

Innovative Pedagogies Project: Policy Brief

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photo: Wellspring Foundation for Education and A Partner In Education

Led by the Education Commission in partnership with Inclusive Development Partners; the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration of the University of Cape Coast; The Wellspring Foundation for Education and A Partner in Education; the Aga Khan Foundation and Samuel Hall; the governments of Ghana, Rwanda, and Kenya; and with support from the LEGO Foundation.



Key Messages

- Following the evidence collated in the Save our Future White Paper (September 2021), the Education Commission and the LEGO Foundation launched the **Innovative Pedagogies Project (IPP)** in Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda to create greater awareness, political will, and action toward adopting adaptive, inclusive, engaging, and playful pedagogies.
- **Country-level research and policy dialogues reveal that national policies in Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda largely embrace the philosophy of inclusive, engaging, and adaptive (IEA) pedagogies but these policies are not fully implemented in schools and classrooms at primary level.** On average, only 38 percent of observed classrooms showed evidence of all elements of IEA pedagogies.
- **Teachers appear most adept at using engaging and motivating pedagogical approaches,** though the frequency of use varies across countries. Nearly all observed teachers in Ghana (94 percent) used pedagogies that motivate and engage learners, compared to 43 percent of teachers in Kenya and 63 percent in Rwanda.
- **Teachers demonstrate emerging but inconsistent efforts to adapt to different learners' needs.** For instance, nearly all teachers in Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda reported using diverse ways to assess learners before and after lesson instruction, but few used this information to differentiate instruction or target learners that appeared to be struggling with additional support.
- **Students do not often get to choose how to engage with lesson content.** Across all study countries, students were rarely given choices around how to express their understanding or options to choose what to read, whether to work individually or in pairs, and which problem to work on.
- **Teachers and school leaders are eager to translate national IEA policies into practice, but do not always have the necessary skills or resources to do so.** Across all countries, stakeholders pressed for the need for more training – both pre- and in-service – associated with IEA pedagogies, as well as classroom resources to provide inclusive and individualized support.
- **Each country has formulated a national action plan in consultation with multiple stakeholders.** While each plan addresses the unique gaps identified during the project, actions align to similar goals across the three levels of the system: national, school and community, and classroom.
 - **At the national level:** to provide sufficient policy guidance backed by adequate training and resources;
 - **At school and community levels:** to provide the infrastructure and mechanisms to support safe and adaptive learning environments for all learners;
 - **At the classroom level:** to ensure consistent use of IEA pedagogies, resources, and classroom management approaches that benefit all learners.



1. Introduction

Project Overview

Globally, most students in low- and middle-income countries demonstrate low levels of learning and a lack of foundational skills, resulting in learners lagging far behind their peers in high-income countries at grade-appropriate content levels.¹ This crisis has been further magnified by COVID-19-related school closures, with deeply unequal impacts for marginalized groups.² Responding to the learning crisis, however, is not only a function of increasing inputs or getting more children into school.³ The current classroom model, where teachers deliver standardized content in a uniform manner and with little engagement with learners, must be changed to meet the different learning needs of all children and effectively stimulate learning for all.

Research shows that learning outcomes improve when students are motivated to learn in different ways, when learners can engage with lesson content in a way that works best for them (e.g., hearing, seeing, writing, or acting out information), and when learners have a variety of options to show their knowledge.⁴ Moreover, evidence shows that adaptive and differentiated approaches that assess and tailor teaching to individual learner needs, rather than by age or grade, consistently improve learning outcomes.⁵ When such teaching practices are applied in inclusive classroom settings, the greatest effect is for marginalized students, helping to close learning gaps.⁶

As the Save our Future White Paper highlighted in its Action Area 2, a focus on engaging, inclusive, and adaptive learning for all is particularly critical in the post-pandemic recovery period to accelerate progress for all learners as children return to school and beyond. In recognition of this, the Education Commission and LEGO Foundation launched the Innovative Pedagogies Project (IPP) to create greater awareness, political will, and action toward adopting inclusive, engaging, adaptive and playful pedagogies at the primary school level in three African countries – Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda – as well as globally.

Between September 2021 and December 2022, the Education Commission, alongside the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration at the University of Cape Coast, the Aga Khan Foundation, Samuel Hall, A Partner in Education, and The Wellspring Foundation, as well as the governments of Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda worked to:

- Assess the extent to which inclusive, engaging, and adaptive (IEA) pedagogies have been adopted at the system, school, and classroom levels in the three project countries;
- Identify gaps that hinder successful adoption of IEA pedagogies and best practices that can inform adoption of IEA pedagogies in other contexts;
- Bring together key education stakeholders to jointly develop relevant action plans to facilitate the adoption and adaptation of IEA and playful pedagogies.

The project had two phases:

- 1) Desk research alongside a series of workshops to develop a framework to define, identify, and assess critical components of IEA pedagogies.
- 2) Country-level rapid research and policy dialogues, culminating in a country research brief and a national action plan.

¹The World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, FCDO, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. 2022. The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update. Conference Edition.

²The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. 2021. The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery. Washington, D.C., Paris, New York: The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

³Dubai Cares and Education Commission. 2022. Rewiring Education for People and Planet.

<https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Rewiring-Education-for-People-and-Planet-Final-Version.pdf>

⁴CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

⁵Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). 2019. "Tailoring instruction to students' learning levels to increase learning." J-PAL Policy Insights. <https://doi.org/10.31485/pi.2522.2019>

⁶Ibid.

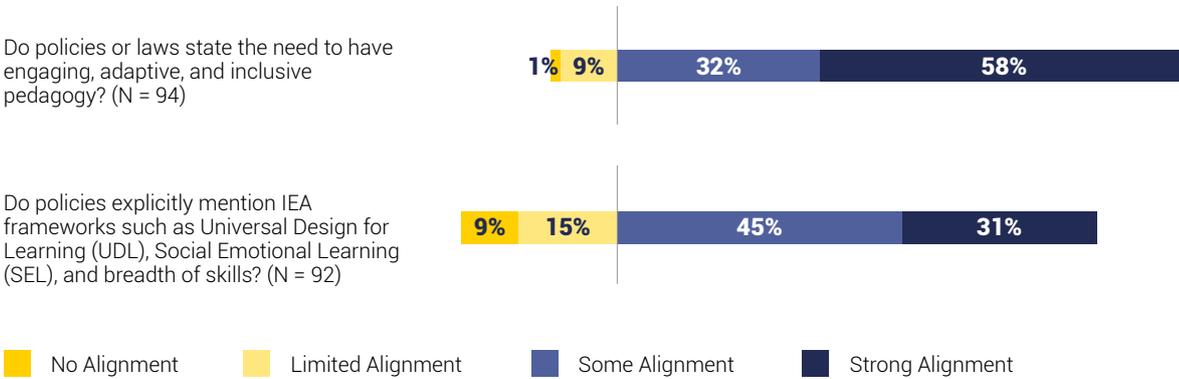
2. Main Findings

Inclusive, Engaging, and Adaptive Pedagogies in National Policies

Across the three project countries, national laws, policies, and plans are mostly aligned to and support the adoption of IEA pedagogies. In general, laws and policies strongly emphasize the usefulness of IEA-related principles and concepts such as the right to quality education for all, inclusion, active and engaging teaching and learning practices, SEL, and life skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. On average, 90 percent of stakeholders across the three countries indicated that policies state the need for IEA pedagogies, and a further 76 percent indicated that such policies explicitly reference UDL, SEL, and breadth of skills.

Figure 3. Perception of national-level laws, policies, and plans in relation to IEA pedagogies

Weighted average of stakeholder responses across Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda responding to rubric prompts asking the country/system's degree of alignment to standards listed in the question.



For instance, the three partner countries have recently adopted competency-based or standards-based curricula, which requires teachers to shift from traditional methods of instruction to adopt participatory and interactive methods that involve learners in the learning process in an active, engaging, and personalized manner.

Translating Policy Into Practice at the School and Classroom Levels

Despite an enabling policy context, IEA pedagogical approaches are not yet holistically implemented at the school and classroom levels. On average, only 38 percent of observed classrooms showed evidence of the delivery of all elements of IEA pedagogies. The extent to which IEA approaches have translated to classroom practice varies among study countries, as well as in the use of some instructional strategies and environments over others.

Pedagogical Approaches

In Ghana, nearly all stakeholders agreed that teachers use engaging approaches to support learning and offer students multiple ways to participate with lesson content. This perception was affirmed during lesson observations in primary school classrooms, where 94 percent of teachers were observed using pedagogies that motivated and engaged learners and 69 percent of teachers adopted strategies such as small-group work, working in pairs, and peer engagement (see figures 4 and 5).

In comparison, in Rwanda, most observed lessons involved teachers making oral presentations and writing notes on the board, with learners following passively. While 63 percent of teachers utilized instructional approaches that appeared to motivate and engage learners, the number and types of these were limited in each class. For example, 5 teachers used songs, 9 teachers used games, and 30 teachers linked content to learners' personal experience. These observations are in line with stakeholder perceptions, where just 53 percent of stakeholders agreed



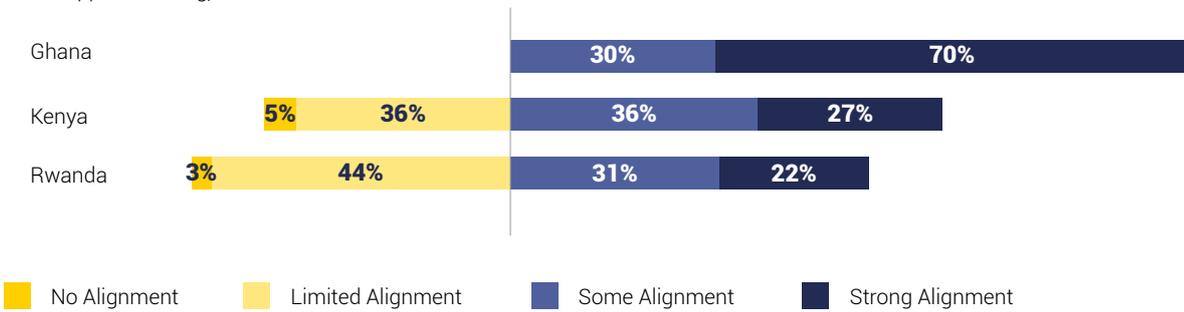
that learners are supported through multiple instruction approaches, and less than half of respondents agreed that teachers use interactive pedagogical approaches more frequently than teacher-led or rote memorization approaches.

Stakeholders In Kenya had a slightly more positive view as to whether teachers use engaging and motivating approaches (64 percent) compared to the percent of teachers observed that utilized diverse means of engagement (43 percent) such as songs and dances, learning through play, and linking instructional content to learners' personal experience. This could be explained by the perception that these approaches do not occur as frequently as more traditional approaches such as teacher-led or rote memorization approaches.

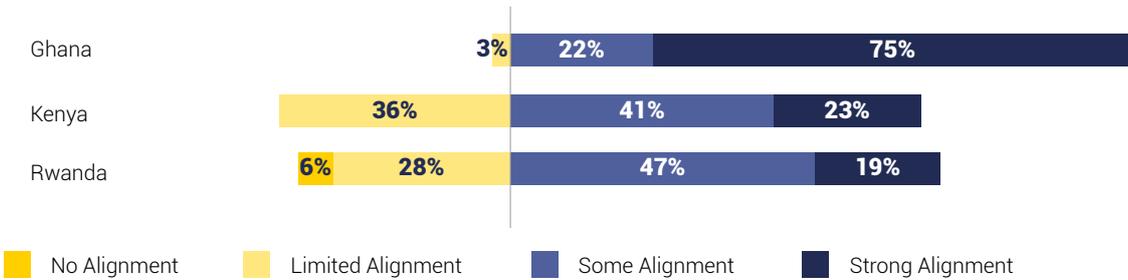
Figure 4. Perception of engaging teaching practices

Stakeholder responses to rubric prompts asking the country/system's degree of alignment to standards listed in the question.

a. Do teachers use multiple approaches to engage and motivate students (create games, storytelling, and play opportunities to support learning)?



b. Are learners supported through multiple instructional approaches, such as working in pairs or small groups to discuss or practice lesson content?



c. Do teachers use interactive pedagogical approaches more frequently than teacher-led or rote memorization approaches?

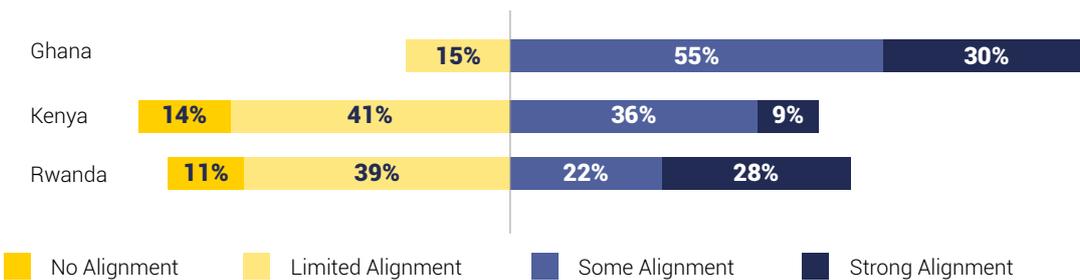
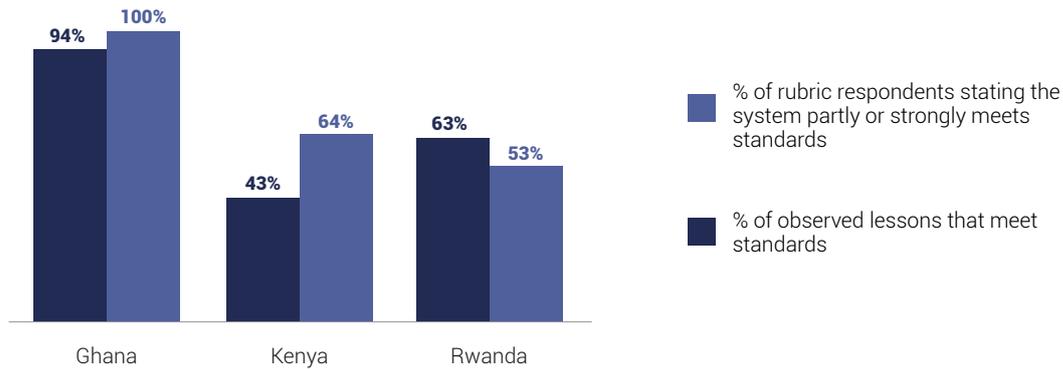


Figure 5. Alignment between rubric responses and classroom observations on whether teachers use multiple approaches to engage and motivate students



Adapting to Student Needs

IEA pedagogies emphasize the need to differentiate for learners' different needs and be able to adapt teaching to support all learners. The use of formative assessments to identify struggling learners and offer additional support is critical, as well as providing learners the opportunity to select the means of interacting with content and demonstrating understanding.

On a positive note, teachers in Ghana reported that they assessed their learners through written and verbal assessments given at the end of lessons and used the outcomes to identify learners who need remediation support. Lesson observations confirmed that 81 percent of teachers provided additional support to learners who appeared to be struggling. In comparison, in Kenya, 97 percent of teachers interviewed reported using diverse ways of assessing learners during lesson instruction, such as completing short classroom tasks, assignments, and continuous assessment tests. But less than half (47 percent) of the teachers reported using the assessment outcomes to identify and offer additional support to struggling learners, though sometimes assessment feedback was reported by some teachers to help involve parents and caregivers to support children at home.

In Rwanda, 70 percent of teachers indicated that they carry out assessments before starting a lesson to assess learners' understanding of the previous lesson and provide support accordingly. Six observed teachers even used this information to group learners according to their abilities, either by placing struggling learners with more able learners, or by grouping those with the same abilities together. However, lesson observations suggest that formative assessments could be made more effective. Observed teachers generally asked verbal questions expecting short verbal answers, usually provided by vocal learners. Written assessments are rare and feedback, when given, is generalized rather than individualized. These findings confirm rubric results, which indicate that teachers generally do not use assessment results to differentiate instruction.

Findings were more consistent across all study countries in that learners were rarely given choices on how to express their understanding or how to engage with lesson content, such as choosing what to read, whether to work individually or in groups, and which problem to answer. This is vital for enhancing autonomy and critical thinking and replicates the diversity of ways of applying knowledge in real life.

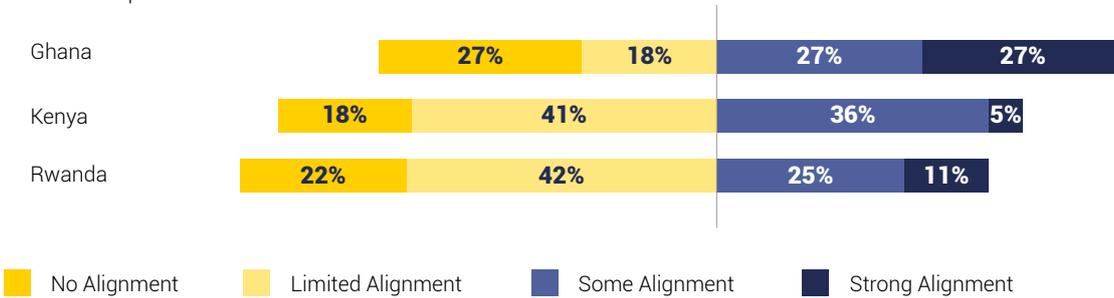
In Rwanda, for instance, just 9 percent of observed teachers allowed their students to choose how to answer to problems. Similarly, in Ghana, 19 percent of teachers allowed students to choose to work in pairs or individually and 15 percent had learners choose the problem they could work on. In Kenya, only 33 percent of teachers provided students with options for what to read, whether to work individually or in pairs, and whether to respond by speaking, gesturing, or drawing. Classroom observations reveal a starker picture than stakeholders perceive. On average, nearly half (44 percent) of stakeholders agreed that learners are provided choices about learning, and half (50 percent) agreed that learners can choose how to show their knowledge.



Figure 6. Perceptions on differentiated teaching practices

Stakeholder responses to rubric prompts asking the country/system's degree of alignment to standards listed in the question.

a. Are learners provided with choices about learning, such as selecting a storybook to read or whether to answer an easier or harder question?



b. Are learners given choices on how to show their answer (in writing, verbally, drawing or pointing)?

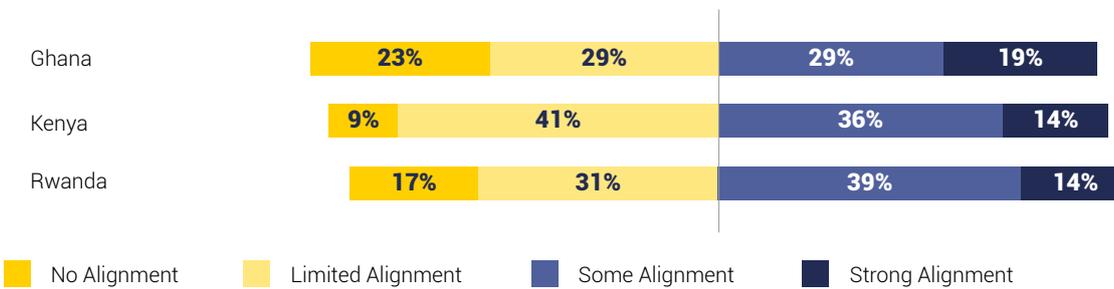
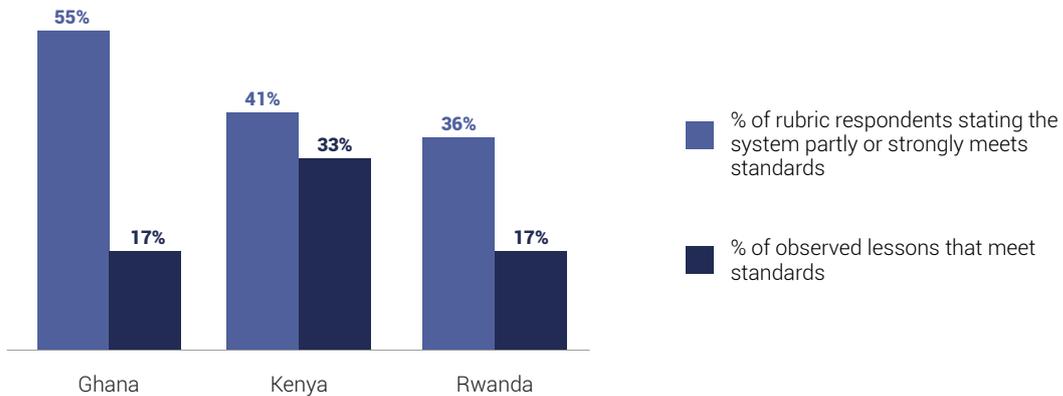


Figure 7. Alignment between rubric responses and classroom observations on whether teachers provide students with choices about learning



Classroom Management and Learning Environments

The inclusive element of IEA pedagogies includes both physical inclusion (classroom accommodations for learners with disabilities) and social inclusion (where learners are free from social and psychological stressors like bullying and discrimination).

For the most part, rapid research suggests that classroom environments are largely supportive and inclusive for all learners. For instance, 83 percent of teachers in Kenya and 98 percent of teachers in Ghana instructed in a language that learners were familiar with and according to interviews with stakeholders, teaching and learning materials in Kenya have been adapted to ensure they are gender-responsive and include representations of learners with special needs.



3. Enabling IEA Pedagogies In Practice

National laws, policies, and plans are translated into practice through operational-level programs in areas such as workforce training. Classroom practices must also be supplemented by other factors in the wider learning environment, including the availability of teaching and learning materials, accessibility of schools, and the relationship with the wider community.

These components work in tandem to provide adequate incentives for IEA pedagogies, and weaknesses in any one of these components have the potential to undermine the successful implementation of IEA approaches in schools and classrooms.

Enablers: Operational level

It is critical that teachers and school leaders at all levels are trained to create and sustain an inclusive, learner-centered environment. This is shown in the case of Ghana – which demonstrates more consistent adoption of IEA pedagogies in classrooms – where stakeholders agree that IEA pedagogies form a core part of pre-service (80 percent) and in-service (62 percent) teacher training packages. As part of Ghana’s curriculum reform process, pre-service teacher training has been amended to ensure instruction is both relevant and responsive to children’s diverse learning needs; modules have also been developed to support inclusive in-service teaching education.

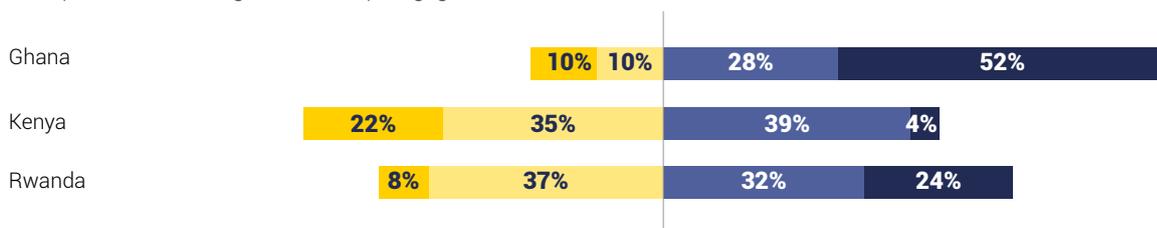
In comparison, fewer than half of stakeholders in Kenya agreed that IEA pedagogies are a core part of pre-service (43 percent) and in-service (41 percent) teacher training. While teachers and headteachers reported being aware of national policies and frameworks related to inclusivity and instructional leadership, they reported that they lack sufficient training to translate these principles into practice. Findings emphasize that teacher training programs are infrequent, too brief, and/or accessible only to a few staff members. Current funding and resource allocation plans are insufficient to address these limitations.

For Rwanda, training in IEA is not yet systematically available for school leaders, leading to a limited ability to provide constructive teacher feedback and quality assurance in schools. Positively, however, the government has developed teachers’ Communities of Practice and school leaders’ Professional Learning Communities to ensure peer learning is defined and supported. Within the professional standards for effective school leadership, there is an expectation that school leaders will develop the capacity to lead teaching and learning in their schools and support professional development for teachers. School leaders are given training opportunities from government and development partners, which are aligned with the development of IEA pedagogies in their schools.

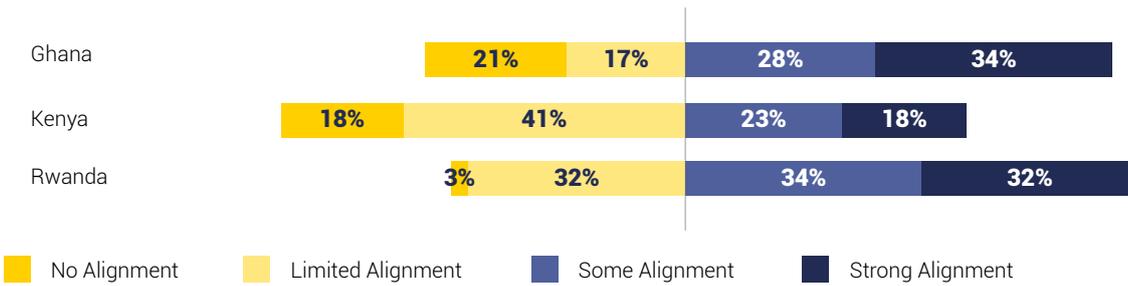
Figure 8. Perceptions on workforce training

Stakeholder responses to rubric prompts asking the country/system’s degree of alignment to standards listed in the question.

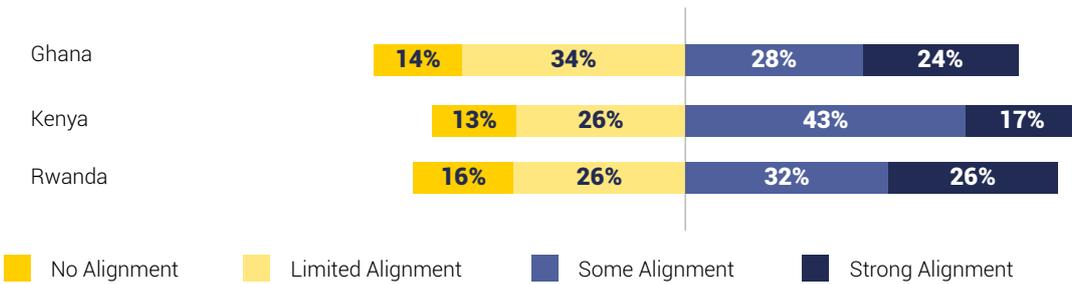
a. Does pre-service training address IEA pedagogies?



b. Are IEA pedagogical approaches part of the core in-service teacher training package for all teachers?



c. Do all school leaders receive training on instructional leadership, including IEA pedagogies?



Enablers: School Environments

Having adequate school infrastructure and learning materials enable efforts to offer engaging and adaptive instruction within classrooms as well as the integration of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and schools.

In Rwanda, for instance, newly constructed schools are generally accessible for most children. For instance, all new schools have built-in ramps to facilitate access for children and teachers using wheelchairs, all schools have separate toilets for boys and girls, and new classrooms are well-ventilated with multiple windows and doors. However, school observations in Kenya revealed limited capacity to address the needs of learners with disabilities in schools. Forty percent of observed schools reported infrastructure challenges and most classrooms lacked adequate lighting, had ramps missing, and hallways full of clutter. Similarly, in Ghana, observation data shows that most schools (75 percent) did not have ramps to give easy access for those with physical disabilities.

Schools and classrooms in Ghana and Kenya are generally under-resourced leading to high student-teacher ratios and insufficient teaching and learning materials. In Kenya, nearly one-third of schools visited were overcrowded, with learners sitting on the floor, inhibiting teachers' capacity to address learners' needs on an individual basis and making it practically difficult for learners to follow instruction. Four schools registered over 100 learners per teacher. In Ghana, only 10 percent of lessons observed had textbooks available and in usable condition for all learners.

Enabler: Community Engagement

Partnerships among schools, families and caregivers, and community leaders can help enforce the values of schools, including the need for safe and IEA learning. Schools in Kenya and Ghana demonstrate high levels of community and family engagement. In Kenya, community leaders reported that they met with school leadership every term, although at varying frequencies, to discuss learner performance, student discipline, teacher performance, student well-being, and school infrastructure. There are also clear lines of communication between parents/caregivers and teachers. All parents and caregivers reported that they have a way to communicate with teachers and school administrators and three-quarters (77 percent) of parents reported having sustained communication with teachers who advise them on student progress, practicing



