



Learning Summary for the Play Context Study in Sierra Leone

Program Description

The technical assistance partnership between the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and Right To Play is a part of the Building Back Better, an initiative that sought to pilot a series of new, play-based interventions in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda from 2022-2023. This technical assistance activity seeks to support the national education priority of improving learning outcomes by strengthening play-based learning in lower primary classrooms in Sierra Leone.

Study Purpose

Using key stakeholder interviews and classroom observations, this study was conducted for two primary purposes:

- To understand the status of play in the teaching and learning process of pre-primary and early primary grades across schools in various cultural and community settings in Sierra Leone.
- To guide and inform activities in Right To Play's technical assistance activities supporting play-based policies and intervention strategies for schools and communities in Sierra Leone.



"Educative games help children learn fast, therefore children need to have playing time both in school and at home to reduce mental fatigue and increase class participation."

– Teacher, Port Loko

KEY FINDINGS

1

Definitions of play

Play was most commonly defined as games that involve interaction, communication, relationship-building, physical growth, and social-emotional development. Games most commonly mentioned, included local games like Touch, Ardie, and Balance Ball, football, rhymes, songs, drama.

2

Teachers

Teachers discussed play for learning under two broad categories:

- Play as games for communication, and relationship building.
- Play's benefits for children's physical growth and development, and improved health and cognition.

Play-based learning was described as a holistic process that helps children develop retentive memory.

3

Headteachers

Headteachers viewed play-based learning as teacher-led, with the choice and set-up of play determined by the teacher. The teacher gives instructions, roles, and responsibilities, and learners participate individually, in pairs, or in groups.

4

Community members

Community members viewed their role in supporting play in the school and the community in two categories:

- Monitoring and supervision
- Community awareness raising on the importance of play and the provision of play (e.g., providing materials, time, space, etc. To play).

5

Classroom observations

- Indoor environments were lacking teaching and learning materials. Only half of the schools had playgrounds.
- Learners were given little to no time to engage with materials.
- Songs & games using rhymes were the only types of play observed.
- Play was used as a tool to regain attention or energize learners during a lesson.
- A few instances of PBL were observed in the classrooms. The majority was teacher-directed. Some classrooms also offered some opportunities for learners to lead their own learning.



CONCLUSIONS

1

Investment from the government and support from relevant partners is important to support:

- Ministerial coordination.
- Engagement and communication between community and pre-primary and early primary level units of the MBSSE to support transition of children from pre-primary to primary grades.
- Increased training and support through professional development and quality assurance mechanisms.

2

Training for formally and informally trained early grade teachers is critical:

- It should focus on emphasizing the importance of play for children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and especially academic development.
- Training is needed on the use of play-based learning and different types of play for existing curriculum, education structures, and teaching practices.

3

Awareness-raising is critical for the use and value of play-based learning. The importance of play should be communicated to stakeholders, including pre-primary and early primary teachers, headteachers, and community members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations to emerge from the findings of this study focused on four key areas for integration of play-based learning into Sierra Leone's education system: teacher training, Ministerial support, quality assurance, and awareness raising. Some recommendations included:

1

Provide in-service training to strengthen teachers' skills and knowledge on play-based pedagogy for classroom practice and management, and integrating and linking play activities to learning outcomes.

2

Support the MBSSE to identify appropriate local and sustainable play-based teaching and learning materials.

3

Update tools and capacity of School Quality Assurance Officers to effectively monitor and mentor teachers in play-based learning.

4

Raise awareness on play-based learning with community members to ensure buy-in on the use of play inside the classroom extends beyond the school.

"Play can arouse the interest of learners, encourage their full participation, and makes learning meaningful to them. It also breaks the communication barrier between teachers and learners and among learners themselves."

- Head Teacher, Bo