

For 14-year-old Mugisha (single name used to protect his privacy), holidays don't mean sleeping in. By 6:00 a.m., he is already awake, milking and feeding the family cow before the sun rises. Once the chores are done, he heads to Lake Muhazi in Gahini Sector, Eastern Province, to fetch water and gather grass—a daily routine that leaves little room for rest.

When school is in session, Mugisha's routine is the same. He walks two kilometers to Ecole Primary Gahini, where he got promoted to Primary Four last term. The fourth of seven children, Mugisha aged 14, last year lagged behind in P.3, failing to get 50% pass mark in class.

Unlike his younger siblings, who approach their studies with eagerness? He says, " I have little interest in schoolwork, I attend faithfully, but I am not driven by passion but by a quiet sense of duty, I try to study, but I need more explanations from the teachers"



Mugisha's (pictured above) situation is not different from many others. In Rubona Sector, Rwamagana District, Umutoni Justine aged 13, faced the same challenge, and was not promoted to the fourth grade. Her mother, Marie Claire Mukandamaje a single mother of three reflects on the struggle, "Umutoni didn't receive the support she needed at home. As parents, we couldn't provide the necessary help for her to complete her homework or study effectively. That is why she struggled in class this year"

In 2021/2022 the primarily school repetition rate was 30.2% , with boys at 31.4% and 26.1% of girls according to the Statistical yearbook2024.

Behind these numbers are children like Mugisha, Umutoni and many others balancing household responsibilities with education, often struggling to reach the required 50% passmark.

To address this challenge, the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and UNICEF launched the Remedial Education Program two years ago.

Dr. Flora Mutezigaju, Deputy Director General of REB, explains that this program targets students who have attended school regularly but struggle academically due to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, floods, or personal hardships.



Dr. Flora Mutezigaju, Deputy Director General of REB

“Unlike the Catch-Up Education Program, which helps students who have dropped out or lagged behind, Remedial Education Program focuses on those who need extra support to meet the pass mark and continue to the next class,” she says.

For students like Mugisha and Umutoni, Dr. Flora believes that the program offers a critical second chance—not just to pass exams, to build confidence, regain momentum, and continue their education on equal footing with their peers.

Rwanda’s Remedial Education Program shows that targeted interventions, combined with parental involvement and community support, can turn the tide for struggling students. For children like Mugisha and Umutoni, it is more than a program—it is a pathway to hope, opportunity, and the chance to write a different future.

The reform program offers extra support to [students who fall behind due to low confidence](#), learning gaps, or missed lessons. Every child learns differently, and some need more time or guidance to meet classroom expectations. The program allows these students to re-sit exams during holidays and improve their performance, with focus on a smaller group due to limited resources.

Students attend classes Monday to Friday for 40 minutes per hour per subject for four hours a day. Core subjects for Primary 1–3 include English, Kinyarwanda, and Mathematics, while Primary 4–6 cover English, Kinyarwanda, Mathematics, and SEC. Learners are taken out of their regular classrooms and taught in a separate setting, distinct from special education.



The program also supports pupils [affected by disruptions to government-organized online teaching](#). Teachers assess learners in their own classes, then select and group those eligible for remedial support. Peer learning is also used, allowing students to support each other. For the program to succeed, these general principles and careful monitoring must be followed.

According to [an assessment carried out on the student in August 2024](#), 90.6% said that materials used in this program are helpful adding that they supported the

program.

Angelic Mukamusoni, the headmistress of Ecole Primarily Gahini was not available for a comment but his depute Emmanuel Ndungutse explains the program helps create a culture and habit to diagnose and help low performing learners on time, without waiting for the end of the term or year examinations.

“At Ecole Primarily Gahini, we enrolled 260 pupils from Primary 1 to 5 for the remedial holiday program during this school break. Last year it was around 70.” He noted

Dr. Flora highlights the program is designed for a smaller group of students, which allows each one to receive more personalized attention. Students have better access to learning resources like books, they take the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA) exams during school holidays, and, in most cases, the chances of passing are significantly higher.

REB explains that students who previously scored between 40% and 49% have successfully passed the NESA exams.

Additionally, Dr. Flora explains that the program is also carefully monitored in partnership with trained teachers; through a method called ability grouping tailored to lesson planning and continuous assessment.



Source: Rwanda Statistical year book:
National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA)

“This helps determine which strategies work best for improving performance. Also, the team tracks whether students continue in this program beyond the second exam sitting or transition back to regular classes” She notes

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, [UNICEF in partnership with Imbuto Foundation](#) literally translated “seed” scaled up remedial learning clubs programs to support reintegrating children back to school minimizing the drop out. More than 25,960 students in 150 schools and five youth centers across ten districts benefitted from the programs.

A key feature of the program is community involvement. Parents, especially D

mothers, are encouraged to participate actively in their children's learning. Ancille Akimana , a mother of two daughters: Kariza 8 and Isaro 6 from Rwamanaga District, shares her experience: "My children were struggling at school, and it was painful to watch. Thanks to the Remedial Education Program, they are catching up and performing much better. I am proud of their progress."

Kariza, a student at Rukara Model Primarily School softly says, "I've turned my failure into success. Scoring 80% in my P 5 exams has made me believe in myself"

"This year, we involved the youth volunteers to assist in the program, not to replace teachers but to assist them. Many have shown interest in joining the program, which is positive—they support teachers and even use the program to conduct research," noted Dr. Flora.

"Thanks to the remedial learning training, our teachers have gained valuable new skills," says Ndungutse. "They are now applying these skills to support not only remedial classes but also our regular lessons."



Challenges

Peace Kabatesi, a teacher at Shining Primary School in Gahini Sector, Kayonza District points out a challenge she feels deeply. "The program is designed for government schools, not private ones," she explains. "I am very interested in being trained, because

I feel left behind when I see other teachers gaining new skills through the program. But since I teach in a private school, it's impossible. '

"Without same tools and methods, both she and her students risk missing out on the benefits that remedial education has brought to many classrooms across the country" Kabatesi adds.

Despite its importance, some teachers worry the daily 40-minute session a day is insufficient. Emmanuel Ndungutse, a teacher at Ecole Primary Gahini, who is among the 200 trained teachers in the Remedial Program suggests, "Extra hours over the weekend could help students revise, reflect on their strength and weakness better grasp as well practice their skills in what they've learned during the week. Some students fall behind because they need more time."

He adds that attendance is another worry. “Parents must ensure students attend remedial sessions during holidays, but we often face low turnout for various reasons,” Ndungutse notes.

Teachers also highlight that, the RWF 30,000 (\approx US\$20.88) incentive is too low compared their daily earnings per day, making it hard to justify giving up other work during holidays.

REB adds that most students in remedial programs pass after a second chance. However, some who fail exams twice continue to struggle despite support. “This shows a challenge: either the curriculum is above their level, or testing methods don’t accurately measure their ability.” Dr. Flora added.