

Only 44% of Rwanda's Primary Three pupils are able to correctly answer questions about what they have read, according to a national education assessment that highlights continuing challenges in reading comprehension despite efforts to improve learning outcomes.

The findings were released Monday by the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA) as part of the Learning Assessment of Rwanda's Education System (LARS), a study conducted in May 2025 and presented on June 15, 2026. The assessment evaluated 22,950 students from 592 schools across all districts of Rwanda, focusing on learners in Primary Three, Primary Six and Senior Three.

Students were assessed in key subjects including Kinyarwanda, English, Mathematics and Science.

The study found that while many pupils are able to read words and sentences, a large number struggle to understand and interpret the information they read.

In Kinyarwanda, the assessment showed that 49% of Primary Three pupils could read at least 35 words per minute, while 71% were able to read sentences. However, only 44% could correctly answer questions based on a passage they had read.

NESA Director General Dr. Bernard Bahati said the results show that reading ability does not always translate into understanding.



*Dr. Bernard Bahati, the Director General of NESA*

"Children may be able to read, but when asked questions about what they have read, many struggle to respond," Bahati said during the presentation of the findings.

According to NESA, 76% of students have difficulty answering questions related to texts they have read. Bahati said learners often manage simple tasks such as identifying words or information directly stated in a passage but face challenges when required to analyze, interpret or draw conclusions.

The assessment also revealed significant challenges in English language learning.

The English evaluation examined students' ability to read words, read sentences and understand written passages. NESAs reported that 63% of students were able to read words, but only 46.6% reached the required benchmark for reading fluency, defined as reading at least 35 words per minute.

Only 25.8% of Primary Three and Primary Six students were able to answer comprehension questions based on English texts they had read. Among Primary Three pupils, only 4% demonstrated the ability to understand what they read in English.

Bahati said the difficulty is not limited to English, noting that students face similar comprehension challenges in Kinyarwanda.

"Students can handle simple tasks that do not require much thinking, but when they are asked specific questions about what they have read, it becomes difficult," he said.

The assessment also showed differences in performance based on location and gender. Girls in Primary Three performed better than boys in Kinyarwanda reading, while students in the Northern Province recorded stronger results compared with those in Kigali City and the Southern Province, where challenges remain.

Teachers who participated in the study cited several factors affecting students' ability to learn effectively, including overcrowded classrooms and shortages of learning materials.

Some teachers reported difficulties managing classes of up to 60 pupils, making it harder to provide individual attention. Others said a lack of sufficient textbooks and teaching materials affects students' opportunities to practice reading and comprehension skills.

Beyond literacy, the assessment identified challenges in mathematics.

NESA reported that 63% of Primary Three students met the required mathematics standards, compared with 68.7% of Primary Six students and 57.5% of Senior Three students. However, only 15% of learners were able to successfully solve basic arithmetic problems involving addition, multiplication and division.

Education Minister Joseph Nsengimana said the findings highlight gaps that require urgent action and will guide government efforts to improve the quality of education.



*Joseph Nsengimana, the Minister of Education*

He acknowledged that both students and teachers continue to face challenges in English proficiency but said programs are already underway to address the problem.

The government has introduced teacher training initiatives aimed at strengthening educators' language skills and classroom instruction. Additional programs are being implemented to help students improve their speaking, reading and writing abilities.

Nsengimana said improving foundational learning skills remains a priority as Rwanda works toward its Vision 2050 goal of becoming a knowledge- and technology-based economy.

He added that information from the assessment will help policymakers develop strategies to improve teaching quality, support teachers and ensure students complete primary school with stronger literacy and communication skills.

Conducted every two years, the LARS assessment provides national data on student performance and helps identify areas requiring improvement within Rwanda's education system.

The latest results suggest that while progress has been made in helping children learn to read, ensuring they understand what they read remains one of the country's biggest education challenges.