Life skills sub-component of Kwara state AGILE

RESEARCH FINDINGS & CASE STUDIES

Evidence of Programme Effectiveness and Impact | Year 1 | Kwara State, Nigeria

5	5	3	Year 1
Thematic Research Findings evidence-based conclusions	In-depth Case Studies school-level narratives	Contextual Typologies urban, peri-urban, rural	Evidence Period 2024/2025 academic cycle

Prepared by: Monitoring & Evaluation Unit | Olive Community Development Initiative

Life skills sub-component of Kwara state Agile | Kwara State | Academic Cycle 2025/2026

1. Research Framework and Analytical Approach

This document presents research findings and case study evidence drawn from Year 1 implementation data of the Kwara AGILE Life Skills Sub-Component. It is designed to complement the quantitative Evaluation Report and Impact Data Report by providing analytical depth, contextual interpretation, and school-level narratives that bring the programme's effectiveness to life.

The research findings are derived from a systematic analysis of monitoring data collected across 100 schools and 16 LGAs over four monitoring cycles. They are framed around five thematic areas aligned to the AGILE programme's theory of change: access and participation, operational fidelity, mentor effectiveness, geographic equity, and programme sustainability signals. The case studies are selected purposively to represent high-performing schools across three contextual typologies: urban, peri-urban, and rural.

While this document draws on Year 1 monitoring data rather than primary research instruments (surveys, focus group discussions, or qualitative interviews), the patterns identified across 100 schools constitute a robust evidence base for programme-level conclusions. Year 2 will introduce formal pre/post assessment tools to generate outcome-level research evidence.

1.1 Analytical Framework

Thematic Area	Research Question	Data Source	Key Indicator
Access & Participation	Do girls participate consistently?	Monitoring registers	Enrolment growth rate
Operational Fidelity	Are Safe Spaces functioning as designed?	Field visit reports	Cohorts formed, mentor activity
Mentor Effectiveness	Do mentors remain active and capable?	Mentor activity logs	Retention rate
Geographic Equity	Is access equitable across contexts?	LGA-level aggregates	Urban/rural enrolment distribution
Sustainability Signals	What factors drive sustained growth?	Growth trajectories	School-level growth differentials

2. Research Findings

Finding 1: Peer Referral is a Primary Driver of Safe Space Growth

Across the 85 schools with comparable baseline and year-end enrolment data, 79 schools (93%) recorded positive enrolment growth with an average increase of 133.9%. Crucially, this growth occurred within the existing programme structure: no new schools were added after initial activation, and no second wave of community mobilisation was documented in monitoring reports. The growth is therefore attributable to within-school and peer-community dynamics rather than external programme expansion activities.

This finding is consistent with documented literature on adolescent girl programmes in West Africa (Population Council, 2014; Wodon et al., 2018), which identifies peer social networks as a primary recruitment pathway once a programme achieves initial credibility within a school community. Girls who derive tangible benefit from Safe Space sessions, including improved self-confidence, peer support, and knowledge of protective behaviours, act as informal programme ambassadors to their peers. The Kwara data strongly suggest this dynamic is at work, with the most dramatic enrolment growth observed in schools that had the longest operational periods before monitoring visits.

Implication: Programme design in Year 2 should explicitly harness peer referral through structured 'girl ambassador' mechanisms and ensure that Safe Space physical capacity (meeting spaces, materials, mentor bandwidth) can absorb organic enrolment growth without compromising session quality.

Finding 2: Mentor Retention is a Leading Indicator of Programme Quality

The programme's 93.1% overall mentor retention rate, with 85% of schools maintaining 100% retention, is statistically remarkable for a community-based mentorship model. Cross-tabulation of mentor retention data against enrolment performance reveals a positive directional relationship: the 15 schools with partial mentor attrition recorded an average enrolment of 87 girls per school, compared to 140 girls per school in schools with full retention, though the small subsample size (15 schools) warrants caution in drawing causal inferences.

This finding aligns with established evidence from similar adolescent girl programmes (BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme; Ethiopia TESFA; Nigeria WORTH) that mentor consistency and relationship continuity are among the most potent predictors of sustained girl participation. Girls who attend Safe Spaces primarily for the relationship with their mentor, as much as for the curriculum content, are sensitive to mentor changes and may disengage when their trusted facilitator is replaced or becomes inactive.

Implication: Mentor support and supervision systems should be treated as a core programme investment rather than an administrative function. A structured mentor wellbeing and performance review protocol should be introduced in Year 2, with early-warning systems to identify at-risk mentors before attrition occurs.

Finding 3: Urban-Rural Delivery Gap Exists but is Not Insurmountable

The average per-school enrolment in the three Ilorin urban LGAs (314 girls per school) is approximately four times higher than the average in rural and semi-urban LGAs (79 girls per school). This gap primarily reflects structural differences in school population sizes, transportation accessibility, and community density rather than programme design failures.

Importantly, several rural schools in Baruten, Kaiama, and Edu LGAs recorded consistent enrolment growth and full mentor retention across all monitoring cycles, demonstrating that the programme delivery model is effective in rural contexts when adequate field supervision is maintained. The existence of high-performing rural schools argues against a blanket resource concentration in urban areas and supports a differentiated support model that provides higher-intensity technical assistance to rural implementation sites.

Implication: A tiered support model should be developed for Year 2, classifying schools into 'urban-standard', 'semi-urban-supported', and 'rural-intensive' categories with differentiated monitoring frequency, mentor incentives, and capacity development resources.

Finding 4: Multi-Cohort Schools Signal Institutional Ownership

Schools operating six or more simultaneous cohorts, including Ansarul Islam Ogidi (12 cohorts), Okelele Secondary School (8 cohorts), and several Ilorin-West schools (6 cohorts each), share a common pattern: school leadership that has moved beyond passive compliance with programme requirements to active institutional championing. In these schools, the Safe Space is not an external project hosted on school premises but has become an embedded component of the school's identity and student support structure.

This finding has significant implications for programme sustainability: schools that have internalised the Safe Space model as part of their institutional culture are more likely to sustain programme activities during funding gaps, staff transitions, or external disruptions. The presence of 12 schools operating five or more cohorts in Year 1 suggests that the seeds of institutional ownership are already germinating across the programme, a promising early sustainability signal.

Finding 5: Data Completeness Gaps Create Blind Spots in Programme Evidence

Fifteen schools lack baseline enrolment figures (primarily Edu and Patigi LGAs), seven schools have missing July monitoring data, and the November monitoring column is incomplete across approximately 40% of schools. These gaps mean that current programme-level growth statistics are underestimates of true programme reach and may systematically underrepresent the performance of LGAs where data capture was delayed.

The gaps are not evidence of programme failure but of M&E system capacity constraints that are common in first-year programme implementation across Nigeria's development sector. They represent a known and addressable challenge that should be treated as a Year 2 M&E strengthening priority.

Implication: A data quality improvement plan should be developed for Year 2, including mentor-level data capture training, real-time digital reporting via ODK or KoboToolbox, and monthly data validation reviews at the LGA coordinator level.

3. School Case Studies

The following five case studies are selected to represent diverse implementation contexts, performance profiles, and lessons relevant to programme design and scale-up. Each is drawn directly from the Year 1 monitoring dataset and contextualised within the AGILE programme's theory of change.

Case Study 1: The Peer Amplification Model

Ansarul Islam Secondary School Ogidi | Ilorin-South LGA | Urban

Ansarul Islam Secondary School Ogidi is the single highest-performing school in the Year 1 dataset by absolute enrolment. Beginning with 321 girls enrolled at initial monitoring, the school grew to 1,547 girls by year end, a 382% increase driven by 12 active cohorts and a fully retained mentor team of 3. The school's performance is particularly instructive because it demonstrates what happens when the 'peer amplification' dynamic reaches critical mass: girls who benefit from Safe Space sessions actively recruit peers, their peers in turn recruit others, and enrolment compounds organically without additional external mobilisation. The school operates within a densely populated urban environment with a large girl student body, providing fertile ground for peer referral networks. However, scale alone does not explain the growth: other large urban schools in Ilorin-South did not reach comparable numbers. The distinctive factor appears to be the depth of institutional buy-in from school management, which actively supported mentor scheduling, space allocation, and programme visibility within the school community. Lesson: Where institutional ownership and peer referral converge, Safe Space enrolment can scale dramatically within a single year. Programme design should include protocols for 'peer ambassador' activation and school-level institutional engagement as deliberate programmatic strategies rather than incidental outcomes.

1,547	+382%	12	100%
Girls at Year End	Enrolment Growth	Active Cohorts	Mentor Retention

Case Study 2: Peri-Urban Scale and the Quality Tension

Government Girls' Day SSS, Pakata | Ilorin-West LGA | Peri-Urban

GGDSS Pakata recorded the highest percentage enrolment growth of any school in the programme, expanding from 106 girls at initial monitoring to 770 girls by year end, a 626% increase. Operating with 6 cohorts and maintaining its full complement of 3 trained mentors (100% retention), the school's performance reflects both the strong latent demand for structured

girls' spaces in peri-urban communities and the effectiveness of a fully supported mentor team. The Pakata case, however, also introduces a critical programme quality question: at 770 girls across 6 cohorts, each cohort averages approximately 128 participants. This figure exceeds recommended Safe Space group sizes (typically 15 to 25 girls per cohort) by a considerable margin. While the monitoring data confirm that cohorts are functionally active, the density of participation raises legitimate concerns about the depth of mentor-girl engagement, the ability to deliver sensitive life skills content in large groups, and the potential for girls' individual needs to go unaddressed in high-volume settings. Lesson: High enrolment growth is a positive programme signal but must be accompanied by cohort-level quality monitoring. Year 2 should introduce maximum cohort size guidelines and trigger protocols for additional mentor deployment when cohort sizes exceed programme standards.

770	+626%	6	~128
Girls at Year End	Enrolment Growth	Cohorts	Girls per Cohort (est.)

Case Study 3: Rural Resilience in a Remote LGA

Government Secondary School Ilesha-Baruba | Baruten LGA | Rural

Located in Baruten LGA, one of Kwara State's most geographically remote and predominantly rural areas bordering Kwara's border with Kogi State, GSS Ilesha-Baruba demonstrated consistent programme performance across all four monitoring cycles. The school ended Year 1 with 141 girls in 4 active cohorts, all 3 trained mentors remaining active (100% retention), and enrolment data recorded at every monitoring visit. The school's consistent performance in a challenging geographic context challenges the common assumption that rural delivery inherently produces weaker programme outcomes. It demonstrates that when field supervision is adequate, mentor incentives are maintained, and school leadership is engaged, the AGILE Safe Space model can deliver effectively regardless of location. The school's experience is particularly valuable because Baruten is one of the LGAs with the highest rates of girl school dropout in Kwara State, meaning the programme is reaching a high-need community with documented impact. Lesson: The Baruten delivery model, characterised by consistent field monitoring, mentor support, and school leadership engagement, should be documented as a rural replication blueprint and applied systematically across similarly remote LGAs including Kaiama, Patigi, and parts of Edu.

141	4	100%	All 4
Girls at Year End	Active Cohorts	Mentor Retention	Monitoring Cycles Covered

Case Study 4: Multi-School LGA Excellence

Offa LGA (7 Schools) | South-Central Kwara | Semi-Urban

Offa LGA presents a compelling case of sustained programme excellence across an entire LGA rather than a single school. All 7 programme schools in Offa maintained active Safe Spaces across all monitoring cycles, collectively enrolling 1,140 girls at year end across 34 cohorts. Three schools, Nawair-Ud-Deen SSS (186 girls), Saint Marks Secondary School (186 girls), and Offa Grammar School (414 girls), stand out as individually high-performing institutions. The LGA's aggregate performance (21 active mentors out of 22 trained, 95.5% retention; 34 cohorts; 1,140 girls) suggests that strong LGA-level coordination and peer learning among school-based mentors may be contributing to consistently high performance across diverse school types. Offa includes government, missionary, and Islamic school types, yet all seven deliver comparable programme results, suggesting that the programme model is robust across institutional and religious diversity. Lesson: LGA-level coordination structures appear to add significant value to school-level implementation quality. Year 2 should investigate Offa LGA's coordination mechanisms and, where they are replicable, systematise them as a state-level LGA management model.

1,140	34	95.5%	7/7
Total Girls (LGA)	Cohorts	Mentor Retention	Schools Active

Case Study 5: Inclusion of Girls with Special Needs

Kwara State School for Special Needs (SSS) Ilorin | Ilorin-East LGA | Urban

One of the most significant inclusion milestones in Year 1 is the activation of a Safe Space at the Kwara State School for Special Needs in Ilorin. With 4 trained mentors (the highest single-school mentor deployment in the dataset, likely reflecting the additional support needs of the student population), 2 cohorts active, and 59 girls enrolled at year end, the school demonstrates that the AGILE Life Skills programme can be adapted and delivered to girls with diverse learning needs. The school's inclusion in the programme represents a meaningful commitment to the principle that adolescent girls with disabilities are equally entitled to life skills education, social

protection, and safe learning environments. The monitoring data show consistent enrolment across cycles, suggesting the adapted delivery model is functioning effectively. This school's experience should be documented as a disability-inclusive Safe Space model for potential replication across other states implementing AGILE. Lesson: Disability-inclusive programme delivery is achievable within the AGILE Safe Space model with appropriate mentor-to-participant ratios and adapted facilitation approaches. OCDI should document the pedagogical adaptations made at this school and develop a disability-inclusion annex for the programme's operational manual.

59 Girls Enrolled	**4** Mentors Deployed	**2** Cohorts	**Special Needs** School Typology

4. Programme Effectiveness Synthesis

The research findings and case study evidence presented in this document collectively point to a programme that is, in its Year 1 phase, demonstrating the foundational characteristics of effectiveness: it is reaching its target population at scale, sustaining community participation organically, retaining its frontline workforce at rates that exceed sector benchmarks, and delivering consistently across diverse geographic and institutional contexts.

The absence of outcome-level data (changes in life skills knowledge, attitudes, and protective behaviours) is a recognised limitation of Year 1 evidence. However, the patterns of sustained and growing participation documented across 100 schools constitute strong circumstantial evidence that girls are deriving value from Safe Space sessions, value sufficient to maintain and expand their engagement over a sustained period. Sustained voluntary participation in a programme that makes no material incentive offer to participants is itself a meaningful proxy for perceived benefit.

The case studies demonstrate that the programme's effectiveness is not confined to favourable contexts. Rural schools, schools serving girls with special needs, schools in predominantly Islamic communities, and schools in geographically isolated LGAs are all delivering results. This contextual robustness is a hallmark of a programme with strong theoretical grounding and an adaptable delivery model.

4.1 Recommendations for Enhanced Evidence Generation

- Commission a baseline survey in Year 2 using validated life skills and gender-attitude assessment instruments (such as the GAGE tools or SIYB adapted instruments) to generate pre/post outcome evidence.
- Conduct focus group discussions with Safe Space girls, parents, and school staff in at least 6 LGAs to generate qualitative evidence on perceived programme benefits, barriers, and suggestions.
- Document and publish a programme learning brief after Year 2 Cycle 1 to share findings with AGILE national stakeholders, the World Bank, and the wider adolescent girl programming community in Nigeria.
- Develop a school-level Safe Space Quality Assessment tool that measures facilitation quality, content delivery fidelity, girl voice, and space safety, to be administered during at least two monitoring cycles in Year 2.
- Establish a programme-level knowledge management system to archive case studies, monitoring reports, and learning products for institutional memory and donor accountability.

Effectiveness Conclusion

Year 1 research findings and case study evidence confirm that the Kwara AGILE Life Skills Programme is operationally effective, contextually robust, and generating credible signals of impact at scale. The programme is well-positioned to generate rigorous outcome-level evidence in Year 2 that will demonstrate its contribution to improved life skills, protective behaviours, and educational resilience among adolescent girls in Kwara State.