



Kwena Extension Project: Baseline Assessment Report (2026)

1. Introduction

This report presents baseline findings from the Kwena Extension Project, aimed at assessing school readiness among Grade 1 learners at the start of the academic year. The baseline serves as a reference point against which learner progress will be tracked over a three-year intervention period.

The study includes **four schools**, comprising **two project schools** and **two control schools**, with a total sample of **160 learners** (80 project; 80 control). Establishing equivalence between these groups at baseline is critical for evaluating the impact of the intervention over time.

2. Methodology

2.1 Measure

Learners were assessed using the *Test of Basic Concepts Knowledge (TBCK)*, a screening tool designed to evaluate foundational concepts underpinning early learning, including colour, shape, size, position, number, and letter knowledge. The TBCK provides a total score out of 24, with performance categorised as follows:

- 0–10: Very Poor
- 11–17: Weak
- 18–20: Average
- 21–24: Strong to Very Strong

The TBCK has been shown to be a useful indicator of preparedness for formal school learning.

2.2 Administration Considerations

It is important to note that while the TBCK is typically administered in learners' home languages, both instruction and assessment in this study were conducted in English, a first additional language for most learners. This factor should be considered when interpreting results, while also reflecting a key contextual challenge facing learners as they progress through the schooling system.

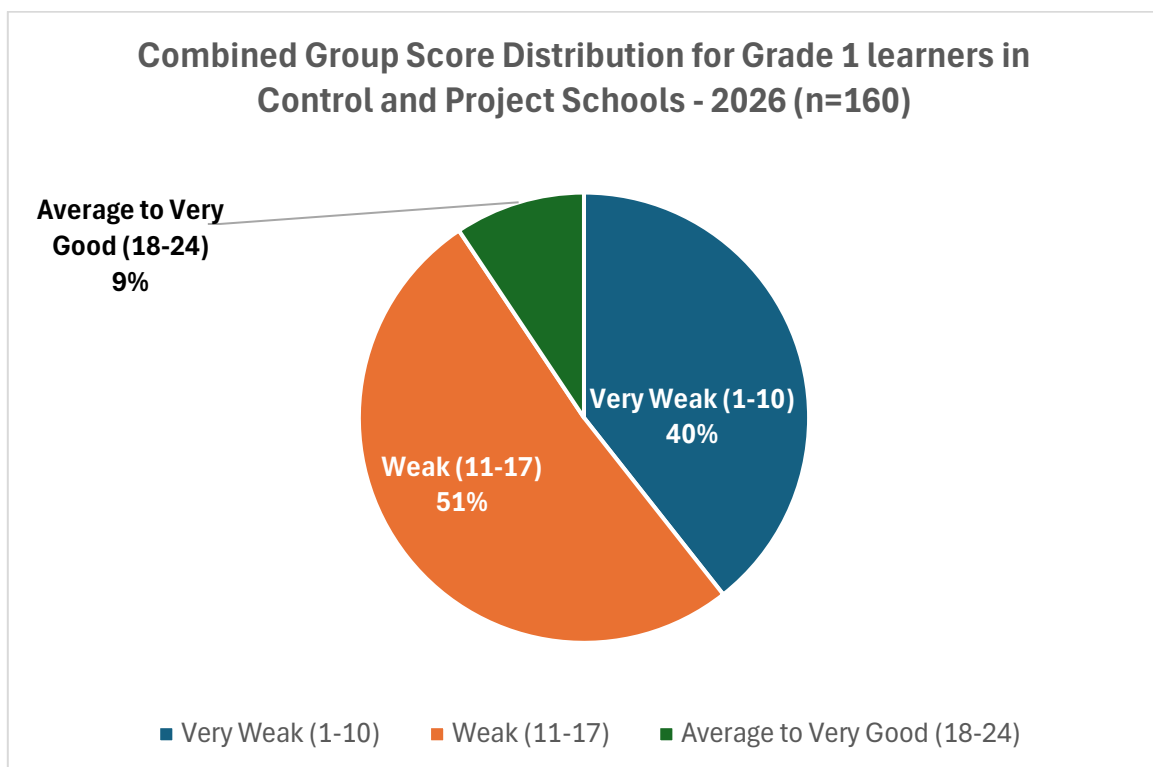
2.3 Sample and Design

A total of **160 Grade 1 learners** were assessed, with **40 learners per school**. The inclusion of both project and control schools allows for comparison at baseline and strengthens the internal validity of the study.

3. Results

3.1 Overall Performance

The baseline results indicate **very low levels of school readiness** across the sample. The majority of learners scored within the *very poor to weak* range, with only a small proportion demonstrating average or higher levels of conceptual understanding.



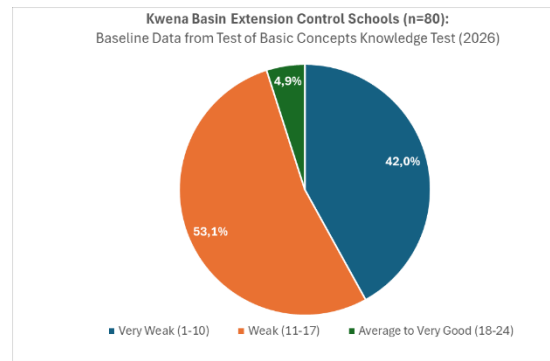
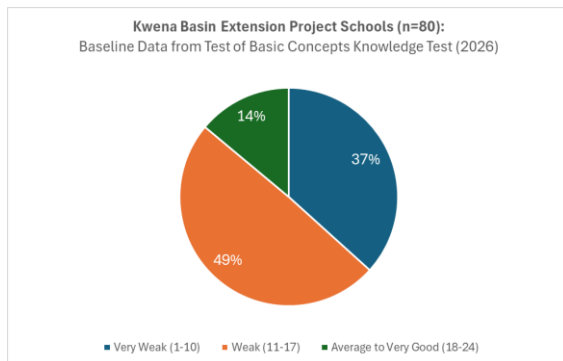
Descriptive analysis shows:

- A high concentration of scores in the lower bands (0–17)
- Very limited representation in the *average* range
- Minimal presence of learners in the *strong* category

This distribution suggests that most learners are entering formal schooling without the conceptual foundations necessary to engage effectively with the curriculum.

3.2 Comparison: Project vs Control Schools

A comparison of total scores between project and control groups indicates **no meaningful difference at baseline**.



- Mean scores between the two groups are closely aligned
- Distribution patterns across performance categories are highly similar
- Any observed differences are small and not practically significant

A basic inferential comparison (e.g. independent samples t-test) supports this observation, showing **no statistically significant difference** between groups at baseline ($p > 0.05$).

This equivalence is a critical finding, as it confirms that:

- The groups are well matched at the outset
- Any future divergence in outcomes can be more confidently attributed to the intervention

3.3 Distribution Across Performance Categories

When examining performance categories:

- The **overwhelming majority** of learners fall within the *very poor* and *weak* bands
- Only a **small minority** reach the *average* range
- Very few, if any, learners demonstrate *strong* conceptual readiness

This pattern is consistent across both project and control schools, reinforcing the conclusion that low readiness is a **systemic issue rather than a school-specific one**.

4. Interpretation

The baseline findings point to a clear and consistent reality: **most learners are entering Grade 1 without the foundational conceptual knowledge required for formal learning.**

While the use of English as the language of assessment may have influenced performance to some extent, this does not diminish the significance of the findings. On the contrary, it highlights the dual challenge faced by learners:

- Developing core conceptual understanding
- Acquiring the language proficiency required to access learning

These are not separate issues. The ability to understand and use concepts is closely tied to language development, particularly in contexts where learners transition to English as the language of instruction in later grades.

Importantly, the strong equivalence between project and control groups provides a **robust foundation for longitudinal analysis**. This strengthens the design of the study and increases confidence in the validity of future outcome comparisons.

5. Conclusion and Next Steps

This baseline assessment establishes a clear starting point for the Kwena Extension Project. The findings underscore the **urgent need for targeted intervention** to support both conceptual development and language acquisition in the early years of schooling.

Over the next three years, this cohort of learners will be tracked to assess the impact of the intervention. The expectation is that sustained, structured support will lead to measurable improvements in:

- School readiness
- Conceptual understanding
- Access to the curriculum

The strength of this baseline lies not only in what it reveals, but in the **clarity it provides for measuring meaningful change over time**.
