



Comprehensive study of the Informal Literacy Sector – Global, Ghana and Nigeria

Study Report

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*<https://bri360.org/>
Tel: (233) 243 876325/
0509622993
Office: +233 30 223 9637
Email: research@bri360.org /
jafrimpong@bri360.org
No. C410/2
Tachie Tawiah Avenue
Adabraka, Accra, Ghana*

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Acronyms

CDs	Compact Disc
CEA	Complementary Education Agency
CLBCs	Community Based Learning Centers
CLC	Community Learning Centers
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DPs	Development Partners
DVDs	Digital Optical Disc
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth Development Office
GDS	Ghana District Scale
GES	Ghana Education Service
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KG	Kindergarten
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
NaCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEA	National Education Assessment
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NST	National Standardised Test
PLC	Peer Learning Communities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

TEP	The Education Partnership
TV	Television
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Background

Despite global efforts to achieve universal primary education under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), the learning crisis persists. While primary school enrollment has increased, a significant number of children lack basic literacy skills. UNICEF reports that two-thirds of 10-year-olds worldwide struggle to read simple texts, with 250 million children left behind, and 130 million unable to read after four years of education. This crisis disproportionately affects low- and middle-income countries, leading to a learning poverty rate of 70%, a 13% increase from pre-COVID levels. In response, various interventions, including informal learning programmes, have been implemented. The informal literacy/education system has been identified as a key sector that could have a significant impact at improving literacy levels in the formal education system. The evidence highlights how parents and members of the communities/community-based resources serve as valuable resources for students, providing them with opportunities to engage in literacy-related activities outside of the classroom.

Objectives of the study

The main goal of this extensive desk study is to explore effective strategies and practices in informal learning, aiming to improve literacy levels, particularly in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). The study delves into understanding the workings of the informal sector, identifying key players, and evaluating its measurement in LMIC settings, with a specific focus on Nigeria and Ghana. It assesses the informal literacy learning process, examines its role in LMIC contexts, and analyses the current sector status in Ghana and Nigeria.

Methodology

The informal literacy sector was examined using a scoping review approach, involving peer-reviewed papers, grey literature (programme and project reports), institutional reports, and policies. The review analysed global, regional, and national reports, focusing particularly on Ghana and Nigeria. International best practices reports were also studied to provide a broader context. The findings from this review formed the foundation of this report.

Study findings:

- *General overview of the informal literacy sector*

The review findings indicate that informal learning, occurs in diverse forms across different contexts, highlighting its importance especially in LMICs, where it bridges educational gaps and enhances skills, knowledge dissemination, and social integration. The evidence indicates that informal education is diverse and adaptable, in contrast to the standardised approach of formal education. The sector encompasses community-based centers, peer learning communities, audio-visual platforms, parental involvement programmes, child-to-child learning, and technology integration. Other key cost-effective approaches, including low-tech solutions like personalised tutoring phone calls, SMS messages, and parental involvement programmes, have proven effective in enhancing informal learning outcomes. These methods empower learners, providing personalised, culturally relevant, and accessible educational experiences. The evidence emphasises the importance of parental involvement, community support, and technology

integration in enhancing informal learning outcomes and stresses the need for recognising the value of informal education within the formal education sector.

- *Evidence on informal learning interventions/projects*

Interventions in the informal literacy landscape of Ghana and Nigeria encompass a diverse range of initiatives aimed at promoting learning and literacy outside the formal education systems. These interventions are geared towards addressing the learning challenges resulting from poor learning in the formal system, limited access to educational materials and resources, and the limited quality education, particularly in deprived communities. The interventions comprise physical and e-libraries to community engagement and reading clubs – enhancing literacy beyond the classroom, promoting lifelong learning, and ultimately contributing to the empowerment of children. In Ghana, efforts like the Worldreader Ghana District Scale Project and mobile library interventions improved literacy through digital books and community engagement. In Nigeria, projects such as the Girls' Education Initiative and the Mobile Learning Project utilised methods like mobile phones and community-based centers to enhance literacy skills.

- *Stakeholder analysis and financing of the sector*

The informal education sector, vital in supporting formal education, often lacks adequate funding but receives support from diverse stakeholders, including international NGOs and development partners like USAID and FCDO. In Ghana and Nigeria, collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations addresses learning challenges. Local and international NGOs play a pivotal role, employing innovative methods such as technology-driven book access and community-focused literacy programmes. Partnerships with organisations like UNESCO and UNICEF facilitate funding and knowledge sharing, fostering positive changes in the informal education landscape.

- *Funding of the education sector*

Education globally relies on government and development partner funding, with SDG 2030 recommending 15-20% of public expenditure for education. In Ghana, despite a 28.76% increase in the 2023 education budget, it only constitutes 10.05% of the total budget, falling below the SDG threshold. Investment in informal education, notably the Complementary Education Agency (CEA), remains very minimal. In Nigeria, education funding involves federal, state, and local governments, contributing 50%, 30%, and 20% respectively. Despite challenges like unequal resource distribution and funding inadequacy, efforts have been made to improve education quality. Funding increased from 428 billion Naira in 2013 to 876 billion Naira in 2022. However, the share of the education budget as a percentage of the total budget varied, reaching 7.9% in 2016, dropping to 5.4% in 2022 due to economic strains from the COVID-19 pandemic. These fluctuations reflect Nigeria's changing priorities and challenges in the education sector.

Gap Analysis

- *Gaps in the informal literacy space and interventions*

A number of challenges and opportunities exist within the informal literacy sector. The challenges include lack of standardisation, limited research on effectiveness, facilitator training needs, technology barriers, addressing disparities, ensuring sustainability, cultural relevance, robust evaluation, measurement of informal learning outcomes, and fostering innovation. Overcoming these challenges requires balancing flexibility with standardisation, conducting comprehensive

research, providing training, bridging technology gaps, targeting marginalised groups, ensuring sustainability, tailoring interventions to local culture, implementing rigorous evaluation, quantifying informal learning outcomes, and embracing innovative approaches.

- *Gaps in stakeholders and funding sources*

Key gaps in the informal literacy sector include the lack of coordination with formal education, sustainability challenges reliant on donor support, the need for capacity building for educators and community members, and the necessity for robust policy advocacy. Strengthened funding, effective regulation, and increased research efforts are vital to enhance the sector's impact on literacy in Ghana and Nigeria.

- *Recommendations*

Based on the desk study findings, the following recommendations are made to guide future programming and interventions:

1. Increase investment in community-based initiatives that promote and support informal literacy learning. This could include the establishment of community literacy centers, where individuals, especially, children ages 6 to 15 can access resources and participate in literacy activities.
2. Promote collaborative partnerships between government agencies, communities, non-governmental organisations, development partners and educational institutions should be fostered to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives. These partnerships should leverage combined efforts to enhance informal learning and bridge gaps in literacy.
3. Develop bilingual education programmes and include diverse literature and resources. It is crucial to recognise and value indigenous and local knowledge systems within the curriculum and teaching methods of informal education. By incorporating culturally relevant content, students are more likely to engage with their education and develop a strong foundation of literacy skills.
4. Invest in digital literacy programmes that harness technology to provide access to educational content and resources. Support the development of mobile apps, e-libraries, and platforms that facilitate learning beyond the classroom.
5. Emphasise the importance of parental and community engagement in literacy development. Support projects that empower parents to become active participants in their children's education through reading, discussions, and other literacy-related activities.

SECTION ONE

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

“It is clear and there is a global consensus that involving the community and parents in literacy development beyond the schools is crucial for fostering a holistic and supportive learning environment” (Mark Frantz, Worldreader)

1.1 Description of the literacy problem

Eight years post the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4¹) and the promise to provide universal quality primary education for all, not much progress has been made towards improving literacy levels globally (UIS, 2019). While primary school enrolment has seen considerable growth worldwide, learning is neither occurring for a significant portion of children. According to UNICEF, two out of every three 10-year-olds, globally, are unable to read and understand a simple text (UNICEF 2021, Country profiles for ECD). Again, the learning crisis, has meant that 250 million children have been left behind, 130 million of whom cannot read despite completing four years of education. For these children, not learning to read early is likely to limit their choices, opportunities and potentials (UNESCO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2021). Beyond the adverse impact on their personal and professional development, this group of children risks losing \$21 trillion in potential lifetime earnings (The State of Global Learning Poverty, 2022).

In a more recent report (The State of Global Learning Poverty², 2022), the evidence shows that the global learning crisis is even higher than previously thought. It estimates about 7 of every 10 (70%) children globally³, (low- and middle-income countries - LMIC) suffer from learning poverty – rising from a pre-COVID figure of 57% to 70% in 2022 (Figure 1). This implies the learning poverty rate is 13 percentage points higher. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of kids not learning went up from 52% to 79%, and in South Asia, it went up from 60% to 78%. This means that in just the last three years, about 20% more children in these areas might not be able to read.

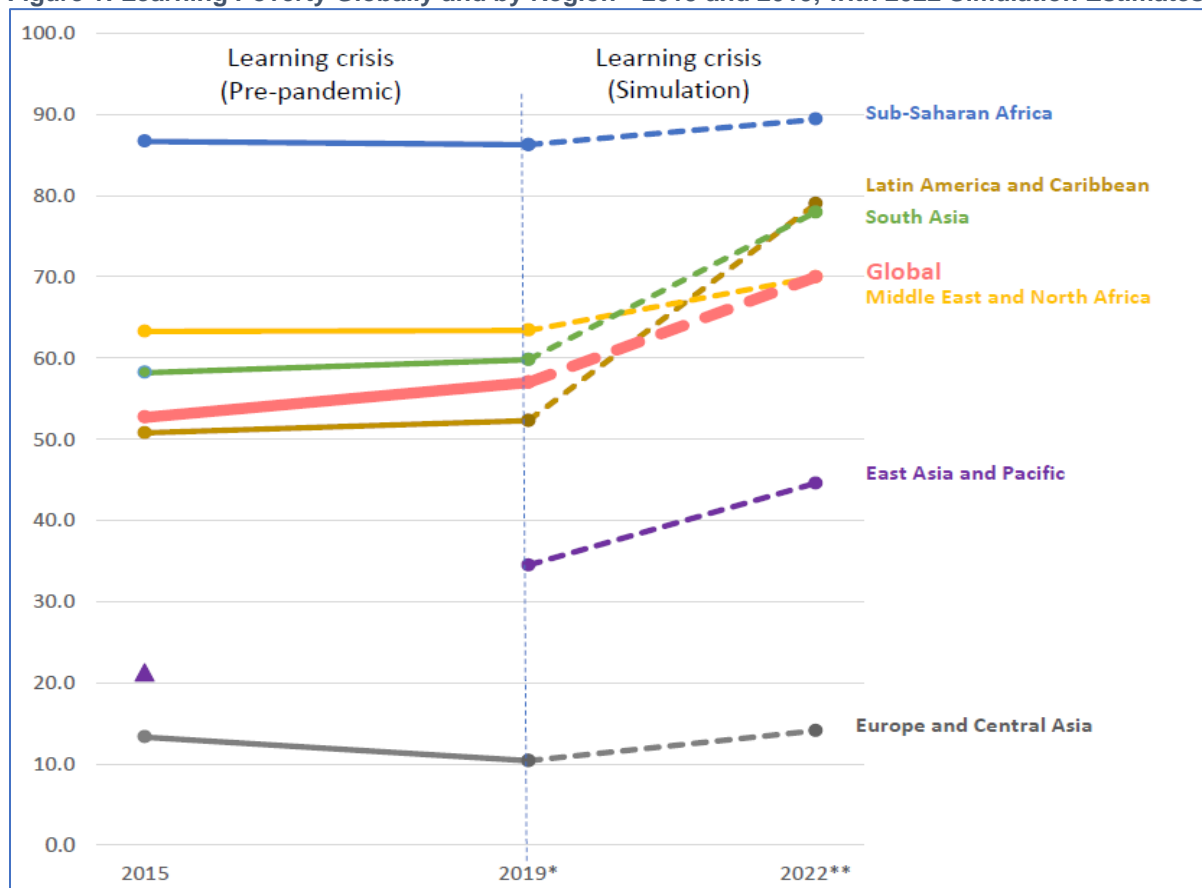
Notwithstanding its almost universal and global reach, the learning crisis disproportionately affects the poorest countries and communities. In Sub-Saharan Africa, lots of kids in Grade 3 can't read well. Nine out of ten (89%) of these children can't read or understand a story (World Bank, 2019; The State of Global Learning Poverty, 2022).

¹ Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

² Learning poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10.

³ The global figure is for all low- and middle-income countries.

Figure 1: Learning Poverty Globally and by Region—2015 and 2019, with 2022 Simulation Estimates

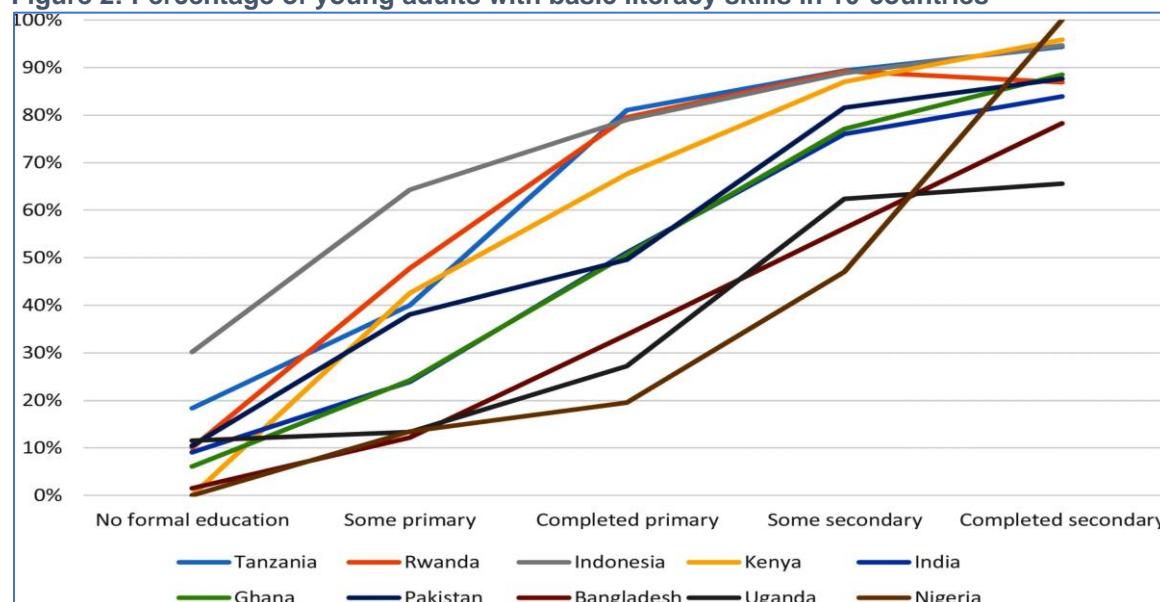


Source: The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update

Note: Numbers for 2022 are simulations. The global figure is for all low- and middle-income countries. Regional and global figures are all population-weighted averages.

In a recent study by Kaffenberger and Pritchett (2020), using learning data across different completion levels in 10-countries (mostly in Africa), the results showed that literacy skills attainment varies widely across countries, and in six of the ten countries, only half or less of primary completers can read (Figure 2). For instance, in Nigeria, only 19% of adults with primary completion as their highest education level can read, compared to 81% in Tanzania and 79% in Indonesia. Uganda falls in between with 27% literacy among individuals with primary completion. Countries like Pakistan, Ghana, and India exhibit intermediate standings, where approximately half of those with primary completion are proficient in reading. The chart also shows that in some countries, especially in the early years of education, students tend to learn at similar levels (have similar learning outputs) but as they progress, differences in learning speed become more noticeable. Out of the ten countries examined, six have less than half of the learners finishing primary school with the minimum literacy proficiency.

Figure 2: Percentage of young adults with basic literacy skills in 10-countries



Source: Kaffenberger and Pritchett (2020)

Note: A steeper line indicates greater literacy gains across a given level of schooling while a flatter line indicates smaller literacy gains

The considerable gap in learning/literacy levels⁴ imply that access to formal education alone does not entirely cater to children’s requirements for acquiring literacy skills. In an effort to address the learning crisis, multiple interventions have been implemented with varying degrees of success, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Beatty et al., 2021; Angrist et al., 2021; UNESCO et al., 2021). Among these are informal learning programmes.

Informal literacy entails learning that is intentional or deliberate but is not institutionalised. It is consequently less organised and structured than formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2011).

The informal literacy/education system has been identified as a key sector that could have a significant impact at improving literacy levels in the formal education system (Beatty et al., 2021; Smith, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Clark, 2019). The evidence highlights how parents and members of the communities/community-based resources serve as valuable resources for students, providing them with opportunities to engage in literacy-related activities outside of the classroom. Through informal conversations, reading with children, providing access to books and other resources, and cultural practices, parents and community members not only expose children to a diverse range of literacy experiences but also shape their attitudes and motivations towards literacy. By promoting a culture of reading and writing, students can develop a love for reading and writing, which can positively impact their formal school literacy levels (Akyeampong and Higgins, 2018; Akyeampong et al. 2018). White et al. (2020) argue that informal learning

⁴ As highlighted in the preceding section

environments act as a crucial bridge between home and school, providing students with opportunities to engage in literacy activities outside of the classroom. By fostering a supportive environment that encourages reading and other literacy practices, parents and community members play a pivotal role in enhancing students' overall literacy skills. White et al. (2020) emphasise the need for community libraries and learning centers as spaces that promote informal learning, bridging the gap between home and school literacy experiences. These spaces not only provide access to a wide range of reading materials but also offer structured literacy programmes and support from trained professionals.

Although informal literacy programmes are expected to contribute to overall learning, the evidence relating to how much of learning takes place within the informal system and its general contribution to overall learning in the formal education sector is quite limited.

1.2 Objectives and scope of the study

There is limited robust evidence on how the informal sector generally operates and the entirety of its ecosystem. Even though schools are the main way students usually learn to read and write, learning outside of school is also very helpful. In LMIC contexts where the regular schools have challenges relating largely to learning, the informal learning sector could play a crucial role in supplementing efforts in the formal sector. The overall objective of this comprehensive desk study, therefore, is to gain insights into what the effective strategies and practices in informal learning are and how these can be applied to enhance overall literacy levels, especially in LMIC. This exercise will help us understand how the informal sector works, who the key players are, how it is measured in LMIC settings, with particular focus on Nigeria and Ghana.

Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

1. Assess the general understanding of the informal literacy learning process
2. Assess how the sector plays out in Low /Middle income country contexts
3. Assess the prevailing sector situation in Ghana and Nigeria

1.2.1 The significance/importance of this desk review

With literacy levels reaching a crisis point, it is important for stakeholders in the education sector to explore and understand the potential in other supplementary initiatives including the informal sector to help drive the needed transformation in learning. The review provides evidence on effective interventions that work to improve literacy skills, share lessons on successive interventions, and identify gaps that should be addressed to further enhance programming in the sector. This review also provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to enhance literacy education and promote equitable access to quality learning opportunities, in addition to guiding effective allocation of resources and policy development and implementation.

In both local and global decision-making, people are more and more interested in funding projects/initiatives where there is clear proof that they will have positive effects. Since there hasn't been much attention given to informal education systems over the years coupled with the limited studies in the sector, it was important to gather existing evidence to create a foundation for understanding how people learn to read and write informally, especially in countries with lower incomes. In essence, studying the informal literacy sector acknowledges the importance of diverse learning pathways and seeks to harness its potential to address the learning crisis,

improve educational outcomes, and promote equitable access to education for all. In summary, studying the informal literacy sector is important for several reasons:

1. **Complementary Learning:** In many LMICs, formal education systems often struggle to provide quality education due to resource limitations and various challenges. Informal literacy learning complement formal education by offering additional learning opportunities outside the classroom.
2. **Addressing Learning Gaps:** The existence of a learning crisis, where access to education doesn't translate into adequate learning outcomes, highlights the need to explore alternative avenues for learning. Informal literacy initiatives can potentially address the learning gaps left by formal education.
3. **Tailoring to Local Contexts:** Informal education often takes place within communities, allowing learning experiences to be contextualised to the local culture, language, and needs. This localised approach can make learning more relevant and effective.
4. **Equity and Inclusion:** Informal education can be more inclusive, reaching marginalised and disadvantaged populations including girls that may have limited access to formal education. This is crucial for reducing educational inequalities and promoting social inclusion.
5. **Parental and Community Involvement:** Informal education often involves parents, caregivers, and community members in the learning process. This creates a supportive environment and encourages active involvement in children's education.
6. **Flexible Learning Environments:** Informal education can take place in diverse settings, such as community centers, homes, and workplaces, making it flexible and adaptable to learners' schedules and needs.
7. **Understanding Learning Dynamics:** Researching the informal literacy sector provides insights into how individuals learn outside formal structures. This understanding can inform educational policies and strategies to improve learning outcomes.
8. **Lifelong Learning:** Informal education promotes lifelong learning by fostering a culture of continuous learning beyond formal schooling. It encourages individuals to seek knowledge and skills throughout their lives.
9. **Community Empowerment:** Informal education initiatives often empower communities to take charge of their own educational needs. This empowerment can lead to sustainable development and improved educational outcomes.
10. **Filling Research Gaps:** Despite its significance, the informal literacy sector often lacks comprehensive research and data. Studying this sector helps bridge knowledge gaps and provides evidence for effective interventions.

11. **Policy Enhancement:** Understanding the impact and challenges of informal literacy can inform education policies, leading to more comprehensive and inclusive education systems.

1.3 Methodology

The comprehensive assessment of the informal literacy ecosystem/sector was done primarily using a scoping review design in identifying both peer-reviewed papers/documents and information in the grey literature (programme/project reports, assessment reports, agency documents i.e., UN, UNESCO, SDG and related documents). The extensive desk review focused on identifying and assessing relevant project reports, global, regional and national level reports and related documents as well as policies and other relevant documents on the educational landscape globally and more specifically in Ghana and Nigeria. International reports on best practices were also reviewed to situate the scoping within internationally accepted contexts. Findings from the desk/document review served as the base for the drafting of this report. Figure 3 provides the step-by-step approach to the conduct of this study:

Figure 3: Flow of work



Source: Author's construct

1.3.1 Search Strategy:

Searches were conducted in academic and scholarly sites/databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, Taylor and Francis, JStor, BMC, Science Direct, Researchgate and African Education Journal using the following key terms: “Informal education” “Informal literacy” “Basic Education,” Informal Education Systems”, and “Informal learning assessment” etc. Again, study reports, intervention documents reports, global development standards, plans and strategic documents/frameworks were searched for, reviewed and synthesised.

1.3.2 Inclusion criteria:

With reference to online resources and databases, a repetitive process was used to surf all the identified sources - this allowed for the repetition of all the key words. In addition, citations identified in journals and other databases relevant to the desk study were also reviewed. The search was limited to the period from 2000 through 2023. Any document before year 2000 was deemed dated and may not provide relevant information for current literacy context. However, documents that are classical in nature were considered to give a proper historical perspective to this desk review. Documents that did not meet the outline criteria were excluded. Duplicate documents/articles were also dropped at the screening stage, together with publications not related to the objectives of this review.

1.3.3 Limitations of the Scoping Exercise

The key limitation relating to the desk study is largely related to the adopted methodology. The study was entirely a desk review – this may have impacted on the depth of information generated. Further, access to programmatic documents, especially within the education space is generally quite difficult. Despite this limitation, efforts were made at gleaning the highest level of available data/information which adds on to the available literature and knowledge on the informal literacy landscape – globally, in LMICs, and in Ghana and Nigeria.

Summary:

- ❑ Global progress in improving literacy levels remains limited, despite efforts towards universal quality primary education under SDG 4.
- ❑ Primary school enrolment has increased worldwide, but actual academic learning is lacking for a substantial portion of children.
- ❑ Two-thirds of 10-year-olds worldwide cannot read and understand a simple text.
- ❑ The learning crisis has left 250 million children behind, with 130 million unable to read despite completing four years of education.
- ❑ This crisis disproportionately affects the poorest countries and communities, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 89% of Grade 3 children struggle to read.
- ❑ The learning crisis not only hampers personal and professional development but also risks a loss of \$21 trillion in potential lifetime earnings for affected children
- ❑ Informal literacy/education systems offer valuable opportunities to improve literacy within formal education.

SECTION TWO:

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE INFORMAL LITERACY SECTOR

“I feel free and strong. If I were not a reader of books, I could not feel this way. Whatever may happen to me, thank God that I can read, that I have truly touched the minds of other men.”
(Walter Tevis, Mockingbird)

2.0 Introduction

Informal learning holds significant global importance beyond the conventional boundaries of educational institutions. This form of learning encompasses a wide range of activities, including experiential learning, social interactions at the family and community levels, apprenticeships and self-directed learning, providing individuals with practical skills and socio-cultural awareness outside the formal educational system. Learning occurs through reading, watching educational videos, and engaging in discussions which take place in various settings such as communities, workplaces, and online platforms (Holford, Jarvis, & Milana, 2019). The recognition of informal learning’s global significance lies in its potential to address the changing needs of societies and individuals in a rapidly evolving world. In a global context, informal learning is recognised as a crucial method of acquiring knowledge and skills in various aspects of life (Ramah, 2019; Salisu et al., 2021). Its prevalence worldwide reveals that it constitutes a substantial proportion of an individual’s overall learning experience. For example, efforts like the Worldreader Ghana District Scale Project and mobile library interventions in Ghana improved literacy through digital books and community engagement and in Nigeria, projects such as the Girls’ Education Initiative and the Mobile Learning Project utilised methods like mobile phones and community-based centers to enhance literacy skills.

In Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana where the formal education system faces numerous challenges, informal learning has been widely practiced, and plays a crucial role in bridging the educational gaps and providing opportunities for skill acquisition, knowledge dissemination, social integration and shaping individuals’ knowledge and skills outside the traditional classroom environment (Abagi et al., 2017) (Oduaran, 2016; Leach & Zwozdiak-Myers, 2021) (Osei-Bryson et al. (2020).

Across the globe, various measures are employed to foster children’s literacy skills beyond the formal educational framework, often within their homes or communities. Examples of such interventions include tutoring and peer-assisted learning, mobile libraries, programmes to build parental knowledge of how to support children’s literacy, literacy instruction outside regular schools and the provision of educational media for use outside regular classroom instruction.

2.1 Types of education and definitions

Education goes beyond what takes place within the four walls of the classroom. A child gets the education from his experiences outside the school as well as from those within. There are three main types of education, namely, Formal, Informal and Non-formal (Table 1). Various definitions and perspectives exist regarding informal literacy or learning. However, the desk study adopts UNESCO’s International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 definition. This is to situate the discussions within globally accepted contexts.

Table 1: Types and definitions of education/learning

S/N	Types of education	Definition	Characteristics
1.	Informal Learning/education	Informal learning is defined as forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate, but are not institutionalised . It is consequently less organised and less structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the <u>family</u> , <u>local community</u> and <u>daily life</u> , on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Happens outside of the classroom ▪ Typically, does not take place in educational institutions
2.	Formal education	Formal education is education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organisations and recognised private bodies, and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognised as such by the relevant national education or equivalent authorities, e.g., any other institution in cooperation with the national or sub-national education authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Typically takes place in educational institutions ▪ Leads to a qualification
3.	Non-formal	Is education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education ▪ Provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars

Source: UNESCO’s International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011

One key gap in the ISCED characterisation of informal learning is that:

ISCED does not include ‘Informal learning’ within its scope for measuring participation in education, although recognised qualifications obtained through informal learning are considered when determining educational attainment levels

This means that the ISCED does not include ‘informal learning’ when looking at how many people are involved in education. However, if someone has gained qualifications through informal learning, those are taken into account when figuring out their education level. This position of a globally recognised body like the ISCED could have implications for the sector in the following ways:

1. *Could lead to limited research and Knowledge generation in the informal sector:* The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) is the research and evidence generating department of UNESCO and their evidence generation work is usually based on their indicators of focus as specified in the ISCED. Therefore, not fully recognising the sector may result in insufficient research and data collection in the informal learning sector, limiting the understanding of its effectiveness and impact.
2. *Limited Support:* not receiving the needed recognition from ISCED may contribute to the sector receiving limited support, recognition, and resources – this could compound the already existing challenges in the sector.
3. *Policy Gaps:* without recognition, policymakers may overlook the potential benefits and challenges associated with informal learning. This can result in the absence of policies and programmes that support and enhance informal learning opportunities.
4. By not recognising informal learning, UNESCO may miss opportunities to leverage and integrate effective informal learning practices into formal educational systems in their educational intervention programming.

2.2 The formal vs. informal literacy debate

Understanding the significance of informal literacy learning is essential for addressing the persistent challenges faced by LMICs in achieving high literacy rates and improving the quality of education. In many LMICs, particularly in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, there is little attention geared towards exploring and expanding informal education (Matambo, 2018). Although informal education is widely recognised, not much is known about the entirety of the ecosystem (how it works, who the stakeholders are etc.) compared to formal education. The limited consciousness in the implementation of informal education is partly because it is much more varied than formal education. Additionally, formal education has been enshrined as a universal human right, recognised through declarations of human rights and the rights of children and implemented through global efforts to teach essentially the same basic forms of literacy and numeracy, regardless of location, resources and outcomes (Smith & Phillips, 2016). Informal education, on the other hand, is much more difficult to standardise because it most mirrors what children and young people want to know, and in some instances what their family and community members and other adults are ready to help them learn. This makes it much more varied from society to society as compared to formal education. Table 2 provides some differences between the informal and formal education sectors:

Table 2: Differences between informal and formal education sectors

S/N	Informal Literacy Sector	Formal Literacy Sector
1.	Flexible Learning: The informal literacy sector is more flexible and adaptable, operating outside traditional educational frameworks and allowing for diverse learning experiences.	Structured Framework: The formal literacy sector operates within organised educational systems, often following curriculum guidelines and established teaching methods.
2.	Non-Certified Learning: While informal learning can lead to skill development, it often lacks official recognition or certifications commonly associated with formal education.	Certification and Recognition: Learning within the formal literacy sector often leads to recognised certifications, degrees, or diplomas, which can hold significant value in academic and professional contexts.
3.	Varied Instructors: Informal learning can involve a variety of instructors, such as family members, community members, peers, or self-guided learning through online resources.	Professional Educators: Teachers and instructors within the formal sector are typically trained professionals who follow a set curriculum and assessment processes.
4.	Diverse Settings: Learning in the informal sector can take place anywhere, including homes, community centers, libraries, and online platforms.	Institutional Settings: Learning primarily takes place in schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions, with defined schedules and instructional hours.
5.	Non-Standardised Assessment: Assessments in the informal sector may be less structured and formalised, with progress often evaluated through practical application and real-life experiences – or through programme evaluation of specific interventions.	Standardised Assessments: Learning outcomes are often assessed through standardised tests and examinations to measure students' progress and proficiency levels.
6.	Personalised Progression: Learners have more control over their learning pace and content, allowing for personalised learning experiences tailored to individual interests and needs.	Structured Progression: Students typically follow a predetermined learning path, advancing through different levels or grades as they acquire new skills and knowledge.
7.	Diverse Resources: Informal literacy materials vary widely and can include everyday texts, digital media, community materials, and resources found online.	Structured Resources: Formal literacy materials are often carefully selected to align with curriculum objectives and may include textbooks, workbooks, and other instructional resources.

2.3 Frameworks for understanding the informal literacy sector

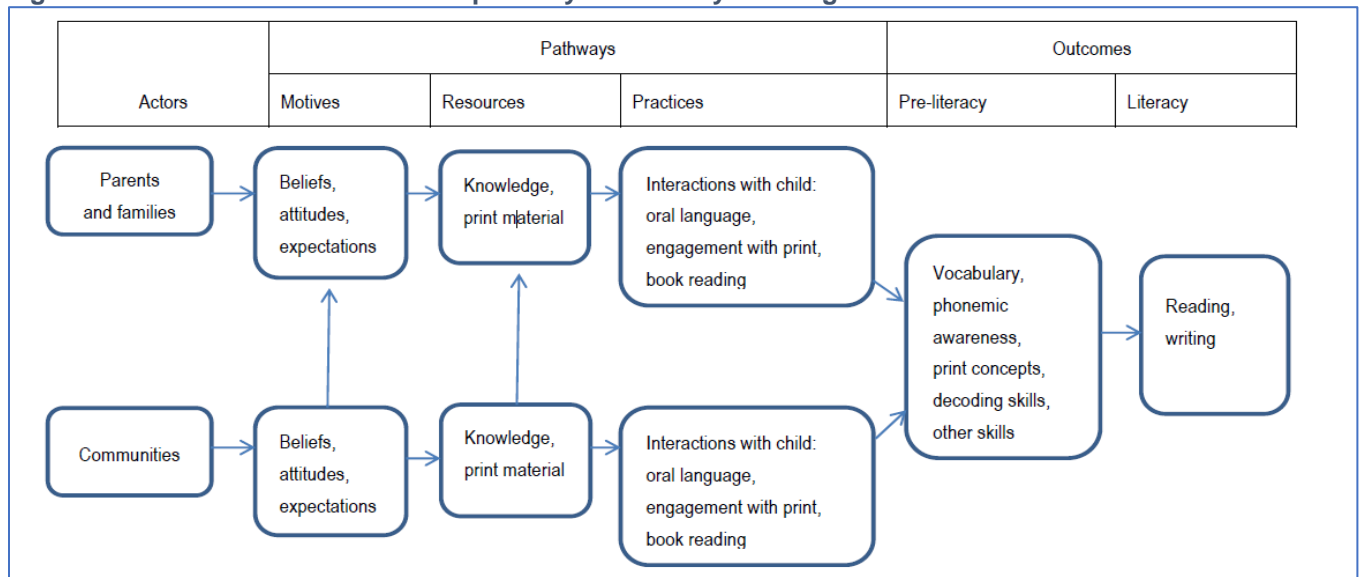
Over the years, the informal literacy ecosystem has encompassed different contexts and pathways. This desk review adapted two key frameworks/models that provide contextual understanding of the possible pathways in the informal learning ecosystem: 1) the “non-school contextual pathways to literacy learning model” (2016) and 2) the “All Children Reading Framework” (2019).

a. The non-school contextual pathways to literacy learning model

The model uses a developmental lens that frames literacy from emergent pre-literacy skills to reading and writing and draws on the contextual pathways that are linked with literacy from the developmental perspective (Spier et al., 2016). The model comprises 4-key features (Figure 4):

- Proximal contextual supports for literacy through the family and the community - The model differentiates family-level supports from community-level supports. These supports are usually supplementary, complementary, or compensate for more formal early-level school-based contextual influences.
- Pathways between these supports and child literacy outcomes can be mediated by three dimensions: (1) attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of families and communities regarding children’s literacy learning; (2) availability of resources, such as knowledge and print materials; and (3) the nature, quality, and quantity of interactions and practices that families and communities engage in to promote literacy.
- Community members or organisations can affect child literacy outcomes by engaging with children directly or acting on families (who in turn engage with children).
- Given the evidence that early learning is one of the strongest predictors of later literacy skills, from a developmental perspective, the model considers outcomes for children between 3 and 12 years old. In some family or community contexts, one or more of the pathways may be weak or non-existent, reducing the likelihood that a child will reach his or her full potential with regard to literacy development.

Figure 4: The non-school contextual pathways to literacy learning framework

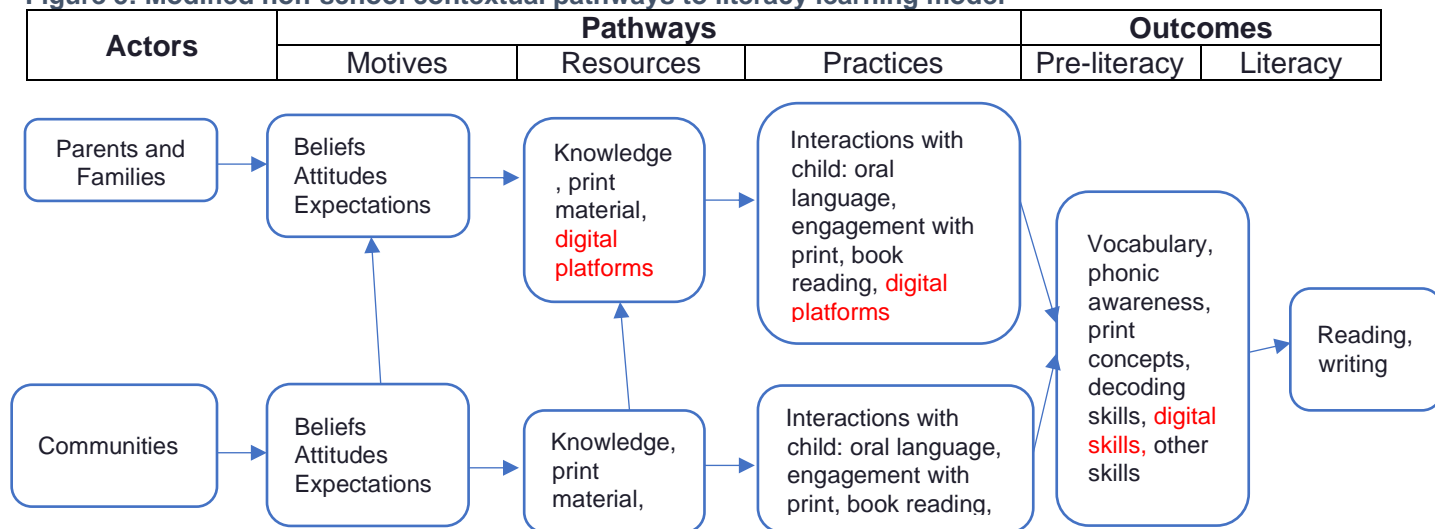


Source: Spier et al., 2016

In line with emerging digital trends across all sectors, an additional level of the pathway under resources is included and labelled as the ‘digital resources pathway’ through the usage of tablets,

phones, e-libraries, television, radio and others (Figure 5). The digital pathway also works through the community and family systems in achieving relevant learning outcomes and ensuring sustainability over time.

Figure 5: Modified non-school contextual pathways to literacy learning model



Source: Author's construct

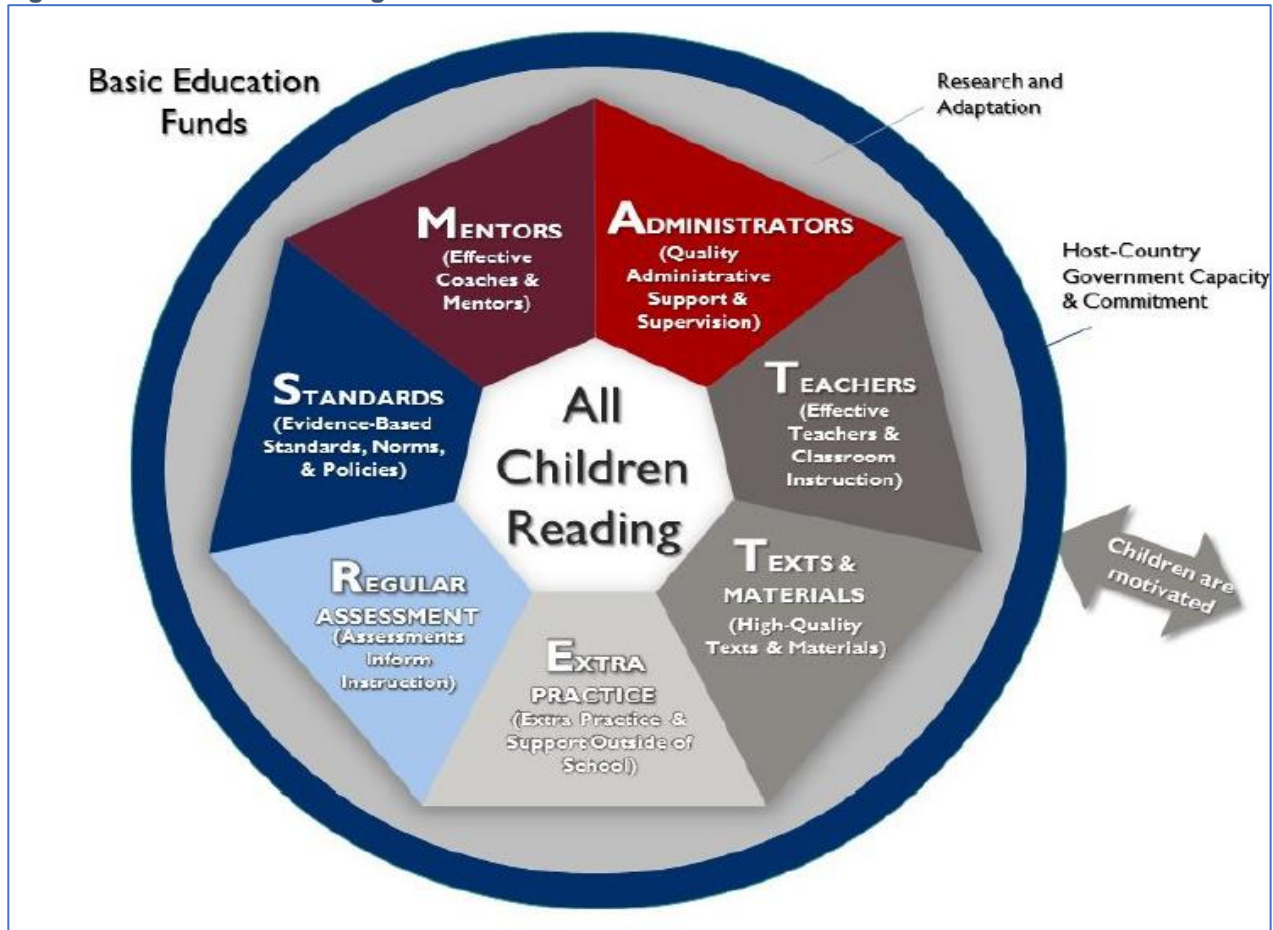
b. All Children Reading Framework

The framework emphasises seven essential elements that research indicates play a crucial role in promoting reading skills development for all children (Figure 6). These elements comprise Mentors, Administrators, Teachers, Texts, **Extra Practice (extra practice and support outside of school)**, Regular Assessment, and Standards. The components themselves, though are not reading-specific, they serve as a holistic and context-sensitive lens through which to determine what will be the most cost-effective and efficient investments in reading and literacy in any given circumstance or environment. The key element most relevant to this review is the 'extra practice' (extra practice and support outside of school). This element highlights the importance of extra practice outside of the school environment through family and community members. A noteworthy requirement to achieving extra practice is having appropriate, accessible and affordable reading materials available to children and their families for reading practice.

- **Extra Practice (Extra Practice and Support Outside of School)**
 - The concept of extra practice signifies that family and community members contribute to enhancing expressive language growth and encouraging regular practice of reading abilities, such as engaging in reading sessions with young learners and reading to them, provided they possess the necessary skills. Every family member has the potential to play a constructive role in fostering literacy development, and studies indicate that a majority of families have at least one member (be it a sibling, aunt, uncle, grandparent, cousin, etc.) with fundamental reading proficiency.

- The extra practice can be achieved through the provision of age and level appropriate and reasonably affordable reading resources and providing the needed support through training/orienting family and community members in utilising these resources.

Figure 6: All Children Reading Framework



Source: USAID Reading Matters Conceptual Framework November 2019

2.4 Past and existing models in the informal literacy sector

The informal education sector takes different forms, responds to different drivers and is supported by different resources in different parts of the world (Smith & Phillips, 2016). Thus, the knowledge or literacy acquisition process in the informal sector is not standardised as in the case of the formal sector. In most cases, the spaces of informal learning are linked to the type of education undertaken and the skills to be learned. Again, the informal literacy landscape encompasses a range of models that cater to specific cultural, socio-economic, or technological contexts. Several platforms exist within the informal literacy space ranging from – community-based learning centres, e-libraries (kindles, tablets), physical libraries, televisions, radios and peer learning communities (Figure 7). This section provides evidence on these models:

Figure 7: Examples of learning approaches in the informal sector



▪ **Community Engagement and Learning Model (Centers)**

Community-based learning centers are essential components of informal literacy ecosystems. These centers, often established by non-governmental organisations or local initiatives, provide literacy programmes to underserved populations. They fill the gaps left by formal education systems and cater to the unique needs of the local community (Benson & Kosonen, 2013). Unlike formal education, CLCs play a crucial role in addressing access to education by strategically situating themselves within or near these communities. This close proximity ensures that learners facing difficulties in the formal schools, those with barriers such as distance, transportation costs, or the absence of nearby schools can conveniently access education (World Bank, 2020). CLCs have the ability to adapt their curriculum to meet the specific needs and interests of the community, resulting in personalised learning experiences. For example, the “Room to Read” programme has established community libraries in multiple countries (21 countries – including Kenya, South Africa, India etc.), promoting literacy among children from low-income backgrounds (Room to Read Research, Monitoring & Evaluation Report, 2018). CLCs create a supportive and diverse learning environment that appeals to learners from various backgrounds, including those who may have discontinued formal education for different reasons. CLCs usually establish strong partnerships through community engagement by actively involving the local community to identify

specific needs, develop tailored curricula, and provide education that aligns with the community's context and aspirations. Parents, elders, and community leaders contribute to shaping the learning environment and advocating for education (UNESCO, 2017). This inclusiveness plays a crucial role in advancing educational equity and guaranteeing widespread access to education throughout society (UNESCO, 2017).

Several studies report positive influence of the support provided by parents and the community on formal school literacy levels. Johnson et al. (2020) argue that community support enhances students' literacy skills within the formal school setting, as parents and members of the community serve as valuable resources for students, providing them with opportunities to engage in literacy-related activities outside of the classroom. Through conversations, reading materials, and cultural practices, parents and community members not only expose children to a diverse range of literacy experiences but also shape their attitudes and motivations towards literacy. These experiences, in turn, positively impact students' formal school literacy levels, as they enter the educational setting with a solid foundation of reading and writing skills. Brown (2017) reported that community engagement programmes such as reading clubs or volunteering as tutors, students receive additional opportunities to practice and reinforce their literacy skills beyond the classroom. Additionally, community engagement programmes foster positive relationships between students, parents, and community members, creating a supportive learning environment that enhances students' motivation and self-esteem, further facilitating their literacy development.

- **Peer Learning Communities (PLCs)**

Within informal literacy ecosystems, peer groups play a significant role in fostering collaborative learning. Reading clubs, discussion groups, and writing circles create platforms for learners to actively engage with one another, sharing insights and acquiring knowledge collectively. They encourage discussion, critical thinking, and active participation, fostering a culture of reading and learning. These clubs are especially beneficial in fostering literacy among children, as they create an environment where reading is both enjoyable and socially reinforced. Studies reveal that these peer interactions not only enhance critical thinking abilities but also improve comprehension skills (Black, 2017). By promoting active participation in the learning process, Peer Learning Communities (PLCs) empower individuals to assume responsibility for their education. This sense of agency serves as a motivating factor for learners to become more invested in their educational journey (UNESCO, 2017).

- **Usage of Audio-Visual Platforms (Radio, Television, DVDs/CDs)**

The utilisation of audio-visual platforms including television, radio, and DVDs for informal learning is a dynamic approach that extends education beyond formal settings. These mediums serve as powerful tools to convey educational content and foster skill development, particularly in contexts where traditional schooling might be limited, inaccessible, or where learning is not happening in the formal system. These platforms became widely adopted approaches during the COVID-19 induced school closures, especially in low-and-middle-income countries as a stop-gap measure. These mediums also serve as valuable approaches to expanding educational opportunities, particularly in regions with limited formal schooling options – offering accessibility, engagement, and flexibility, contributing to lifelong learning and development. The evidence points to the usage of these platforms to promote a variety of literacy and developmental outcomes in early grades. These outcomes range from letter recognition, pattern grouping, and basic counting to aspects like health, social development, and cultural awareness (Angrist et al., 2022). These educational

initiatives are primarily designed to provide supplementary support to learners and in some instances, bridge the gap in regions where formal early school programmes are scarce or unaffordable, focusing on children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Unlike supplementary efforts for children already attending school-based programmes, most interventions target those not benefiting from such programmes.

Considerable research has explored the television habits of pre-school children, revealing a wide array of effects, both positive and negative (Akyeampong et al., 2023). Detrimental impacts tend to be associated with recreational viewing, while positive outcomes are linked to the viewing of educational content. Many studies investigating educational television's effects have concentrated on localised adaptations of programmes including Sesame Street⁵, which is accessible in over 120 countries. Consequently, most evidence suggests that watching educational programmes contributes to improved child literacy - consistent engagement with educational television, whether at home or elsewhere, positively impacts early literacy development in children. (Akyeampong et al., 2023; Figlio et al., 2016).

▪ **Parental Involvement Training Programmes**

Among the prevalent methods for enhancing early academic learning among children outside of school are programmes aimed at empowering parents to effectively support their child's learning journey. In developing countries, these initiatives are often implemented where formal preschool opportunities are scarce but parental literacy rates are high. These programmes exhibit diversity in terms of structure, duration, and intensity. They typically involve assigning tasks for parents and children to collaborate on between sessions. This approach necessitates that parents or adult caregivers have the time to attend sessions and actively participate in these activities with their children.

The role of parents in informal learning has been recognised as a key influence on formal school literacy levels. According to Smith (2019) and Clark (2019), parental support and engagement in a child's education have been found to have a significant impact on children's academic achievement, particularly literacy skills. Informal learning activities include reading with children, engaging in meaningful conversations, and providing opportunities for hands-on learning experiences. These informal experiences at home can greatly enhance a child's literacy skills and set a strong foundation for their formal education. A similar study exploring the impact of parental reading practices on children's formal school literacy skills reported that reading aloud to their children, engaging in discussions about the story, and providing access to a variety of reading materials contributed to the development of important reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, decoding, and comprehension (Jones, 2018). Thompson (2022) showed that parent-child discussions had a positive impact on reading comprehension skills, as they provided opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations about texts, ask questions, and make connections between their prior knowledge and the content of the readings. These discussions not only enhanced students' comprehension abilities but also fostered a love for reading and an intrinsic motivation to learn. Other studies on parental use of their home language and engaging in informal learning activities, such as storytelling or reading together, helps children develop a solid foundation in literacy, which in turn impacts their performance in school (Gomez

⁵ Sesame Street is an educational children's television series that combines live-action, sketch comedy, animation and puppetry

et al., 2021). Ultimately, this research provides a rationale for further exploring the ways in which parental support and involvement can be leveraged to improve literacy outcomes in formal school settings.

- **Child-To-Child Learning**

In developing countries, child-to-child approaches for promoting literacy involve enlisting older children in primary grades to assist preschool children in developing their literacy skills. There is a substantial body of literature on peer 'helping' or 'mentoring' in developed nations, particularly in the context of peer tutoring. These studies predominantly demonstrate mostly positive but insignificant outcomes for the mentored or tutored students, and generally favourable results for the peer helpers, mentors, or tutors (Rahma, 2019). However, it's worth noting that these studies primarily concentrate on older school-age children aiding their counterparts, and the focus is typically on supplementing school-based content learning rather than serving as a central method for acquiring fundamental literacy skills across a broader spectrum.

- **Use of Media and Technology**

In the digital age, media and technology contribute significantly to informal literacy. Online platforms, educational apps, and digital resources provide avenues for self-directed learning. In regions where internet connectivity is limited, offline applications can effectively leverage technology. Mobile phones can be used to share reading materials, assignments, and engage in discussions (Adeoye and Adeyemo, 2020; Salisu et al., 2021). They can also be used to send short text messages to nudge student engagement with content.

According to the 2023 'Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning - What does recent evidence tell us are' (Smart Buys) report, the use of low-tech approaches have proven to be effective in driving learning in the informal sector. For example, in a multi-country study, the findings showed that personalised tutoring phone calls and instruction, in addition to text message delivered by teachers or volunteers improved learning. In some contexts, this low-tech approach was more effective for children with lower initial test scores, less educated parents, and for low-income families. Implementation fidelity has been shown to improve with repeated experimentation in delivering foundational literacy and numeracy over mobile phones when implemented by NGOs as well as by government teachers. Mobile phones can be combined with targeted instruction to facilitate cost-effective delivery (Akyeampong et al, 2023).

In an experimental learning study using low-tech devices outside of the formal school system conducted in Botswana, two low-technology interventions - SMS messages and phone calls, with parents to support their children were tested (Angrist et al, 2022). The study found that using both tools (messages and calls) together helps students learn better – emerging as one of the most effective and affordable ways to enhance learning.

Summary:

In summary, the write-up explores the significance of informal literacy learning in low- and middle-income countries, providing insights into various models, contexts, and strategies that contribute to enhancing literacy levels outside of formal education systems:

- Informal literacy learning contributes in shaping overall literacy levels, especially in low- and middle-income countries like Ghana and Nigeria.
 - While evidence varies across contexts, there's a consensus that informal education positively affects formal literacy levels.
- The role of family, community engagement, media usage, and technology resources are key drivers in the informal space.
- The importance of collaboration with local communities, educators, and stakeholders is highlighted.

SECTION THREE: EVIDENCE ON INFORMAL LEARNING INTERVENTIONS/PROJECTS

“It has helped us improve upon our reading fluency and improvement in the spelling of words, in the identification of new words and their meaning. It has also improved our spoken English level. Inculcates in us life-long lessons” (Beneficiary learners of the Worldreader Digital Reading Project in Ghana)

3.1 Introduction

Multiple factors contribute to the low levels of learning in West Africa. These comprise issues around insufficient financing, inadequate teaching and learning materials, shortages of qualified teachers, and poor school management (UNESCO, 2015/16; Education Commission, 2019; Lemos et al., 2021).

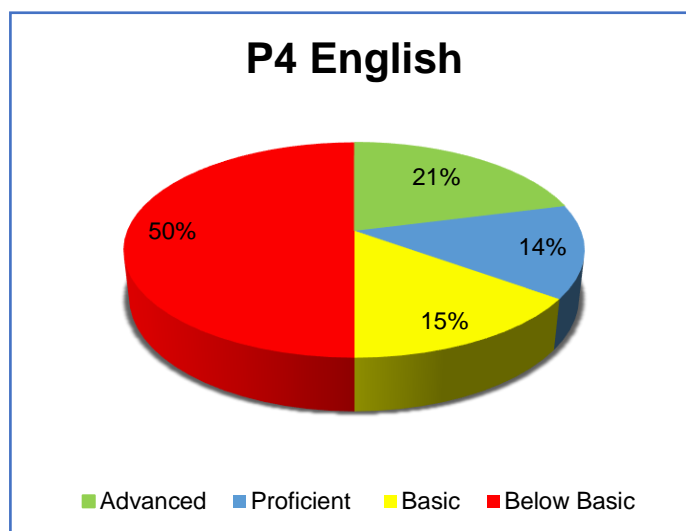
Interventions in the informal literacy landscape of Ghana and Nigeria encompass a diverse range of initiatives aimed at promoting learning and literacy outside the formal education systems. These interventions are geared towards addressing the learning challenges resulting from poor learning in the formal system, limited access to educational materials and resources, and the limited quality education, particularly in deprived communities. These interventions, ranging from physical and e-libraries to community engagement and reading clubs, demonstrate the commitment to enhancing literacy beyond the classroom, promoting lifelong learning, and ultimately contributing to the empowerment of children.

3.2 Informal literacy interventions in Ghana

The literacy problem

Ghana has made significant strides in formal education, but many children of school going age, especially in rural areas and among certain groups are still deficient in the basics in literacy with only 6% of children in grade 3 being able to read with comprehension (UNICEF, 2023). Scores from an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) conducted in 2017 in Ghana across 168 districts, found that, by the end of second grade (primary 2), pupils could read an average of just 2.5 words per minute, with 77% being unable to read even a single word (USAID, 2018). Results of the 2015 EGRA were similar, showing that, by the end of grade 2, most public-school pupils struggled with even foundational reading skills. In both Ghanaian languages of instruction and in English, at least half and often more of the pupils assessed could not read a single word correctly (Ghana Education Service, 2017). Less than 2% were able to read with fluency and comprehension. The 2018 National Education Assessment (NEA) showed that between 19% and 25% of pupils met the NEA proficiency criterion (scoring 55% or above)

Figure 8: Ghana National Standardised Test - P4 (2022)



across grades and subject areas. Between 35% and 48% of pupils scored below minimum competency (scoring 35% or below) (Ministry of Education, 2019). Comparison of the 2016 and 2018 results shows a general downward trend. The current National Standardised Test (NST), 2022 results show similar trends, where 50% of the pupils achieved below basic level in English (Figure 8⁶).

The informal literacy sector in Ghana plays a crucial role in addressing the widespread issue of poor learning outcomes, particularly among children and marginalised populations. As a result, informal literacy initiatives provide supplementary platforms to help address the learning challenges.

3.2.1 Specific interventions

▪ Worldreader Ghana District Scale Project: 2018-2021

The “Worldreader Ghana District Scale Project” aimed at improving literacy rates among learners in Ghana by providing access to a wide range of digital books and educational materials through e-readers. The initiative targeted learners in districts who had limited access to physical books or traditional educational resources. Worldreader therefore, offered the learners e-readers (kindles) containing a wide range of books (both local and international) across various categories such as textbooks, story books, fiction, non-fiction, and other educational resources that align with their curriculum. In addition to this, the initiative provided comprehensive training for teachers, empowering them to integrate e-readers and digital content into their instructional practices. By leveraging this technology, teachers were able to enhance classroom teaching and foster a culture of reading among learners – both in school and at home (GDS, 2018). The key component of the intervention that touched on the informal learning sector was the conscious collaboration with the communities and parents of the learners. The targeted communities played a key role in the implementation of the intervention through the provision of charging centres, contributing to the payment of electricity at the school level and ensuring the safety of the kindles when in use at the community level.

An end of project evaluation into the effectiveness and impact of the intervention in 2022 showed the e-reader programme had a positive and significant impact on the reading and literacy skills of learners across the target communities (Ghana District Scale Endline Report, 2022)

“Prior to the implementation of the e-reader programme, the majority of learners were unable to read fluently. But following the implementation of the programme, most of them within the Municipality currently read with much confidence as access to the digital books on the devices have heightened their interest in reading. Most learners who couldn’t read before the programme currently read with ease – most have also improved in spelling, built up their vocabulary base, and have acquired other related literacy skills” (Frontline Director, Kwabebirem Municipal Education Office)

The evaluation results also showed that, apart from improving the literacy skills of learners, other unintended impact were recorded. This comprised increased love for reading, improved skills in

⁶ Source: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), Ghana

the usage of other digital devices for learning purposes at home, independent/self-learning and increased love for schooling.

Despite the successful roll-out of the intervention, some specific challenges were highlighted. The e-readers did not contain materials on the new standard-based curriculum approved by the government. Thus, the devices could not be used to teach newly introduced subjects in the new curriculum such as Our World Our People. Secondly, the limited number of digital devices led to limited access. Other challenges included difficulty in charging the devices in some of the remote schools due to the lack of access to electricity supply coupled with broken down solar panels; and finally, teachers' scepticism to allow students full access to the digital devices for the fear of possible damage with its associated cost of replacement.

Limiting the use of the reading kindles to only the school system in this particular programme was also highlighted as a drawback to the implementation process. This meant learners could only practice when in school, curtailing consistency in reading practice outside of school hours - which is crucial for improving reading skills and language proficiency. This also meant missed opportunities for family involvement in engaging directly in shared reading experiences with their children.

▪ **The Mobile Library Early Grade Community Reading Intervention**

During the COVID-19 induced school closures, the Ghana Library Authority, in collaboration with UNICEF introduced the 'Mobile Library Early Grade Community Reading Intervention' to engage school children during their stay at home to mitigate the effects of the spread of the virus on education/ cover up on the losses on education due to the lockdown. The project was rolled out through mobile library vans across remote low-performing communities in specific regions in order to deliver age-appropriate reader packs for children. This initiative facilitated the accessibility of reading materials and activities essential for enhancing reading proficiency among children in remote regions. Additionally, it was complemented by comprehensive training sessions aimed at equipping teachers with effective strategies for nurturing students' reading and writing capabilities.

The initiative focused on improving access to reading resources to early grade children in selected districts in eight (8) regions through bi-weekly mobile van visits and enhancing knowledge in effective reading methods. It also focused on promoting reading habits and spark reading interests of children in rural communities in selected districts of the newly created regions by making reading resources accessible through mobile library vans' bi-weekly outreach programmes to homes in selected communities. In all, 8,500 KG 1 to Basic 3 school children (including children with special needs from 10 districts in the 2 additional regions were directly reached with a further 10,000 children benefiting indirectly.

The results of an endline evaluation of the intervention showed marked improvements in literacy indicators (Table 3). At the outset of the intervention, a considerable portion of children, approximately 80.3%, could identify only letters, indicating a limited foundational understanding. However, at the endpoint, this percentage improved to 88.1%, revealing an increase in letter recognition skills. Similarly, the number of children unable to identify letters decreased from 19.7% at the baseline to 11.9% at the endline, signifying a positive shift in this fundamental skill. The most remarkable transformation occurred in the realm of word identification. Initially, only 29.3% of children could identify words, a figure that significantly improved to 60.5% by the end of the

intervention. The progress extended to higher levels of reading comprehension. The percentage of children capable of reading and comprehending sentences grew from 24.5% at the baseline to 46.3% at the endline, reflecting a significant advancement in their sentence-level understanding.

These results underscore the intervention’s effectiveness in enhancing children’s reading abilities and providing a strong foundation for further literacy enhancement initiatives.

Table 3: Assessment results of the Mobile Library Early Grade Community Reading Intervention

No.	Assessment criteria	Baseline (%)	Endline (%)
1.	Number of children who can identify only letters	80.3	88.1
2.	Number who cannot identify letters	19.7	11.9
3.	Number of children who can identify words	29.3	60.5
4.	Number of children who can’t identify words	70.7	39.5
5.	Number of children who can read and understand sentences	24.5	46.3
6.	Number of children who can’t read and understand sentences	75.5	53.7
7.	Number of children who can read and understand stories	17.6	33.0
8.	Number of children who can’t read and understand stories	82.5	67.0

Source: Ghana Library Authority, 2021

▪ **Community Literacy and Book Sharing Boxes For Rural Ghana**

The Rural Literacy Solutions Community Literacy Engagement Programme (RLSCLEP) and the Book sharing Boxes programme is a practical response to the diagnosed high rate of poor learning in Ghana especially the rural areas of the Northern part of Ghana. The initiative works with teachers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), District Assemblies, Community VIPs – Chiefs and Elders.

The programme offers after-school literacy clubs in primary Schools in northern Ghana. These Clubs are mentored and facilitated by trained specialised literacy teachers – with the teachers offering extra literacy support to the beneficiaries twice a week. The initiative is targeting to help 2 million Ghanaian children to become more literate by 2030.

- **Community of Excellence Programme**

The programme is an initiative to increase literacy in basic schools through a collaborative effort between districts, communities, and schools, supported by the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ghana Education Service (GES), and its partner agencies. The programme focuses on maximising the resources available at school and community levels at addressing foundational literacy issues through increased community and parental engagement in basic education. The Ministry projects/understands that addressing learning and related challenges at the community level is the most sustainable way to ensure that national development goals are achieved.

This initiative is in sync with the country's Education Strategic Plan 2020-2030 and basically focuses on improving learning outcomes through strengthening community-based structures, functional literacy and community education programmes, among others – transforming the education system and improving learning outcomes among **500 communities** across the country.

A major approach for the initiative is to increase community and parental engagement in basic education and largely focuses on three key principles - Culture⁷, Skills⁸ and Collaboration⁹. In a recent review (T-TEL Monitoring Report, 2023) by T-TEL, one of the implementing partners, the CEP has made positive progress in a number of areas:

1. Development and Implementation of Learning Transformation Agendas (LTAs)

CEP districts have been supported to develop Learning Transformation Agendas (LTAs) in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders using the Managing for Learning approach. Despite significant differences in socio-economic context, all districts selected broadly similar priorities for their LTAs- improving teachers' understanding and adherence to the new curriculum; strengthening monitoring and accountability; improving community collaboration and parental engagement and providing teaching and learning resources (TLRs). LTA implementation is overseen by the District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC) while communities and stakeholders participate in Quarterly Accountability Forums where they receive progress reports and can see exactly how funds have been utilised.

2. Change Leaders Training and Community Engagement and Mobilisation

The model works by identifying 'Community Change Leaders' in each community and providing them with the necessary training. The role of these Change Leaders is to bring stakeholders together to enhance community and parental engagement in their local schools, strengthening



Project Amount

CHF 1,974,642

(source: Jacobs Foundation)



Project Duration

Feb 2022 to July 2023



Partners

Jacobs Foundation,
Government of Ghana

⁷ Culture means ensuring that all District Education Offices and basic schools are focused on learning

⁸ Skills refers to the capabilities, knowledge and understanding of teachers, headteachers and SISOs so that they understand the new basic school curriculum and have sufficient mastery of the required pedagogies to enable them to teach at the right level, meet the requirements of the NTS and ensure that children are learning.

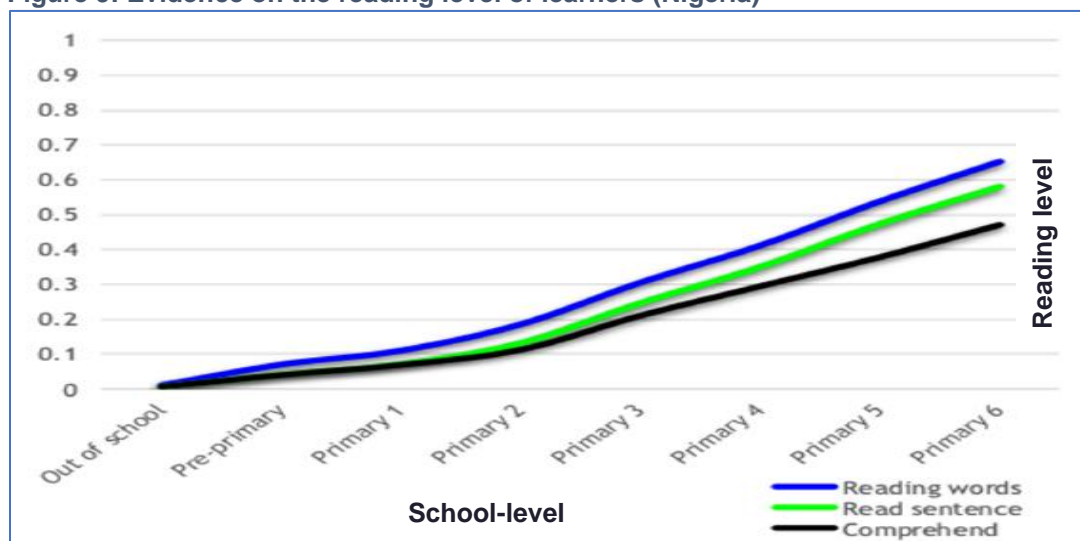
⁹ Collaboration - strengthening linkages between stakeholders and enhancing community and parental engagement in education, with a specific focus on literacy, social and emotional skills.

the relationship between the school authorities and communities. These Change Leaders, according to a recent monitoring report (T-TEL, 2022) have had several successes including mobilising communities and traditional authorities to contribute funds to supply books, renovate buildings and build new classroom blocks and teachers' accommodation; working to address issues with parents who have not been sending their children to school; and helping to organise community sensitisation programmes to drive the interest in learning in low-performing areas.

3.3 Informal literacy in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the learning crisis is quite dire - the country is facing an enduring learning crisis with low literacy rates and disparities in access to formal education. Not only is the nation home to the largest number of children not in school in the world, estimated at 20 million (UNESCO, 2022), but available evidence suggests that learning/literacy levels for children in school are very low (Adeniran et al., 2020; Figlio et al., 2016). Results of learning assessments conducted over the last 25 years indicate two things: literacy attainments at the basic school level are consistently low, and attainment rates have been declining over time. According to the World Bank Human Capital Index for 2020, on average, children born in Nigeria complete about 10.2 years of school by the time they are 18 years old. However, what they have actually learned by that age is only about half of what they should have learned in those years of schooling (Chaudhry et al, 2022). As expected, the average performance increases at a higher-grade level, but overall performance is still very low. Only 47% of the Grade 6 children meet the set benchmark, implying the majority lack foundational skills in literacy even after at least six years of education. At Grade 2, which is the age-appropriate level for most of the concepts tested, only 9% of the students meet the benchmark (Figure 9). The improvement from one level to the next reflects a flat learning curve. More so, large inequalities persist within the country by wealth group, gender, region, religion, and residential area (Chaudhry et al, 2022).

Figure 9: Evidence on the reading level of learners (Nigeria)



National Education Data Survey (NEDS), 2015 – analysis by the CSEA¹⁰ (2021)

¹⁰ Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa, Nigeria

The informal literacy sector in Nigeria is characterised by a range of initiatives aimed at addressing these challenges, including community reading clubs, community education centres, Radio and Television, Street and informal schooling, and Mobile technology among others.

3.3.1 Specific interventions

▪ Girls' Education Initiative (GEI)

The Girls' Education Initiative is a collaborative endeavour between the Nigerian government, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community-based organisations (CBOs). This collaborative approach creates a nurturing atmosphere that not only supports girls' education but also challenges traditional gender norms, fostering a broader appreciation for the importance of girls' schooling (Bajpai & Prakash, 2018). The GEI centers on enhancing girls' educational access and literacy proficiencies within rural and underserved regions. Utilising the establishment of Community-Based Learning Centers (CBLCs), this initiative offers non-formal educational opportunities, training, and life skills enrichment for girls who either discontinued their education or were denied the opportunity to attend school (Ajayi, 2017). CBLCs within the GEI not only focus on academic skills but also offer vocational training and life skills development. Girls acquire practical skills that equip them for economic self-sufficiency and contribute to their overall well-being.

▪ The Mobile Learning Project (MLP)

The 'Mobile Learning Project' (MLP) in Nigeria is a new way of using mobile phones to help people learn better. It's run by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). This project uses mobile phones to teach learners and make them better at reading and writing. Mobile phones are used because they are easy for many people to access, even if they can't go to a regular school. This helps to make education more equal for everyone.

A number of studies have explored the impact of the MLP on literacy development in Nigeria. With its focus on learner-centered approaches, Adeoye and Adeyemo (2020) highlight that this initiative makes learning more personal, meaning it's tailored to what each student needs. It also gives students lots of learning materials, such as digital books and fun games to play, so learning becomes enjoyable. This project is helping students in places where it's hard to get good education, and it's making them better at thinking and solving problems.

In a study conducted by Adeoye et al. (2018), the evaluation of the initiative revealed that learners engaged in the MLP exhibited noteworthy improvements in areas of reading comprehension, the expansion of vocabulary, and the development of writing skills when compared to their counterparts who have not been impacted by the project. This inquiry further underscored the positive influence of the MLP on learners' enthusiasm and active involvement within the learning process.

The project has not been without its challenges in terms of implementation. Despite its potential, the MLP faces challenges related to connectivity and technology infrastructure. Not all students have access to smartphones or reliable internet connectivity, creating disparities in who can benefit from the initiative. In addition to this, teachers require continuous training to support effective integration of digital resources into the existing curriculum and pedagogy to enable them guide students to use technology for educational purposes Adeoye and Adeyemo (2020).

3.4 Literacy/learning assessment modalities/measures

In the informal education system, there is no standardised way to measure education level as compared to the formal education system. However, there are foundational literacy and numeracy measures (FLN) which are often used as benchmarks to test and provide the minimum requirements in education – especially in intervention related programmes. Some of these are measures trying to capture the problem whereas others are trying to measure improvements through certain policies. This section highlights some of the assessment models that are used in assessing the learning progress of students on interventions:

- **Citizen-led Assessments (CLA)**

The People’s Action for Learning (PAL) Network has created a special way to check if kids are learning the basics such as reading in developing countries. This method, called Citizen-led Assessments (CLAs), is cost-effective and involves regular people in the process. PAL Network member organisations lead these assessments in different countries, with help from community groups and volunteers. These volunteers are trained to test how well kids are doing in their studies. The CLA method has been successful in many countries, and is currently used in 14 countries in the Global South. Since 2005, CLAs have helped over 7.5 million children with the help of more than 690,000 trained volunteers who speak over 40 languages.

- **ASER Learner Assessment Tool**

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Assessment model¹¹ uses basic reading and arithmetic tasks in measuring learning outcomes amongst pupils aged 5 - 16. This model is a household-based model, but is also adapted for use at the school level. It includes assessment tools, data recording sheets, report card for the community/village and guidance on how community members can participate in strengthening children’s learning development. ASER tools in reading focuses on the intent of assessing whether a student can read alphabets, words, paragraph and story.

- **Early Grade Reading Assessment**

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is an oral student assessment designed to measure the most basic foundation skills for literacy acquisition in the early grades i.e., recognising letters of the alphabet, reading simple words, understanding sentences and paragraphs, and listening with comprehension. It focuses on the individual child and is a one-to-one assessment.

¹¹ ASER is an annual survey method used across the world and especially in India to provide reliable annual estimates of children’s schooling status and basic learning levels. This model was developed and first used in India since 2005. The primary objective of the ASER survey is to generate estimates of children’s schooling status and basic learning levels at district, state, and national levels; and to measure changes in these parameters over time.

▪ **Application of these learner assessment tools in the informal education sector**

The EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment), ASER (Annual Status of Education Report), and CLA (Citizen-led Assessments) are assessment tools and approaches that can be adapted for use in the informal education sector to evaluate learners' progress and identify areas of improvement. However, the review did not come across any direct usage of these tools in the informal education sector. The closest to usage in the informal sector is the adaption of these tools in testing students on complementary programmes for out-of-school children.

3.5 Challenges in the informal literacy sector

In LMICs, there are several factors that influence informal literacy learning. According to Adu-Gyimah (2017), one of these factors is the lack of access to educational resources. In many of these countries, there is a scarcity of libraries and other learning materials, making it difficult for individuals to engage in self-directed learning. Additionally, the limited availability of technology, such as computers and internet access, further hinders informal literacy learning. Another factor is the prevalence of poverty in these countries, which often forces individuals to prioritise economic survival over education. This can result in limited opportunities for informal learning and a lower overall level of literacy in the population. Furthermore, cultural factors, such as the emphasis on oral tradition and the devaluation of written language, can impact the value placed on literacy and hinder informal learning efforts. Addressing these factors and promoting a supportive environment for informal literacy learning is crucial for improving literacy levels in low- and middle-income countries.

Challenges to informal literacy learning in Ghana and Nigeria are multi-faceted, stemming from socio-economic, cultural, and educational factors. These challenges impact the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions aimed at improving literacy outcomes outside formal education systems. Specifically, one of the challenges facing informal literacy learning in Ghana and Nigeria is the limited access to resources and infrastructure. According to Mensah (2019), many communities in Ghana do not have adequate libraries or learning centers that provide educational resources for individuals to engage in informal literacy practices. This not only limits the opportunities for individuals to engage in self-directed learning but also hinders the development of a reading culture within communities. Additionally, the lack of internet access in many rural areas further exacerbates this issue, as individuals are unable to access online learning platforms or educational resources. Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for informal literacy learning. For instance, the strong oral tradition in Ghana provides a foundation for storytelling and oral literacy practices, which can be leveraged to promote reading and writing skills. NGOs and community-based organisations can play a significant role in providing resources and support for informal literacy learning initiatives, by establishing community libraries and organising literacy programmes. Other specific challenges comprise the following:

1. **Limited Resources – disparities in access to ICT:** Many communities in both countries lack access to adequate educational materials, including books, computers, and internet connectivity. This limits the availability of learning resources for informal literacy initiatives. Despite a medium-high mobile penetration across both Ghana and Nigeria, there are still many disparities in access between urban and rural areas. In low- and middle-low-income households, if there are mobile technologies it is often only one and owned by the father,

who spends most of the day outside the home working and therefore making it difficult for other family members to engage in reading activities.

2. **Language Diversity:** Both Ghana and Nigeria are linguistically diverse countries with numerous languages spoken. Creating learning materials in local languages is a challenge, as there's a need for translations and adaptations for effective communication.
3. **Lack of Qualified Facilitators:** Informal literacy programmes often rely on community volunteers. However, there are almost always limited number of trained facilitators who can provide effective instruction, especially in remote areas.
4. **Funding and Sustainability:** Many informal literacy initiatives depend on external funding, making sustainability a challenge. Changes in funding availability can impact the continuity of programmes.
5. **Socio-Economic Inequalities:** Low-income families often struggle to afford education-related expenses, hindering children's participation in informal literacy programmes. Poverty can also force children into labour, reducing their time for learning.
6. **Parental Awareness and Involvement:** Parents' understanding of the importance of literacy and their involvement in their children's education can vary. Lack of parental support can hinder children's progress. In many instances, most homes across Ghana and Nigeria lack reading culture and in Ghana 93% of homes do not have any children's books (Worldreader, 2022). This may contribute to ineffectiveness of community-level reading initiatives.
7. **Cultural Barriers:** Some cultural beliefs may discourage participation in formal or informal education, especially for certain marginalised groups, girls, or older individuals who might feel it's not suitable for them.

Summary:

- **Significance in African Context:** Informal learning is crucial in countries like Nigeria and Ghana due to challenges in the formal education system including poor learning outcomes, limited resources, and quality education disparities. It bridges gaps in skills, knowledge, and social integration, especially in regions with limited access to quality education. Despite widespread use of intervention strategies in low and middle-income countries, some lack empirical evidence for their efficacy.
- **Informal Literacy Interventions in Ghana:**
 - "Worldreader Ghana District Scale Project": E-readers with diverse content improved reading skills.
 - "Mobile Library Early Grade Community Reading Intervention": Mobile vans delivered reader packs and teacher training during school closures.
 - "iREAD Ghana" Reading Clubs: Peer-led reading clubs foster love for reading, community engagement, and cultural appreciation.
 - Community Literacy and Book Sharing Boxes: After-school literacy clubs in Northern Ghana, focusing on literacy mentorship.
- **Informal Literacy in Nigeria:**
 - Similar challenges to Ghana, with low literacy rates and education disparities.
 - Strategies include community reading clubs, education centers, radio, street schooling, and mobile technology.
 - "Girls' Education Initiative (GEI)": Focuses on girls' literacy through Community-Based Learning Centers, integrating academic and life skills.
- **Parental Role in Informal Learning:** Parents significantly influence formal school literacy levels through informal learning practices at home. Reading with children, conversations, and hands-on experiences create strong literacy foundations.
- **Community Support and Literacy:** Community engagement positively impacts students' literacy by fostering additional learning opportunities and creating a supportive environment for literacy development.
- **Literacy/Learning Assessment Measures:**
 - No standardised way to measure education levels in informal systems.
 - Foundational literacy measures used as benchmarks.
- **Challenges in Informal Learning:** Challenges in Ghana and Nigeria include limited access to educational resources, poverty, lack of technology, cultural factors, and language diversity, shortage of trained facilitators affects the quality of informal literacy initiatives, reliance on external funding. Monitoring and evaluation of impact remain crucial for shaping effective strategies.

SECTION FOUR

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS AND FINANCING OF THE SECTOR

“Children have a right to learn, and it’s up to us, as parents, communities, and governments, not just our schools and teachers. To ensure that they are equipped with every skill they need to progress” (Dr. Modupe Adefeso, MD, The Education Partnership (TEP) Centre – Nigeria)

4.1 Introduction

Although the informal educational system plays a critical role in complementing learning in the formal education system, this sector is largely neglected and generally underfunded (Figlio et al., 2016). However, the sector is generally funded directly/indirectly by development partners, including foreign government agencies, foundations, and international organisations like UNESCO and UNICEF, the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others.

In both Ghana and Nigeria, a number of government agencies, NGOs/CSOs, and development partners collaborate to address the challenge of poor learning and promote education access, quality, and inclusiveness through various programmes and initiatives outside of the school system.

4.2 Analysis of the stakeholders in the informal literacy sector

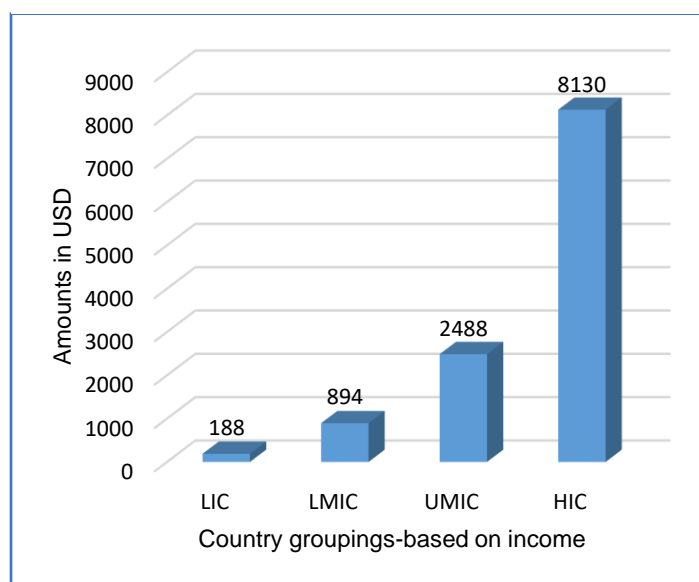
Globally, several stakeholders operate in the informal education sector - ranging from governments from developed countries, operating through their development agencies. These comprise USAID, FCDO, JICA and many others. In the informal learning landscape of Ghana and Nigeria, a diverse array of stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and development partners, work to address the critical challenge of learning and enhance education opportunities for marginalised populations. Table 3 presents information on the various institutions and stakeholders in the informal educational sector in both countries – with a focus on their mandates and functions, key interventions being implemented, funding sources and the status of implementation. Their collaborative efforts span multiple dimensions, ranging from basic literacy to skills training, and are guided by a shared commitment to fostering inclusive education and social transformation.

4.2.1 Government

Funding of the education sector

Generally, education at all levels is funded by Governments, households, and development partners with domestic governments being the largest funders of education in all countries (Al-Samarrai, 2019). In the phase of the rampaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, all these key players have been affected in different ways with an ongoing rippling effect on educational financing at all levels (World Bank, 2020). Prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, different governments were spending vastly different amounts on education. High-income countries, according to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on average were spending 43 times as much on the education of primary-school-aged children as the average low-income country (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Public primary education spending per child



The differences in how much money is spent on students are even more significant when you consider all the years they go to school. On average, a government in a low-income country will have spent about \$188 for one child's education while high income countries spend relatively more. However, LMICs have also been making progress in education expenditure in recent years. With the dwindling educational spending, especially in LMICs – attributable to the impacts of COVID-19, the informal education sector which has over the years had little or no funding, will likely be affected the most.

Source: Al-Samarrai et al., (2019)

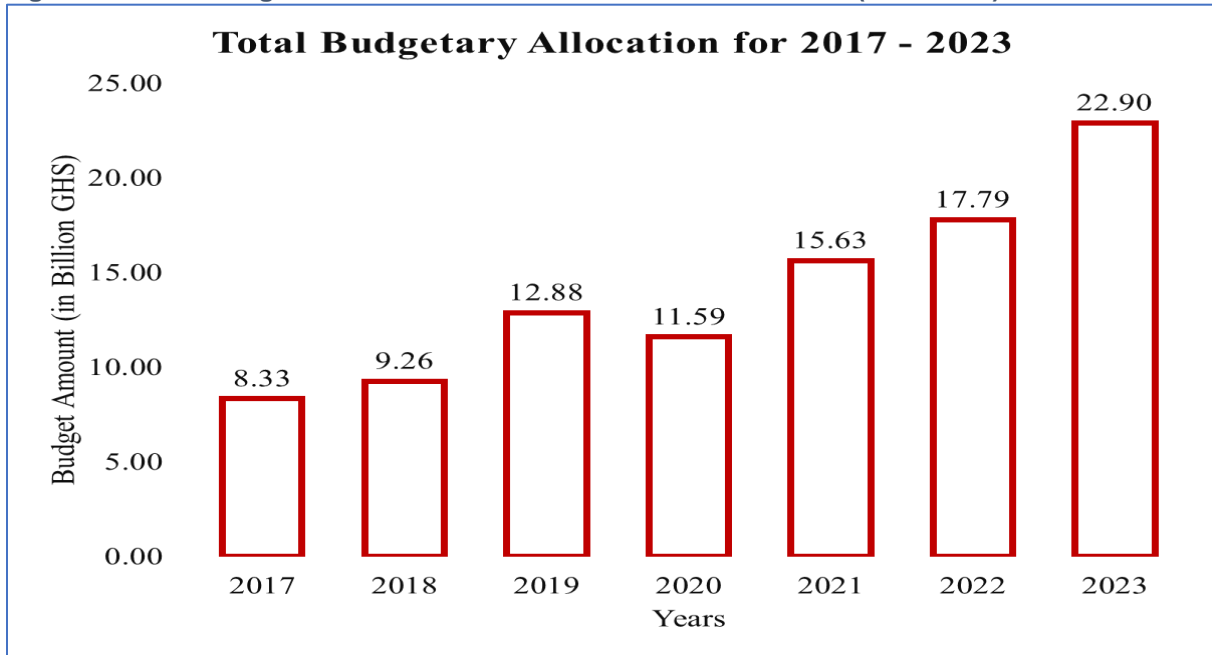
According to SDG 2030 Education Framework for Action, Governments are expected to allocate between 4-6% of GDP and at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to the education sector. Africa has experienced some level of sustained economic growth in recent years with GDP rising at an average of 4.3% over the past decade (World Bank, 2020). However, public funding for education remain inconsistent. This poses serious consequences for the education of millions of children, especially those from the poorest families and especially for the informal sector.

▪ **The Ghana situation:**

In Ghana, the government has historically been the main source of funding for the formal education sector, with some support from donors. Despite investments in education, the sector still faces significant challenges. Between 2017 and 2023, there were generally increasing budgets, except in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the education budget increased by about 28.76% compared to 2022, reaching GH¢ 22.90 billion (about \$2.0 billion).

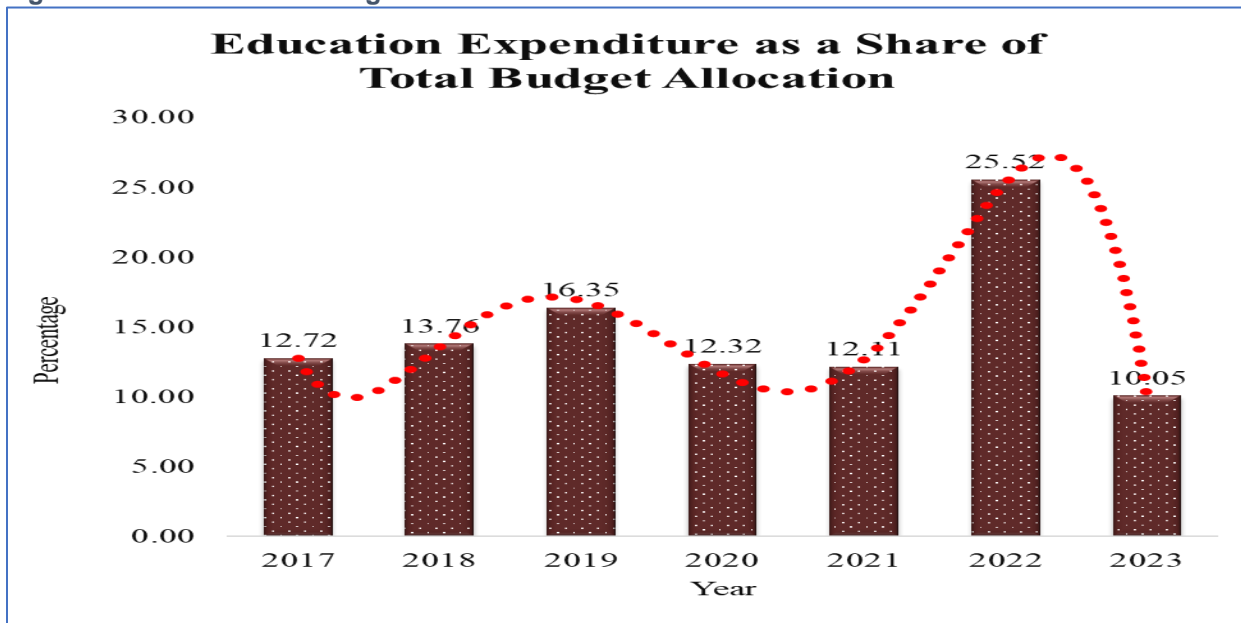
However, this increase is still below the recommended threshold of allocating 15-20% of the total budget to education, as it accounts for only 10.05% of the overall budget. In terms of the education budget's share of the GDP, Ghana falls short of the SDG 2030 framework standard, allocating only about 3% of the GDP to education (Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 11: Total budget allocation for the education sector - Ghana (2017-2023)



Source: Ghana Budget Statement (2017 - 2023)
<https://mofep.gov.gh/publications/budget-statements>

Figure 12: Share of total budget allocation - Ghana

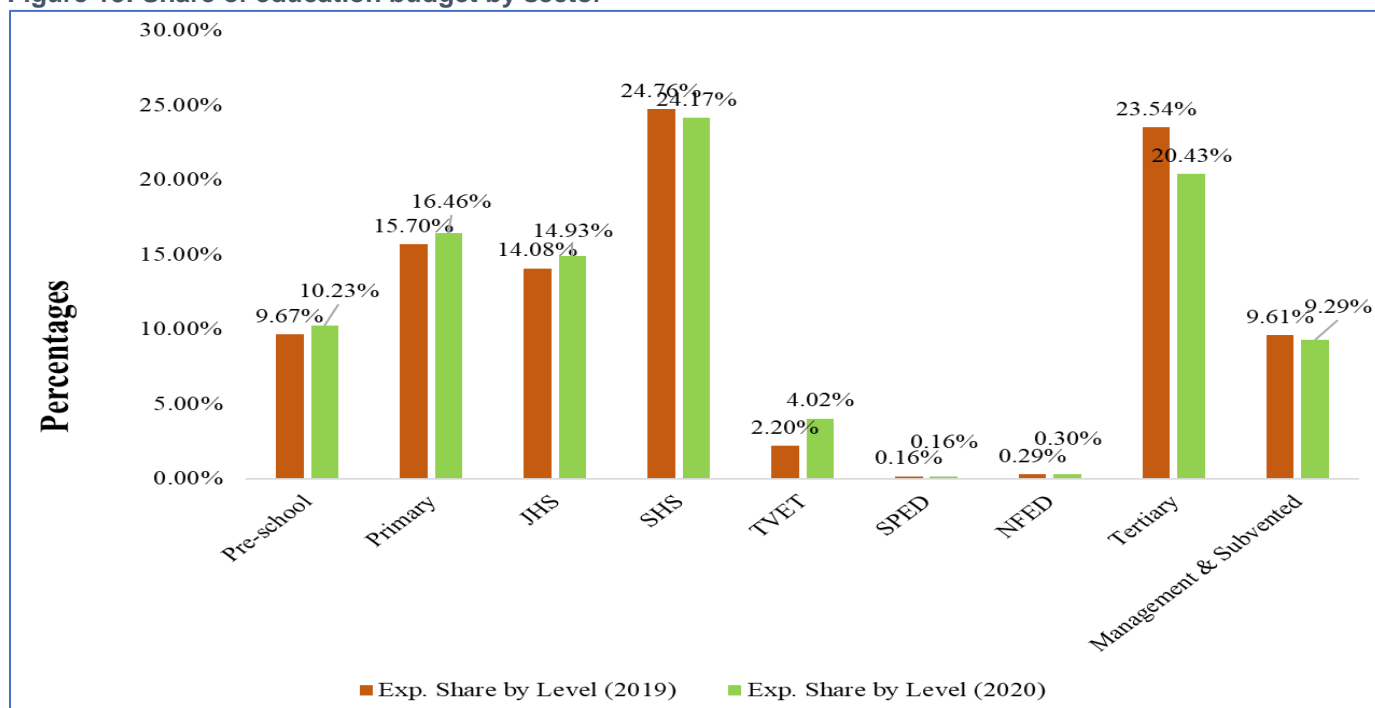


Source: Ghana Budget Statement (2017 - 2023)
<https://mofep.gov.gh/publications/budget-statements>

- **Allocation of funds within the education sector**

Regarding the allocation of funds to different education levels in 2019 and 2020, a significant portion of the budget went to Senior High School (SHS), followed by tertiary education. Unfortunately, there is limited mention of the informal education sector in these allocations. The budget for non-formal education (Complementary Education Agency – CEA), which may have some impact on the informal sector, was very low, accounting for only 0.29% in 2019 and 0.30% in 2020 (Figure 13). The analysis suggests that Ghana is not investing sufficient funding to the informal literacy sector – with the CEA receiving less than a percent (0.32%) of the education funding (See Annex 2 for details).

Figure 13: Share of education budget by sector



Source: ESPR Draft (2020)

- **The Nigeria situation**

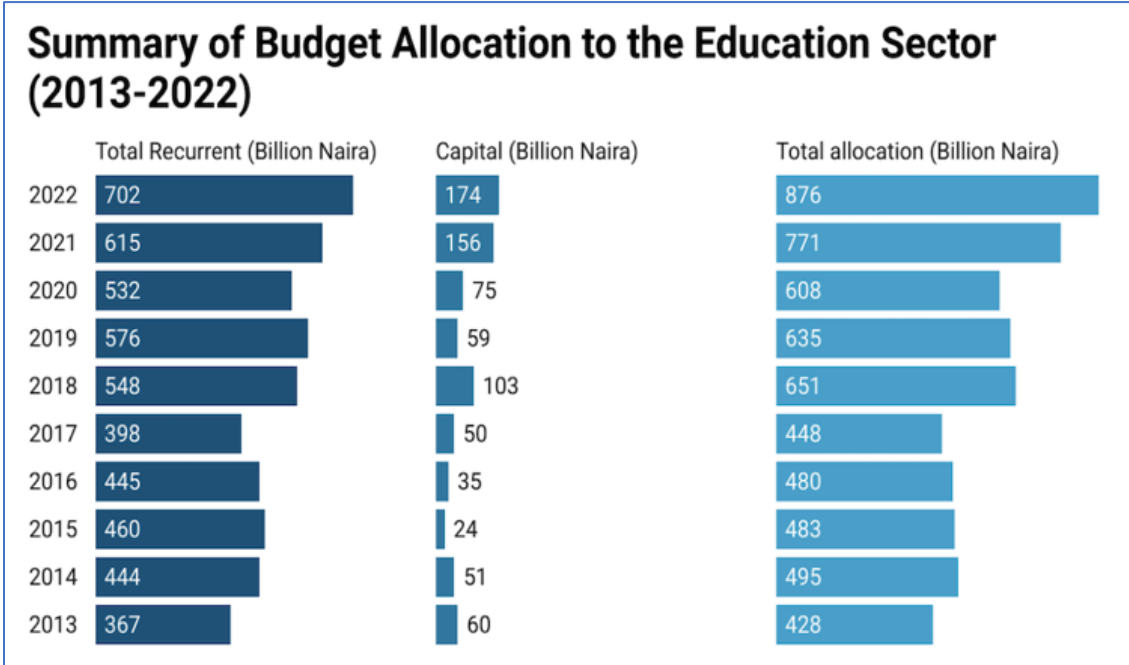
In Nigeria, the funding for education is a joint effort involving three levels of government: federal, state, and local authorities. Each level has specific financing duties and responsibilities. The federal government contributes 50%, while the state and local governments contribute 30% and 20%, respectively.

Education financing in Nigeria faces challenges such as unequal distribution of resources, inadequate funding levels, and the need for improved transparency and accountability in resource allocation. However, efforts are continually being made to address these issues and ensure that education financing is used effectively to enhance the quality and accessibility of education across

the country. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of education in Nigeria's development, leading to increased efforts to improve funding, infrastructure, and the overall quality of education at all levels, from primary to tertiary institutions.

Nigeria has been gradually increasing its funding for the education sector over the years, although there have been some ups and downs (Figure 14). The budget for education generally increased from 428 billion Naira in 2013 to 651 billion Naira in 2018. The dip in 2020 is largely due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, there was a significant boost in education budget, reaching 771 billion Naira, indicating a renewed commitment to investing in education that continued in 2022, with an allocation of 876 billion Naira (about \$1.2 billion). The proportion of Nigeria's total budget allocated to education shows a totally different picture to the absolute figures presented above. As Figure 15 shows, share of education budget has remained volatile since 2016, with the increasing trend up to 2019 changing sharply to a low of 5.4% in 2022. These fluctuations in funding levels reflect Nigeria's changing priorities and challenges in the education sector. In the case of Nigeria, there is no readily available data on allocations within the education sector.

Figure 14: Nigeria's budget allocation - 2013 - 2022



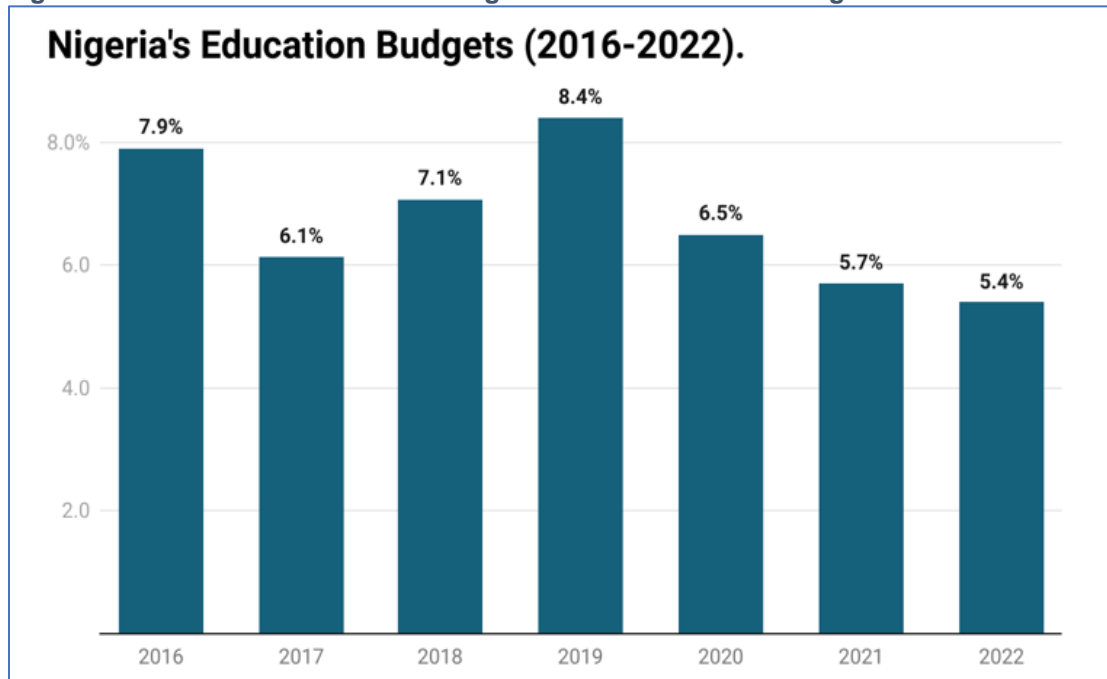
Source: Federal Ministry o Education (2022)

▪ **Share of the education budget as a percentage of the overall funding:**

Figure 15 presents the proportion of Nigeria's total budget allocated to education as a percentage for the years 2016 to 2022. In 2016, education received a relatively substantial share of the budget at 7.9%, indicating a strong commitment to investing in the education sector. However, in subsequent years, there was some variability in this percentage. In 2017, education accounted for 6.1% of the total budget, signalling a slight reduction in funding emphasis. The year 2018 saw a moderate increase in the allocation, with education receiving 7.1% of the total budget. This

suggests a renewed focus on education within the national budget. However, this positive trend was followed by a decrease in 2019 when education's share dropped to 8.4%, indicating potential budgetary constraints in that year. The year 2019 saw the highest allocation over the period. Budgetary allocation, however, started dipping from 2020 and this may be attributed to the economic challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which placed additional strain on the budget.

Figure 15: Share of the education budget as a % of overall funding



Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2022)

▪ **INGOs, NGOs and CSOs:**

There are several international and local NGOs operating in the education sector in both Ghana and Nigeria – working through governments and different local partners to achieve their goals. These institutions leverage innovative approaches such as technology-driven book access, community-focused literacy programmes, and participatory techniques for community development. These NGOs act as catalysts for change, particularly among marginalised groups, by fostering a reading culture, promoting girls’ education, and empowering learners. This section highlights some of their institutions, their focus areas, scope of work, achievements, impact and selected partners (Table 4).

▪ **Development Partners/Funders and foundations:**

Collaborations with development partners, including foreign government agencies, foundations, and international organisations like UNESCO and UNICEF, amplify the impact of informal learning efforts. Funding from sources like the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation support projects like basic education improvement and literacy initiatives. These partnerships enable the scaling up of programmes, support policy

advocacy, and facilitate knowledge sharing across borders. Across these stakeholders, several common themes emerge:

- **Inclusivity:** There is a shared commitment to ensuring education for all, including marginalised groups such as children living with disability, girls, and disadvantaged communities.
- **Literacy Promotion:** The promotion of literacy is a central goal, facilitated by initiatives like e-learning platforms, reading campaigns, and functional literacy programmes.
- **Community Engagement:** Stakeholders emphasise active community engagement, utilising participatory techniques to ensure that educational interventions are locally relevant and sustainable.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Government agencies, in collaboration with development partners, work toward shaping policies and frameworks that address illiteracy and provide alternative education pathways.

Collectively, these stakeholders create a dynamic ecosystem that strives to transform the informal learning landscape in Ghana and Nigeria. By addressing illiteracy and educational disparities, they contribute to the advancement of individuals, communities, and societies, fostering a more inclusive, empowered, and literate future.

4.3 Key Learnings

The governments across both Ghana and Nigeria acknowledge the need for investment in the informal learning landscape – in relation to policy enactment, resource investment and others. For example, the Complementary Education Agency (CEA) Act 2020 (Act 1055) of Ghana mandates the agency to provide lifelong learning pathways for Ghanaians – comprising the establishment of libraries and continuous engagements with communities and parents. These policies, along with others, have set up systems that outline the roles and duties of different government bodies (like ministries and agencies), local authorities (Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies), and other non-governmental groups (like development partners, civil society organisations, private institutions, etc.) in educating children in Ghana outside the formal education system.

However, the implementation of these policies is faced with key challenges comprising limited interest resulting in non-existent budgetary allocations which generally contributes to a woefully cash strapped sector. As a result of the financial neglect, many of the interventions in the sector have been heavily driven by development partner support.

4.3.1 Dependence on donor support

Most of the interventions in the informal literacy sector are driven by development partners. Many African countries and particularly Ghana and Nigeria depend heavily on DPs for resolving many developmental challenges including the education sector. Development partners such as FCDO (formerly DfID), USAID and UNICEF etc. provide both financial and technical support to build community-level libraries, providing reading resources, engaging communities and parents to

provide the needed support for their children and many more. These DPs have also been providing support to the agencies such as the Ghana Education Service (GES) and currently the Complementary Education Agency in Ghana and the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria.

Table 4: Highlights of stakeholders in the informal education sector

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
INGOs/NGOs/CSOs							
1.	Worldreader	Works with partner organisations to provide a holistic digital-supported reading programme at both school and community levels	Ghana, India, Kenya, Spain, the UK and the US	Provision of digital reading resources to learners both in school and at home – working through parents/ caregivers etc.	Since 2010, Worldreader has supported over 21 million readers in Eastern & Southern Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America, South Asia, West Africa and the United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 22 million cumulative readers ▪ 100+ countries ▪ 77 million books read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EdTech hub -Care International -Plan International -Pencils of promise -Team4tech -The Open University -Raising a Reader -Edify -Cotton on Foundation -World Vision -Compassion and many more
2.	Text Foundation (Radio School Programme)	Providing foundational numeracy and literacy intervention for out-of-school-children in Northwest Nigeria	Nigeria (<i>Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara</i>)	Out of school children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 56,389 easy to use workbooks, ▪ 1384 radios and Teachers Guides Distributed ▪ Radio School broadcasts in 1,482 Learning Centers ▪ Successful production and transmission of interactive radio foundational education series via radio broadcast and social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased access to Education ▪ Improved Teaching Capacity ▪ Enhanced Community Participation ▪ Improved Digital Literacy 	-
3.	Luminos	Provides transformative education programmes to thousands of OOSC helping them to: -Catch up to grade level	Ghana, the Gambia, Liberia	Serving vulnerable and out-of-school children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Gambia - Provided Curriculum Development & Advisory Services to the Government ▪ Liberia - 9,727 total beneficiaries, 3,150 students served 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reached 172,957 out of school children ▪ Learners progress ten times faster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School for Life ▪ Link community Development, Ghana

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
		-Reintegrate into government school systems -Prepare for lifelong learning			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ghana - 3,063 total beneficiaries, 1,500 students served 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> than learners in comparable programmes Over 90% transition to formal school 	
4.	Room to Read Ghana and Nigeria	Improving reading skills among children, especially girls	4-countries in Africa – South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania Also works in other 17-locations worldwide	Works in schools and communities through literacy programmes including distribution of books - worked in more than 49,000 communities, with additional support through remote solutions that facilitate learning beyond the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 39.3 million+ books distributed 35.5 million+ children benefited from our Literacy Programme 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
5.	Action Aid	Participatory techniques that help to generate discussions and analysis on critical issues that are of concern to the community	Ghana	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT) 	-	-

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
6.	National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE)	Mobilise and sensitise nomadic pastoralists to appreciate the value of modern education; Increase the level of support and enthusiasm of nomads with a view to improving learners' enrolment and attendance	Nigeria	Children from nomadic families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Radio/LIFE Literacy programme - Use of Radio in a Nomadic Education Programme 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNESCO UNDP UNICEF
7.	World Vision, Ghana	WV Ghana education project is to contribute to "Improved access and quality of education for 2.6 million school children and their families, leading to improved learning outcomes".	Ghana	Improved access to education in deprived communities. Children read, write and use numeracy skills. Boys and girls complete basic school. Increased capacity of communities to participate in education delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Engagement for Localise Materials Creation (CELMC) School Performance Improvement Programme (SPIP) Reading Improvement in Primary Education (RIPE) Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CIDA, AusAID, KOICA
8.	Plan International	Advance children's rights and equality for girls	Ghana Nigeria	Promotes free, equal access to quality education for all children – from early learning to secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive, quality education for Girls education programme 		<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Government Agencies							
9.	Complementary Education	To oversee the provision and administration of quality complementary	Ghana	Provide functional basic literacy education to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading to Connect Minds for Social Transformation 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government of Ghana

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
	Agency (CEA)	education and to provide for related matters		disadvantaged groups. Provide occupational skills training for different trade groups. Formulate policies and guidelines to advance complementary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community of Excellence in Ghana My First Day At Literacy Class 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO)
10.	Ghana Education Service (GES)	The GES is a government agency under the Ministry of Education responsible for implementing government policies that ensure that Ghanaians of school-going age.	Ghana	In the informal space, GES provides oversight responsibility on the CEA's activities – overseeing OOSC issues, establishment of libraries etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme. Secondary Education Improvement Project (SEIP). 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCDO USAID
11.	Ghana Library Authority	Ghana Library Authority is responsible for providing educational materials. To provide facilities for study and research. Promote and encourage a reading culture in the country.	Ghana	-	Ghana Library Authority recently launched an e-learning project Read2Skill. The objective of the project is to enable Ghanaians have the opportunity to undertake courses on the world largest open learning platform, Udemy. National Short Story Writing Challenge. The Ghana National Council of Private Schools (GNACOPS), in collaboration	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNICEF Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
					with the Ghana Library Authority (GhLA) and the Parliament of Ghana held 'Parliament Reads 2020'		
12.	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA)	Regulatory body mandated by the Education Regulatory Bodies Act 2020 (Act 1023) to approve all teaching and learning materials for both in school and out of school	Ghana	To improve learning experiences and outcomes of all Ghanaian children through a world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting standards.	-		-
13.	Federal Ministry of Education	Responsible for the determination of National Policy on Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. To enter into dialogue with international donor agencies on the subject of co-operation in the sphere of Mass literacy, adult and non-formal education.	Nigeria	-	-	-	-
14.	Community Learning Center (CLC)	To serve as a focal point for providing non-formal and informal education activities for local people.	Nigeria	Provide informal literacy services. Coordinate and connect the community's learning sources and the natural learning sources to develop the network	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government of Nigeria ▪ UNESCO

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
				community learning centre for education for the general public.			
15.	Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE)	To strengthen adult education in all its aspects, so that it can better serve the needs of the people of Nigeria and play a positive role in the development of the country	Nigeria	Planning, implementation and evaluation of adult and non-formal education programmes	-	-	-
16.	National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education	Responsible for the organization, monitoring and assessment of adult literacy practices in the country. Co-ordinate mass literacy, adult and non-formal education programmes nation-wide Nigeria	Nigeria	1. Each-one-teach-one" or "fund-the-teaching-of-one. 2. Quranic School Non-Formal Education Programme 3. Revitalising Adult and Youth Literacy in Nigeria project.	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal budgetary allocations ▪ UNESCO
17.	Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)	Responsible for the development of strategic frameworks for literacy education in Nigeria	Nigeria	-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UNESCO
18.	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC)	Develop, review and enrich curriculum at all levels. Undertake and promote book development, and	Nigeria.	Serves as a centre for the collation, exchange and management of information on education and policy related issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-formal education curricula for Girl-Child Out-of-School Boys ▪ Quranic School children and youth - that the learners can benefit 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UNICEF

SN	Organisation	Focus areas	Focus countries	Target/Scope	Programmes/Achievements	Impact	Other partners
		<p>local authorship for quality assurance.</p> <p>Conduct educational research for public policies formulation and implementation.</p>		Assess book for all levels of education for quality assurance	from quality learning and have the opportunity mainstreaming into the formal school system later.		
Development Partners/Funders							
19.	United States of Agency for International Development (USAID)	USAID partners with the GoG to enhance its capacity to measure learning outcomes and use data to improve school management. This helps Ghanaian education officials to better assess reading achievement.	Ghana Nigeria		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Reading Radio Programme (NRRP) - developed and distributed English literacy instructional materials to children ▪ Transitions to English (T2E) initiative - developed and distributed English and Ghanaian Language of Instruction (GLOI) Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ US Government
20.	UNICEF	Works to ensure every child is protected, healthy and educated, focusing on the children left behind by wider economic and social progress.	Globally – Ghana and Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education ▪ Health and Nutrition ▪ Water, Sanitation and Hygiene ▪ Social Policy and Protection ▪ Child protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mobile School Report Card (mSRC) ▪ Inclusive Education in Ghana ▪ Adolescent Girls' Education 		

SECTION FIVE GAP ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This section presents the gaps in the informal educational sector in Ghana and Nigeria. The gap analysis highlights areas requiring improvement - examining the discrepancies between existing conditions and the intended goals or benchmarks. The section further provides valuable insights into what needs to be addressed, enhanced, or changed to bridge the identified gaps in the informal sector.

5.2 The learning crisis - gaps

The global challenge of low literacy levels persists despite efforts to provide universal quality education. The gap between access to schooling and actual learning outcomes underscores the need for effective literacy interventions. In LMICs, the informal education sector can complement formal schooling by offering additional learning opportunities outside the classroom. However, limited evidence exists on the impact of these interventions. Learning data is lacking, and there's insufficient understanding of informal education models. Challenges within formal education systems, including inadequate resources and teacher shortages, contribute to the learning crisis. Disparities in literacy outcomes among individuals with the same education level further highlight the need for evidence-based interventions. In Nigeria and Ghana, learning crises are evident, with declining literacy attainments and struggles with foundational reading skills. The fragmented informal literacy sector lacks well-documented evidence of its impact. Possible interventions for stakeholders in the sector could include evidence-based research, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions, quality assurance in formal education, and resource allocation. Engaging communities, developing localised materials, promoting parental involvement, and advocating for equitable policies are key strategies. Collaborative efforts between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners are crucial to address the gaps in knowledge within the informal literacy sector and promote effective, lifelong learning opportunities.

The synthesis of the evidence on learning crisis across LMICs and specifically across Ghana and Nigeria highlight the following gaps:

1. **Limited Progress in Literacy Improvement:** Despite global efforts towards achieving universal quality education (SDG 4), literacy levels remain low. The gap lies between access to education and actual learning outcomes, indicating that the provision of formal schooling alone does not effectively address fundamental literacy skills.
2. **Lack of Evidence-Based Interventions:** Many interventions exist within both formal and informal education sectors, but there is limited empirical evidence supporting their efficacy in improving literacy levels.

3. **Declining Literacy Attainments and Limited Proficiency in Reading:** Evidence from various assessments in Nigeria shows consistently low literacy attainments at the basic school level, and attainment rates are declining over time. This suggests a deep-rooted learning crisis. In Ghana, pupils struggle with foundational reading skills, even after completing primary education. High percentages of pupils cannot read a single word correctly, indicating a significant literacy gap.
4. **Fragmented Informal Literacy Sector:** The informal literacy/education system is fragmented, with limited funding and resources, hindering its potential impact on improving formal education literacy levels.
5. **Limited Research and Data:** Despite its importance, the informal literacy sector lacks comprehensive research and data, inhibiting informed decision-making and policy formulation.

5.3 Gaps in the informal literacy space and interventions

The formal versus informal literacy debate highlights the impact of informal learning on formal education outcomes. While formal education aims for standardisation, informal learning is context-specific and varied. The contextual pathways to literacy learning model underscores the significance of proximal contextual supports, resources, and practices in fostering literacy outcomes. The informal literacy sector has evolved from traditional practices to modern platforms, adapting to changing socio-economic and technological contexts. Community engagement and collaborative partnerships are seen to be key drivers in enhancing effectiveness of informal literacy initiatives. Overall, understanding and harnessing the potential of the informal literacy sector is crucial for addressing literacy challenges and promoting equitable access to education in LMICs. The following gaps emerged from the synthesis of the context of the informal learning sector:

1. **Limited Focus on Standardisation in Informal Learning:** While formal education strives for standardisation, the informal literacy sector lacks uniformity due to its context-specific nature. There is a gap in understanding how to balance the flexibility and customisation of informal learning with the need for certain levels of standardisation, particularly when aiming to integrate informal learning outcomes into formal education systems.
2. **Insufficient Research on Effectiveness:** While there is recognition of the positive impact of informal literacy on formal education, there is limited comprehensive research and evaluation that quantifies this impact across different contexts. More empirical evidence is needed to determine the consistent influence of informal literacy on improving literacy levels within formal education systems, with particular focus on child-to-child learning which has shown potential but lacks research. More qualitative studies will help delve deeper into the nuances of parent-child interactions, community engagement dynamics, and the emotional aspects of learning that quantitative approaches might overlook. In addition, long-term longitudinal studies are needed to track students' literacy progress over extended periods, examining how early informal learning influences their literacy skills, attitudes, and academic achievements throughout their educational

journey. The research should help understand the optimal conditions and approaches for maximising its impact.

3. **Facilitator Training and Capacity Building:** The success of these interventions often depends on the capacity and skills of facilitators at the local level. Offering comprehensive training to educators can enhance their ability to deliver effective literacy instruction and adapt to the specific needs of learners in informal settings.
4. **Limited and Unequitable Access to Technology and Resources in Technology-Based Learning:** While technology has transformed informal learning, challenges related to internet connectivity, access to devices, and digital content still persist. Limited internet connectivity and access to digital devices hinder the potential impact of technology-based learning. Bridging this gap and ensuring equitable access to digital resources is crucial for leveraging the full potential of informal literacy through technology.
5. **Addressing Learning Disparities:** While progress has been made, there's still a significant gap in literacy levels among children. Interventions need to target marginalised groups, including children with disabilities and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to ensure that no one is left behind.
6. **Sustainability and Long-Term Impact:** Many informal literacy initiatives rely on external funding and support. There is a gap in knowledge about creating sustainable models that can continue to provide benefits to learners over the long term, even in the absence of external resources. Many of the interventions have been successful at a local level, but there is a need for strategies to scale them up and make them sustainable across larger regions.
7. **Local Cultural Relevance:** Tailoring interventions to the local culture and context is essential for engagement and success. Further emphasis on using culturally relevant materials and approaches can enhance the effectiveness of interventions and make them more relatable to learners.
8. **Evaluation and Data Collection:** Many initiatives lack rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess their impact accurately. Implementing robust evaluation strategies can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of interventions, identify areas for improvement, and help refine approaches over time.
9. **Measurement of Informal Learning Outcomes:** Informal learning outcomes are often less quantifiable than formal education outcomes. There is a gap in effective methods for measuring and assessing the impact of informal literacy practices, which is essential for advocating for resources and policy changes.
10. **Innovative Approaches:** To meet the evolving needs of learners and keep pace with changing technology and educational trends, interventions should continuously explore innovative teaching methods, interactive learning platforms, and adaptive content delivery.

5.4 Stakeholders and funding sources in the informal learning sector - gaps

Despite the established importance of the informal literacy sector, it has historically been neglected and lacks coordination. Collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs/CSOs, and development partners are working to bridge this gap and enhance learning opportunities outside the formal system. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration, policy reforms, diversified funding, capacity building, and community empowerment. By working together to bridge these gaps, stakeholders can create a more cohesive and impactful informal literacy sector that complements formal education systems and addresses the learning challenges faced by marginalised populations in Ghana and Nigeria. However, notable gaps remain:

1. **Coordination and Integration:** The informal literacy sector lacks effective coordination and integration with the formal education system, and within the various players. There is a need for stronger collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and development partners to align efforts and create a seamless educational ecosystem.
2. **Sustainability:** The heavy reliance on donor support for funding raises concerns about the sustainability of interventions. To ensure the longevity of informal literacy initiatives, there is a need to explore diverse funding sources, including government allocations, private sector partnerships, and innovative financing mechanisms.
3. **Capacity Building:** Strengthening the capacity of educators, volunteers, and community members involved in informal literacy initiatives is essential. Providing training and resources to enhance their effectiveness in facilitating learning experiences can lead to more impactful outcomes.
4. **Policy Advocacy:** Collaborative efforts among stakeholders should extend beyond project implementation to advocating for policy reforms and increased government commitment to the informal literacy sector. Stronger advocacy can lead to better policy implementation and increased resource allocation.

In summary, the informal education sector has the potential to improve literacy in both Ghana and Nigeria if the sector is given necessary boost through budgetary allocation and effective regulation. Largely, the sector has been neglected in both countries in terms of research and funding.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the desk study findings, the following recommendations are made to guide future programming and interventions:

6. Increase **investment in community-based initiatives** that promote and support informal literacy learning. This could include the establishment of community literacy centers, where individuals, especially, children ages 6 to 15 can access resources and participate in literacy activities.

7. Promote **collaborative partnerships** between government agencies, communities, non-governmental organisations, development partners and educational institutions should be fostered to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives. These partnerships should leverage combined efforts to enhance informal learning and bridge gaps in literacy.
8. Develop **bilingual education programmes** and include **diverse literature and resources**. It is crucial to recognise and value indigenous and local knowledge systems within the curriculum and teaching methods of informal education. By incorporating culturally relevant content, students are more likely to engage with their education and develop a strong foundation of literacy skills.
9. Invest in **digital literacy programmes** that harness technology to provide access to educational content and resources. Support the development of mobile apps, e-libraries, and platforms that facilitate learning beyond the classroom.
10. Emphasise the importance of **parental and community engagement** in literacy development. Support projects that empower parents to become active participants in their children's education through reading, discussions, and other literacy-related activities.

5.6 Proposed key areas mc2h Foundation could focus on:

1. **Community Libraries and Learning Centers:** partner with local NGOs/institutions to establish and strengthen community libraries and learning centers that serve as hubs for informal learning. These spaces should offer a variety of reading materials, technology access, and structured programmes for children, parents, and community members.
2. **Parental Training and Support:** Fund initiatives that provide parents with the knowledge, tools, and resources to engage effectively in their children's education. Workshops, seminars, and digital resources can empower parents to create enriching learning environments at home.
3. **Community-Based Literacy Projects:** Support projects that focus on community-driven literacy initiatives. These may include reading clubs, storytelling sessions, community education centers, and mentorship programmes that encourage a culture of reading and learning.
4. **Mobile Technology for Learning:** Invest in the development of mobile apps and platforms that deliver educational content in local languages. These digital tools can reach underserved areas, allowing children and adults to access learning resources on their smartphones.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Summary of the study approach

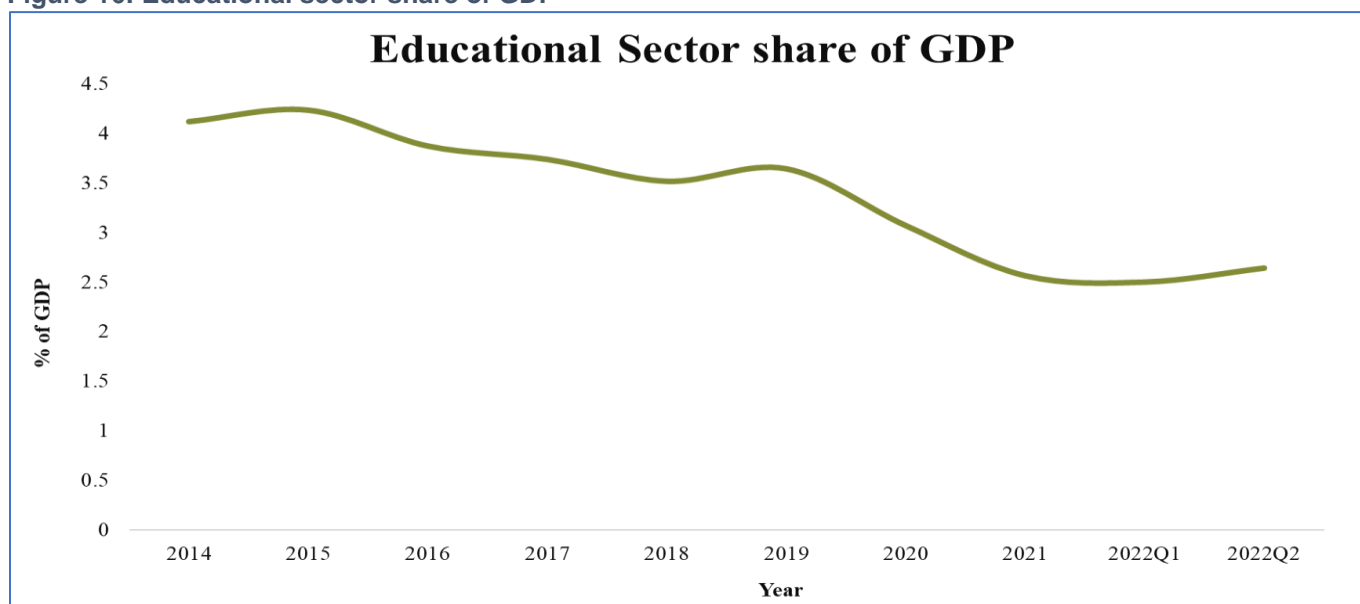
The Table below provides a summary of the step-by-step approach to achieving the objectives of this comprehensive desk study.

Specific approaches to the desk study

Study processes	
Step 1	Determine modalities for the desk study
1.1	Develop draft Table of Contents
1.2	Develop guidelines/methodology for conducting the comprehensive study
1.3	Review and finalise Table of Content
Output	Table of Contents and study guidelines developed
Step 2:	Conduct comprehensive study of the informal literacy sector
2.1	Identify possible sources of information – reports, articles, websites information, data etc.
2.2	Gather all relevant materials - books, reports, data etc.
2.3	Conduct detailed review of the informal literacy landscape based on secondary evidence globally, LMIC and for Ghana and Nigeria
2.4	Synthesis the evidence into one composite report on informal literacy
2.5	Submission of draft comprehensive synthesis report for review
2.6	Finalise comprehensive report based on comments
Output	Report on the informal literacy sector/ecosystem

Annex 2: Additional Graphs

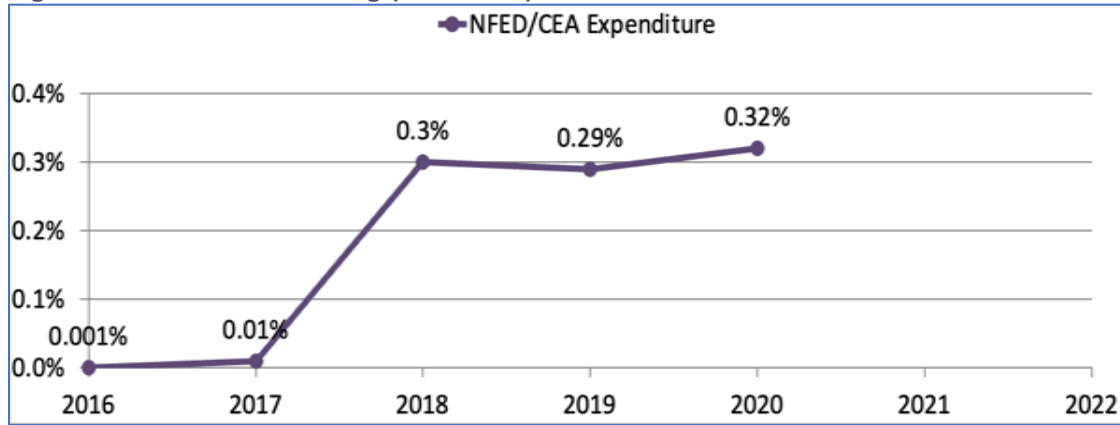
Figure 16: Educational sector share of GDP



Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2022)

The CEA has seen very little financing, with the CEA being woefully underfunded, receiving a maximum of 0.32% of the education sector's expenditure in 2020 (Figure 14).

Figure 17: NFED/CEA funding (2016-2022)



Source: Computations from Eduwatch Report, 2021