The path to scale: navigating the scaling of structured pedagogy programmes

Insight note

Heather Leigh Kayton
and Michelle Kaffenberger

January 2025

The path to scale: navigating the scaling of structured pedagogy programmes

Insight note

Heather Leigh Kayton
University of Oxford
heather.kayton@bsg.ox.ac.uk

Michelle Kaffenberger
University of Oxford
michelle.kaffenberger@bsg.ox.ac.uk

The path to scale: navigating the scaling of structured pedagogy programmes

Insight note

Contents

1 | Mapping pathways to scale

Structured pedagogy programmes have emerged as an effective approach for improving foundational learning outcomes.[1] These programmes provide teachers with detailed lesson plans, teaching and learning materials, initial training, and ongoing support, and have shown significant potential in enhancing student learning.[2] However, the journey from successful pilot projects to large-scale implementation is not straightforward or uniform. Understanding programmes' pathways to scale can inform policy planning processes, help implementers anticipate design and implementation needs, and provide examples of how programmes overcame challenges along the scaling journey to inform future programmes.

This insight note explores some of the pathways taken when scaling structured pedagogy programmes within government education systems. We examine this process through the lens of the **intellectual framework** of the What Works Hub for Global Education. The framework **aims to bridge the gap** between education research and implementation by examining four key areas:

- **Efficacy:** evidence from proof-of-concept studies on education interventions
- **Efficacy+:** evidence on effective types of interventions in new contexts, at new levels of scale, or with different implementers (eg government vs NGO implementers)
- **Policy plans:** government policies, plans, reforms, agreements or guidance
- **Practice at scale:** what actually happens in education systems and classrooms.

---

1   For evidence on the potential of structured pedagogy programmes to improve learning outcomes, see:

–   Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel. (2023). **Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning – What does recent evidence tell us are "Smart Buys" for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries?** [K. Akyeampong, T. Andrabi, A. Banerjee, R. Banerji, S. Dynarski, R. Glennerster, S. Grantham-McGregor, K. Muralidharan, B. Piper, S. Ruto, J. Saavedra, S.]

–   Science of Teaching. (2024). **Structured Pedagogy**.

–   Stern, J., Jukes, M., DeStefano, J., Mejia, J., Dubeck, P., Carrol, B., Jordan, R., Gatuyu, C., Nduku, T., Van Keuren, C., Punjabi, M., & Tufail, F. (2023). **Learning at Scale: Final report.** Prepared for the Center for Global Development and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation by RTI International.

2   For more information on structured pedagogy programmes and what they involve, see:

–   Hwa, YY., Kayton, H. L., and Kaffenberger, M. 2024. **Implementing structured pedagogy programmes at scale.** What Works Hub for Global Education. Synthesis brief, 2024/002.

Figure 1: What Works Hub for Global Education intellectual framework

Controlled proof of concept evidence

Gov framework/plan/ agreement/law

Efficacy

Policy Plans

Efficacy +

Practice at Scale

Goal

Effectiveness (Learning at Scale)

Evidence of (some):
Large scale
Multiple models
Multiple contexts
Gov implementation

Implemented at scale
(by gov or within gov regulatory frameworks)
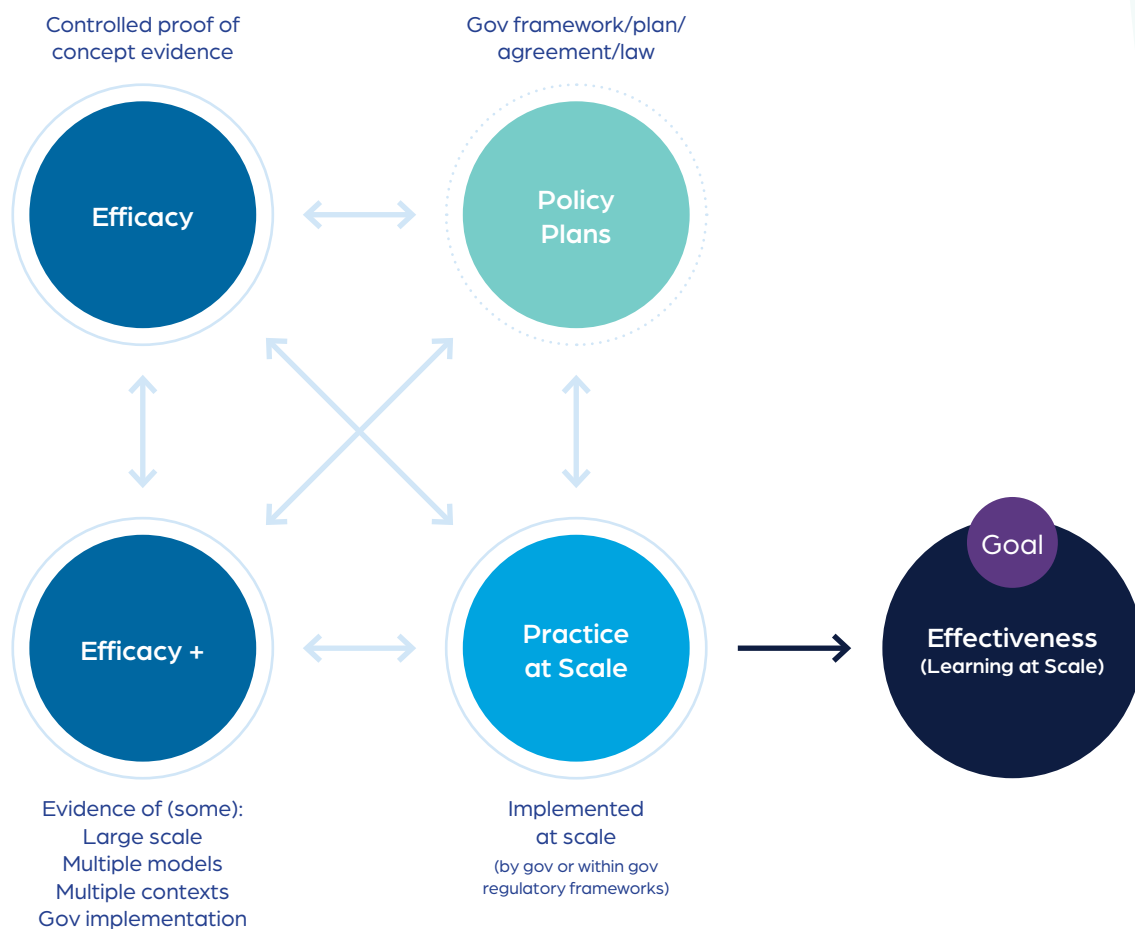
Within this framework, the interrelationships among these areas are central – how does evidence inform policy and practice, and how does practice feed back into research and policy?

While an ideal pathway might be for an intervention to pass smoothly through each area in the framework on its way to scale, in practice that rarely occurs. A programme may pass straight from efficacy to practice at scale, with no ongoing efficacy+ research to ensure continuing impact. A policy plan may be crafted with no efficacy or efficacy+ evidence informing it. Programmes may also pass through some areas multiple times, bouncing between efficacy+ and practice at scale, for instance. It is rare for an educational intervention to traverse the full pathway from initial evidence to nationwide effectiveness. In the global landscape of educational interventions, there are very few programmes that have successfully completed this journey. Most interventions remain stuck in early stages, either as small pilots or as limited efficacy studies that never reach meaningful scale. Empirically mapping the pathways programmes have taken can inform efforts to influence policy and practice to be more evidence-based.

To illustrate the diversity of scaling pathways and how they play out in real education systems, we explore two cases. The first is Kenya's Tusome programme, which followed a relatively straightforward progression through the framework's components, building systematically from initial evidence to national implementation. In later years, however, it did repeat some stages of the framework. The second is Liberia's Teacher Training Programme (LTTP II), which took a more complex path, shaped by context-specific challenges. These examples illustrate different routes taken as programmes moved towards implementation at scale, as well as the strategies that helped each programme to progress towards effectiveness.

2 | Case study 1: Tusome programme in Kenya

The Tusome literacy programme in Kenya emerged as a response to persistent challenges the country faced in improving early grade reading outcomes. The path that Tusome took to scale demonstrates a systematic progression through the components of the What Works Hub for Global Education's intellectual framework.

The programme design drew from established research in literacy education and developmental psychology, which emphasise the importance of developing both foundational decoding skills and higher-order interpretation skills.[3] The rollout in Kenya started with an evidence-establishing pilot programme called Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR). The PRIMR initiative demonstrated positive learning outcomes in an initial 547 schools, providing evidence from a randomised control trial that a structured pedagogy approach could work in the Kenyan context (**Efficacy;** Fig 2, #1). Building on this initial success, the PRIMR pilot was expanded to reach 1,384 schools, demonstrating its efficacy in a broader set of contexts (**Efficacy+;** Fig 2, #2). Notably, this expansion phase was designed with scalability in mind — examining how existing government officers could incorporate the programme into their daily work.[4]

Based on this initial evidence base of demonstrated success across different provinces and schools, the programme progressed, and the Kenyan government began to develop strategies for a larger scale-up across the country (**Policy plans;** Fig 2, #3). This led to Tusome being implemented across all 23,000 public schools as well as 1,500 low-cost private schools — a significant expansion that represented large-scale growth from pilot to nationwide implementation (**Practice at scale;** Fig 2, #4).

Tusome's effectiveness was documented through multiple research studies[5] — some conducted alongside national implementation and others in the years following the rollout at scale (**Effectiveness;** Fig 2, #5). These studies used varied methodologies including mixed-methods evaluations[6], differences-in-differences identification strategies[7] and case study investigations[8] to show that the programme successfully improved reading outcomes at scale. The strong evidence base from studies of Tusome's effectiveness continues to influence the design of other structured pedagogy programmes today.

3 Piper, B., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Mugenda, A. (2014). **Improving reading outcomes in Kenya: First-year effects of the PRIMR initiative.** International Journal of Educational Development, 37, 11–21.

4 Piper, B., Destefano, J., Kinyanjui, E. M., & Ong'ele, S. (2018). **Scaling up successfully: Lessons from Kenya's Tusome national literacy program.** Journal of Educational Change, 19, 293–321.

5 Some examples of the research output related to Tusome's effectiveness include:
  – Caleiro, J. P. (2023). **Learning from Kenya — The experiences of Tusome and PRIEDE.** Lemann Foundation Programme, South-South Programme.
  – Freudenberger, E., & Davis, J. (2017). **Tusome external evaluation—Midline report.** Management Systems International.
  – Gove, A., Korda Poole, M., & Piper, B. (2017). **Designing for scale: Reflections on rolling out reading improvement in Kenya and Liberia.** In A. Gove, A. Mora, & P. McCardle (Eds.), Progress toward a literate world: Early reading interventions in low-income countries, New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 155, 77–95.

6 Piper, B., Destefano, J., Kinyanjui, E. M., & Ong'ele, S. (2018). **Scaling up successfully: Lessons from Kenya's Tusome national literacy program.** Journal of Educational Change, 19, 293–321.

7 Gove, A., Korda Poole, M., & Piper, B. (2017). **Designing for scale: Reflections on rolling out reading improvement in Kenya and Liberia.** In A. Gove, A. Mora, & P. McCardle (Eds.), Progress toward a literate world: Early reading interventions in low-income countries, New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 155, 77–95.

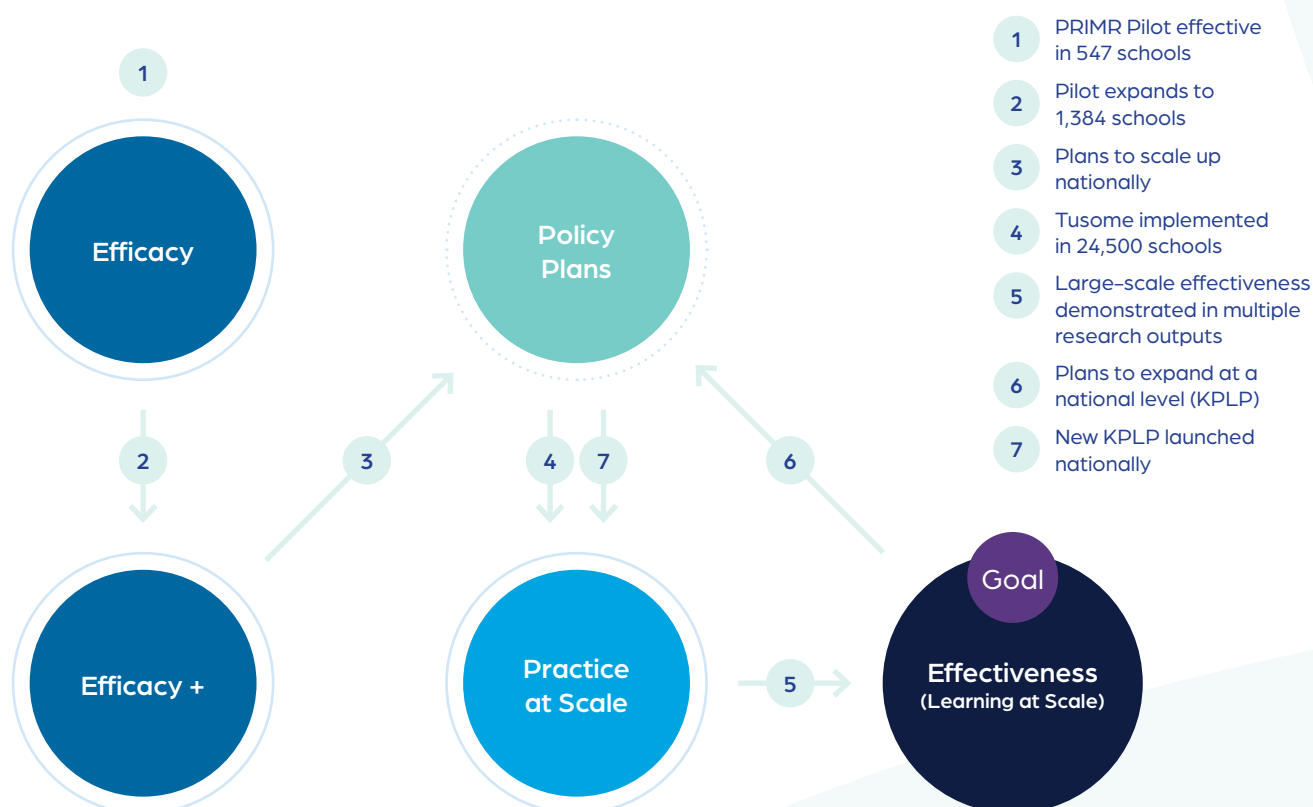8 USAID. (2022). **Tusome Case Study Final Report.** Laser Pulse.

Even Tusome, which followed a relatively linear pathway through the framework, later experienced repetition in stages. The Tusome programme had a brief hiatus in 2023, due to an end in external funding among other factors. In 2024, a new programme called the Kenya Primary Literacy Program (KPLP), modelled on Tusome, emerged in partnership with the Government of Kenya (**Policy plans;** Fig 2, #6).[9] KPLP builds upon previous education investments integrating programme responsibilities into the day-to-day roles of curriculum support officers, head teachers, and teachers.[10] KPLP launched nationwide in April 2024, bringing the programme back to practice at scale (Fig 2, #7).

The success of Tusome highlights the importance of designing for scale from the outset. Rather than just creating an effective small-scale pilot, the programme was intentionally designed to work within the existing government structures. This focus on future scalability, particularly the attention given to how government officers would implement both the pilot and full versions of the programme, helped to facilitate its adoption at a national level.

Although KPLP builds on Tusome's model, it has not yet demonstrated its own effectiveness. Scaling an intervention at a nationwide level does not guarantee long-term sustainability or continued impact. The journey from successful intervention to lasting educational improvement remains complex and uncertain and it relies on continued monitoring, iteration and adaptation to ensure ongoing impact.

Figure 2:   Tusome's pathway towards scale

1 PRIMR Pilot effective in 547 schools
2 Pilot expands to 1,384 schools
3 Plans to scale up nationally
4 Tusome implemented in 24,500 schools
5 Large-scale effectiveness demonstrated in multiple research outputs
6 Plans to expand at a national level (KPLP)
7 New KPLP launched nationally

Efficacy — Efficacy + — Policy Plans — Practice at Scale — Effectiveness (Learning at Scale) — Goal

9 USAID. (2024, March). **The Kenya Primary Literacy Programme Fact Sheet.**
10 Kiptoo, J. (2024, April 29). **How the literacy programme Tusome will be run in schools.** Education News Kenya.

3 | Case study 2: The Liberia Teacher Training Programme II (LTTP II)

Liberia's path to implementing structured pedagogy programmes reflects the complex realities of scaling educational interventions in challenging contexts. Concerted efforts to improve education began in the aftermath of a devastating civil war that had severely disrupted educational infrastructure and capacity.[11] This challenging context was further complicated by a 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which forced school closures and had a negative impact on learning outcomes.[12]

Relative to Kenya, evidence of efficacy for educational interventions is very limited in Liberia. Establishing initial evidence of the effectiveness of structured pedagogy approaches in Liberia therefore began with the EGRAPlus pilot in 2008, which demonstrated promising results from a randomised control trial across 176 schools (**Efficacy;** Fig 3, #1). Building on these findings, the government developed ambitious plans to scale up the intervention through the Liberia Teacher Training Programme II (LTTP II) across nine counties. These plans were later revised, and the scale of the next phase was reduced to focus on five counties (**Policy plans;** Fig 3, #2 & #3).[13]

The actual implementation of the Liberia Teacher Training Programme II ultimately focused on four counties and was implemented in 1,020 schools, where the programme showed some improvements in reading outcomes based on findings from a randomised control trial (**Efficacy+;** Fig 3, #4). However, the disruption from the Ebola outbreak, as well as other implementation and monitoring challenges, meant that the overall effectiveness of the intervention was difficult to establish convincingly. Consequently, LTTP II did not have sufficient evidence of efficacy to support a move to large-scale practice.

Instead, the experience and evidence gathered through LTTP II informed the design of a new adapted initiative, the Read Liberia programme, which aimed to collect more robust evidence of impact. Based on findings from LTTP II which showed foundational pre-reading skills needed attention, the Read Liberia project expanded its scope to also include a planned focus on pre-reading skills in kindergarten (**Policy plans;** Fig 3, #5). The Read Liberia programme was implemented in 640 schools, and evidence from a randomised control trial demonstrated that it had a positive impact on reading fluency and comprehension

11 Davidson, M., & Hobbs, J. (2013). **Delivering reading intervention to the poorest children: The case of Liberia and EGRA–Plus, a primary grade reading assessment and intervention.** International Journal of Educational Development, 33(3), 283–293.
12 King, S., Korda, M., Nordstrum, L., & Edwards, S. (2015). **Liberia Teacher Training Program: Endline assessment of the impact of early grade reading and mathematics interventions.** USAID, Liberia Ministry of Education & FHI 360.
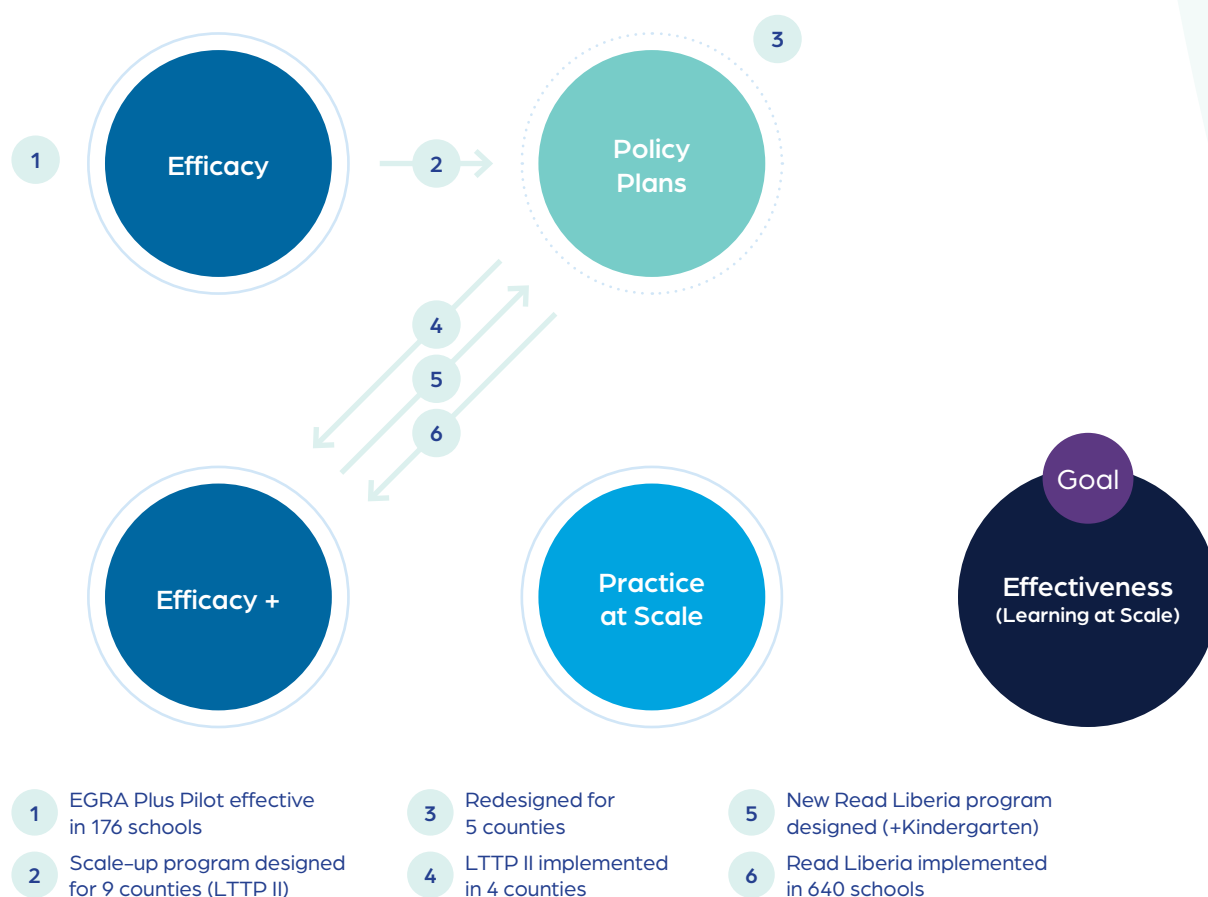13 King, S., Korda, M., Nordstrum, L., & Edwards, S. (2015). **Liberia Teacher Training Program: Endline assessment of the impact of early grade reading and mathematics interventions.** USAID, Liberia Ministry of Education & FHI 360.

(**Efficacy+;** Fig 3, #6).[14] Although the Read Liberia programme ended in 2022, efforts to improve foundational reading skills are ongoing and the Liberia Foundational Skills Activity (LFSA) was launched in 2024.[15]

Unlike Tusome's relatively linear progression to scale, Liberia's journey shows a more iterative path as it worked to establish evidence, with adjustments at each stage as implementation realities and contextual challenges were encountered. This iterative process demonstrates how the interplay between a commitment to evidence–based decisions and policy plans can shape implementation pathways.

Figure 3:   Liberia's pathway towards scale

1 EGRA Plus Pilot effective in 176 schools	**3** Redesigned for 5 counties	**5** New Read Liberia program designed (+Kindergarten)
2 Scale–up program designed for 9 counties (LTTP II)	**4** LTTP II implemented in 4 counties	**6** Read Liberia implemented in 640 schools

14 Menendez, A., Hoadley, U., & Solovyeva, A. (2021). **Read Liberia Impact Evaluation: Endline Report** July 2021 (Update version November 2021).
15 Ministry of Education Liberia. (2024, May 17). **Ministry of Education, in collaboration with LFSA, unveils $75 million initiative to revolutionize Liberian education** [Press release]. **https://moeliberia.com**

4 | Lessons and recommendations

The journeys of Tusome and the Liberia Teacher Training Programme II demonstrate that successful progress to scale requires intentional initial design decisions as well as the flexibility to iterate based on emerging evidence and contextual conditions.

While these cases offer valuable insights into working within government systems, they also highlight the complexity of scaling educational interventions and shed light on some of the evidence gaps that still need to be addressed. Two areas stand out as particularly important:

- **Embedding implementation responsibilities into government roles.** Integrating new initiatives into the existing structures of government roles enables programme tasks and responsibilities to be institutionalised and made a part of routine operations. This reduces dependence on external resources and promotes the long-term sustainability of the programme.

- **Right-sizing programmes while maintaining effectiveness.** Balancing programme scope with effectiveness is essential; overly ambitious programmes risk overstretching resources, while smaller programmes may not achieve meaningful impact. Scaling efforts should focus on adapting interventions to fit within realistic cost and operational limits, ensuring they remain both effective and manageable.

As more countries look to implement structured pedagogy at scale, examples like Tusome and Liberia's Teacher Training Programme II provide case studies on the variation in scaling pathways. Documenting these pathways can help policy planners and implementers identify steps they can take to move towards practice at scale and ultimately effectiveness and improved learning for all children.

5 | References

Caleiro, J. P. (2023). Learning from Kenya – The experiences of Tusome and PRIEDE. Lemann Foundation Programme, South-South Programme.

Davidson, M., & Hobbs, J. (2013). Delivering reading intervention to the poorest children: The case of Liberia and EGRA-Plus, a primary grade reading assessment and intervention. International Journal of Educational Development, 33(3), 283-293.

Freudenberger, E., & Davis, J. (2017). Tusome external evaluation—Midline report. Management Systems International.

Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel. (2023). Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning – What does recent evidence tell us are "Smart Buys" for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries? [K. Akyeampong, T. Andrabi, A. Banerjee, R. Banerji, S. Dynarski, R. Glennerster, S. Grantham-McGregor, K. Muralidharan, B. Piper, S. Ruto, J. Saavedra, S.]

Gove, A., Korda Poole, M., & Piper, B. (2017). Designing for scale: Reflections on rolling out reading improvement in Kenya and Liberia. In A. Gove, A. Mora, & P. McCardle (Eds.), Progress toward a literate world: Early reading interventions in low-income countries, New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 155, 77—95.

Hwa, YY., Kayton, H. L., and Kaffenberger, M. 2024. Implementing structured pedagogy programmes at scale. What Works Hub for Global Education. Synthesis brief, 2024/002.

King, S., Korda, M., Nordstrum, L., & Edwards, S. (2015). Liberia Teacher Training Program: Endline assessment of the impact of early grade reading and mathematics interventions. USAID, Liberia Ministry of Education & FHI 360.

Kiptoo, J. (2024, April 29). How the literacy programme Tusome will be run in schools. Education News Kenya.

Menendez, A., Hoadley, U., & Solovyeva, A. (2021). Read Liberia Impact Evaluation: Endline Report July 2021 (Updated version November 2021).

Ministry of Education Liberia. (2024, May 17). Ministry of Education, in collaboration with LFSA, unveils $75 million initiative to revolutionize Liberian education [Press release]. https://moeliberia.com

Piper, B., Destefano, J., Kinyanjui, E. M., & Ong'ele, S. (2018). Scaling up successfully: Lessons from Kenya's Tusome national literacy program. Journal of Educational Change, 19, 293-321.

Piper, B., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Mugenda, A. (2014). Improving reading outcomes in Kenya: First-year effects of the PRIMR initiative. International Journal of Educational Development, 37, 11—21.

Science of Teaching. (2024). Structured Pedagogy.

Stern, J., Jukes, M., DeStefano, J., Mejia, J., Dubeck, P., Carrol, B., Jordan, R., Gatuyu, C., Nduku, T., Van Keuren, C., Punjabi, M., & Tufail, F. (2023). Learning at Scale: Final report. Prepared for the Center for Global Development and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation by RTI International.

USAID. (2022). Tusome Case Study Final Report. Laser Pulse.

USAID. (2024, March). The Kenya Primary Literacy Programme Fact Sheet.