

Tanzania Reading Recovery Activity





1. Program Overview and Strategic Value

The Tanzania Reading Recovery Activity (2023–2025), funded by the Hempel Foundation and implemented by RTI International in partnership with the Government of Tanzania, is one of the largest remedial literacy initiatives in the region. The program targeted Standard 2 learners in Iringa, Morogoro, Mtwara, and Ruvuma who were falling behind in foundational literacy. Its design emphasized government ownership, flexible adaptation to local contexts, and evidence-based, play-centered pedagogy.

- **Evidence of Impact:** Demonstrates that a short-cycle, teacher-led, play-based remedial model can produce rapid reading gains among struggling early-grade learners in low-resource settings.
- **Scalability:** Embedded within government systems, the model reached over 48,000 pupils in 2024 and 31,000 in 2025, supported by 3,200 trained teachers across 1,600+ schools.
- **Replicability:** The model's flexible, government-led approach is adaptable to other Kiswahili-speaking or similar low-income contexts.

2. Evaluation Design and Methodology

The external evaluation of the program was conducted by Tawi Consult using a rigorous, participatory mixed-methods approach:

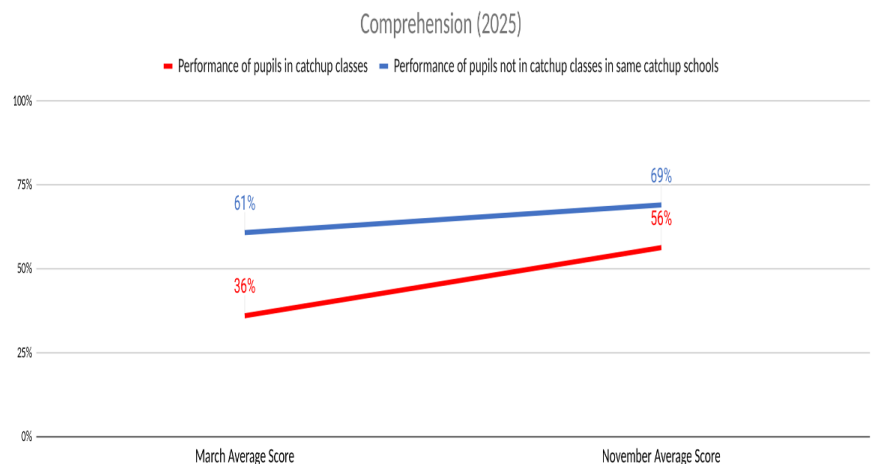
- **Quantitative:** Analysis of Government of Tanzania's Group-Administered Literacy Assessment (GALA) data at two time points (March and November 2025), complemented by classroom-based formative assessments (Tangerine:Teach) and program monitoring data.
- **Qualitative:** 44 key informant interviews, 12 focus group discussions, classroom observations, and in-depth case studies provided rich insights into implementation, stakeholder perceptions, and contextual factors.
- **Sampling:** 120 schools across four regions, with stratified and randomized learner selection to ensure representativeness and analytical power.
- **Ethics:** Full research clearance, informed consent, and anonymization protocols were followed.

“

My child now picks up a book at home without being told.

”

– Parent





3. Headline Results and Impact

Learning Outcomes

- **Catch-up learners made dramatic gains:**
 - Letter Sound scores increased from 13.1 to 27.3 (108% gain).
 - Invented Words rose from 10.2 to 26.0 (155% gain).
 - Comprehension improved from 7.2 to 11.3 (57% gain).
- **Non-catch-up learners** in the same schools showed minimal improvement (2% in decoding, 14% in comprehension), confirming that gains were intervention-driven, not due to general school improvement.
- **Equity:** Girls and boys in catch-up classes achieved parallel gains, with the intervention helping to close early gender gaps in reading outcomes.
- **Psychosocial Impact:** 98% of pupils enjoyed sessions, 94% attended with friends, and 88% received frequent individual help. Over 87% felt more confident in reading, and 94% wanted to continue with the program.

Implementation Drivers

- **Targeted, engaging pedagogy:** Play-based materials and structured progression built motivation and confidence.
- **Active supervision:** Routine follow-up and multi-actor coordination reinforced fidelity and teacher confidence.
- **Supportive climate:** Teachers normalized mistakes and encouraged persistence, creating joyful, low-anxiety learning spaces.
- **Parental and peer support:** 82% of parents engaged with the program, and peer-group enrollment sustained attendance and motivation.

Barriers and Lessons

- **Absenteeism:** Seasonal labor, household responsibilities, and weather affected attendance, especially in rural areas.
- **Operational constraints:** Teacher workload, material shortages, and occasional delays in resource disbursement were noted.
- **Digital challenges:** Some connectivity issues with the Tangerine:Teach platform, though it functions offline for core tasks.
- **Sustainability:** Long-term success depends on government budgeting, streamlined resource management, and continued supervision.

“

We see improvements in letter-sound knowledge and word reading.

”

– Teacher



4. Stakeholder Perspectives

- **Parents and teachers** reported visible improvements in reading skills, attitudes, and confidence.
- **Children’s narratives** highlighted transformation from non-readers to confident, motivated learners, often expressing a desire to help others learn.
- **Officials** emphasized the program’s alignment with national priorities and its potential for institutionalization, provided operational and financial challenges are addressed.

5. Recommendations for Replication and Scale-Up

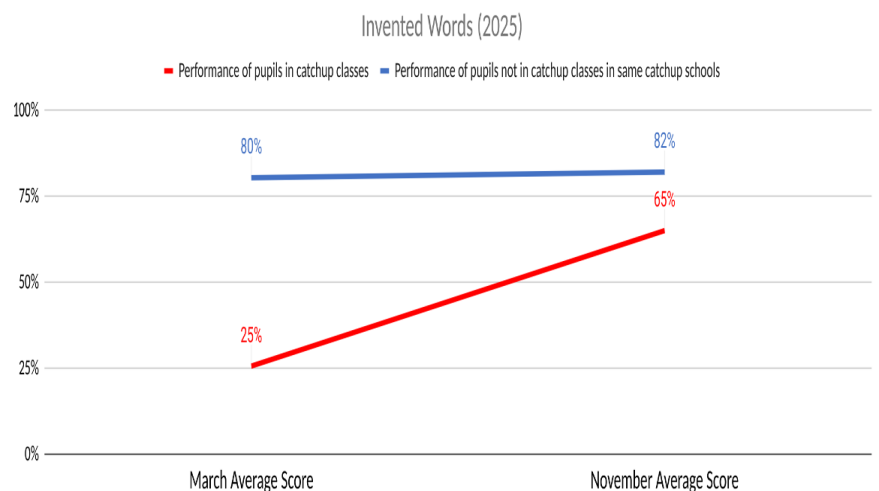
- **Early Identification:** Use simple, competency-based screening tools for timely targeting of at-risk learners.
- **Teacher Support:** Institutionalize regular supervision and coaching, focusing on reflective practice and problem-solving.
- **Formative Assessment:** Reinforce offline use of digital tools and ensure teachers are confident in their application.
- **Attendance Strategies:** Integrate attendance monitoring and strengthen home–school linkages to address absenteeism.
- **Joyful Pedagogy:** Preserve play-based, inclusive teaching methods that build confidence and motivation.
- **Resource Management:** Streamline small-grant disbursement and clarify allowable uses to enhance responsiveness.
- **Government Integration:** Embed the model within national literacy strategies, teacher development, and district monitoring systems.
- **Evidence-Based Advocacy:** Use robust data to inform policy and investment decisions, including cost-per-child estimates for donors.

“

Now I can read...
I want to teach
others.

”

– Pupil

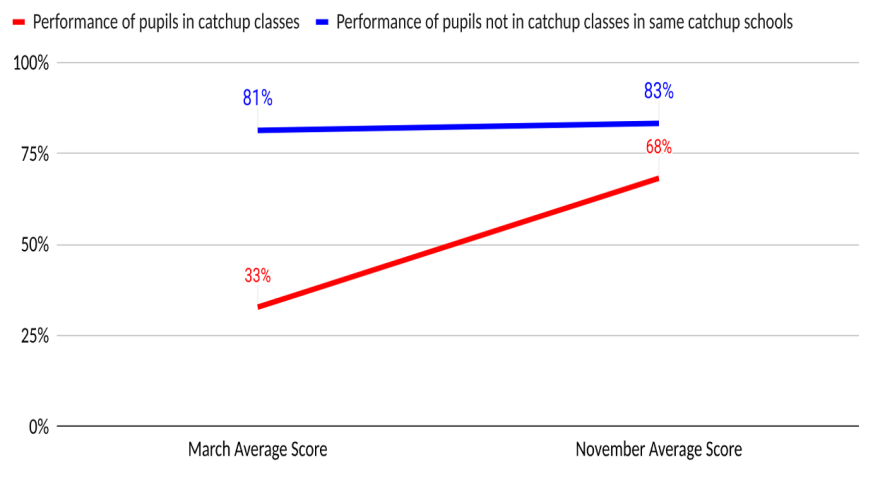




6. Why Donors Should Invest

- **Proven, scalable impact:** The model delivers rapid, equitable learning gains for the most disadvantaged learners.
- **Government buy-in:** Strong ownership and alignment with national systems increase sustainability and potential for scale.
- **Cost-effective:** Relies on low-cost materials, targeted teacher support, and strong psychosocial engagement rather than high-intensity inputs.
- **Global relevance:** Offers a replicable blueprint for foundational literacy improvement in similar contexts.

Letter Sound Recognition



**For more information,
contact:**

Katherine M. King
kmking@rti.org
Center for Global
Impact
RTI International

www.rti.org

