



RIGHT TO PLAY
PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education in Ghana Through Play-Based Approaches



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

With support from the ELMA Foundation and the LEGO Foundation, Right To Play's Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education project has improved early literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development outcomes among children ages three to five years old in Ghana since 2022. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and its agencies, Sabre Education and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), the project expanded the kindergarten in-service training (KG INSET) package and trained Teacher College Tutors, Teachers, and Early Childhood Education (ECE) Coordinators on play-based learning approaches. The project also developed contextually relevant play-based content for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)¹ at the school and district level.

The end results of the project demonstrate significant improvements in children's development outcomes and teachers' skills and confidence in using play-based approaches.

CONTEXT

In 2008, the Ministry of Education in Ghana made two years of kindergarten (KG) a compulsory component of its basic education strategy. This commitment recognizes the important role of the early years in achieving foundational learning outcomes and child development.² Since then, Ghana has embedded ECE into its education policies³ and budgets and has significantly increased access to ECE. While there are notable improvements, there is inconsistent KG enrollment across the country, as well as gaps in teacher training and persistently low-support among parents for the use of play-based approaches.

To help address these challenges, Right To Play offered technical expertise to help teachers incorporate play-based learning into curriculum and teaching practice. Through the project, a KG INSET package was piloted, tested, and replicated at an increasingly larger scale with measurable results.

REACH

140
schools

155,221
children
Girls: 75,407
Boys: 79,814

4,198
KG teachers
Women: 3,384
Men: 814

2,800
caregivers

¹140 schools were reached across nine districts in Greater Accra, Northern Ghana, and the Volta Region. 4,198 KG Teachers, 200 ECE Coordinators, and 220 Teacher College Tutors were trained to effectively integrate and deliver play-based learning approaches. 2,800 parents were also reached and given information on the importance of play to improve their children's development and learning outcomes.

KEY RESULTS

Right To Play's Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education project supported 4,198 KG Teachers through training and mentoring to develop their skills and confidence in using play-based approaches. An external evaluation of the project compared baseline and endline results and demonstrated significant improvements in key foundational learning outcomes, including early literacy and numeracy, and social and emotional development.

EARLY LITERACY AND NUMERACY

There is strong evidence linking play-based learning with improved literacy outcomes in children in the early years.⁴ **The final results of the Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education project revealed an improvement in early literacy skills from an average of 29% at baseline to 66% at endline.**⁵ The evaluation demonstrated substantial improvements in student's ability to identify letters and sounds, suggesting that the intervention effectively targeted foundational phonics. Children reached through the project were also better able to form letters and understand the mechanics of writing. These improvements are essential for children as they transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn."

The evaluation also demonstrated that children **improved their early numeracy skills from 44% at baseline to 81% at endline.** This included indicators such as number and shape identification, one-to-one correspondence, and puzzle completion. Puzzle completion helps children enhance their spatial reasoning, which is essential for subjects like geometry and more complex problem-solving later in life.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Play-based learning fosters critical social and emotional development skills, such as recognizing emotions, relating to others, and navigating social dynamics. **The project had a significant impact on children's social and emotional development and showed an improvement from 42% at baseline to 82% at endline. More specifically, there were significant gains in emotional awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution.**

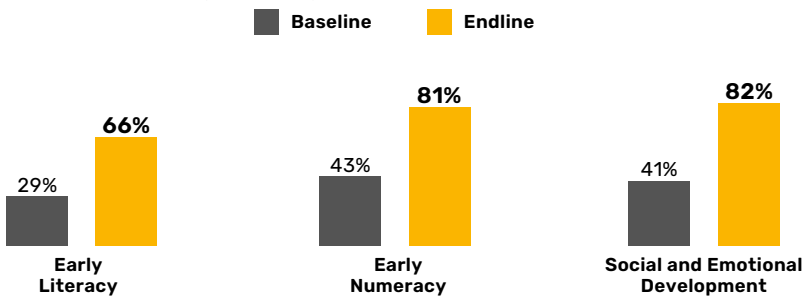
POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND QUALITY EDUCATION

Right To Play works to support teachers to create more child-friendly and interactive learning environments using the power of play. **Teachers trained through the Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education project were observed to use more effective classroom management techniques, such as positive discipline (88%) and inclusive classroom practices that enhanced peer relationship among students (77%). 90% of teachers were observed to use diverse play-based and interactive learning strategies.** This included hands-on activities like drawing, creative play, structured games, interactive songs, storytelling, and role-play to support literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development.

CAREGIVER KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES

Caregiver involvement is a critical component of play-based approaches to reinforce learning and child development in the home. At endline, 65% of caregivers demonstrated a basic understanding of play-based learning, 70% expressed favourable attitudes toward the importance of play, and 60% reported actively engaging in playful activities at home.

RESULTS FROM THE ENDLINE EVALUATION





KEY LEARNINGS

1 Play-based approaches at the KG level are accelerating foundational learning outcomes for children in Ghana:

Investing in the early years, including play-based approaches, sets a strong foundation for learning later in life. The Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education project is well positioned to help deliver on Ghana's basic education and ECE policies and should therefore be maintained and expanded to ensure that all children receive two years of good quality education at the KG level.

"As a nation, if we want to get to where we want to be, we need to look back to our kindergarten children. If we want children who are creative, who can communicate effectively, and who can collaborate with their peers in learning, it is now, and it is through play based learning".

*- Vida Barbara Nton
Director for Early Childhood Education, Ghana
Education Service*

2 Play-based approaches help to improve teaching practice and positive classroom management skills:

When teachers are trained and supported to use play in the classroom, it contributes to a more inclusive and positive learning environment for children. At the same time, ongoing professional development for teachers is essential to keep play-based learning practices effective and relevant. This includes access to play-based resources and materials.

3 Increased knowledge and support for play among parents and caregivers is essential:

Community and parental involvement is needed to garner support for play-based approaches and reinforce the value of play in the home. Engaging communities builds a sense of ownership among parents and local stakeholders and significantly strengthens the impact and sustainability of ECE interventions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education project, including the delivery of the KG INSET package yielded encouraging results in only two years. It has successfully shifted teaching practices toward more playful, learner-centered approaches, that promote access and inclusion. It has also improved children's learning and development outcomes.

In order to build on the success of the project, Right To Play puts forward the following recommendations for consideration:

- 1 Continue to invest in pre-service and in-service teacher training, with a focus on play-based approaches at the KG and primary level.** This should include ongoing professional development, refresher courses, and formalized Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at the school and district level. PLCs should be supported by trained mentors and School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs). Teacher professional development should also include specialized training on differentiation and scaffolding techniques to address the diverse needs of all learners. This includes the development and distribution of guidelines and support mechanisms for teachers to foster inclusive classroom environments.
- 2 Work to ensure that play-based learning is not only integrated into national education policies, but that school and district level officials receive the support they need to implement such policies at the local level.** This includes working with experts to align Ghana's Standard-Based Curriculum and other government education policies with evidence-based play-based approaches. Effective roll-out of such policies also requires additional investments in classroom infrastructure and learning materials.
- 3 Increase investments to expand school infrastructure, classroom improvements, and ensure that schools are supplied with essential play-based learning materials, especially in rural and under-resourced schools.** While teacher training interventions improved learning environments overall, only 50% of classrooms were considered child-friendly and conducive to facilitating play-based learning activities at endline. These investments should be made in collaboration with local authorities, and stakeholders.
- 4 Invest in campaigns at the local level that help to build knowledge and buy-in from school leadership, community groups, parents, and caregivers on the power of play:** School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) are important allies in scaling up play-based approaches at the local level. However, their knowledge of play-based learning varies significantly by region. Building strong partnerships with local stakeholders is essential to increase demand and make of play-based learning sustainable. As such, training, resources, and public communication strategies should be developed to deepen understanding and support for play-based learning, including caregivers' reinforcement of play in the home.
- 5 Increase the collection of data monitor access to and quality of KG broadly, and play-based learning specifically:** Play-based approaches are effective in improving children's literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development, but more efforts are needed to measure progress in delivering play-based KG education nationally. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education work with education officials and partners to establish a set of indicators to track progress toward universal access to quality, play-based KG education over the long-term. Data collection will help to better institutionalize and legitimize the delivery of play-based learning nationally.

1. PLCs are communities that foster continuous professional development, peer learning, and collective problem-solving to improve teaching practices.

2. Ministry of Education Ghana. 2020. ECE Policy Framework.

3. The Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) of Ghana has proposed foundational learning as its overarching policy priority reform area as part of the Partnership Compact, which targets children from KG1 through P3 levels. Since the 2008 Education Act, which made two years of KG part of compulsory universal basic education, key reforms demonstrating the government's commitment to ECE include a framework for INSET of KG teachers in 2018, the Standard Based Curriculum in 2019, and the ECE Policy in 2020.

4. Cynosure Evaluation Limited. 2024. Meta-analysis and synthesis of evidence about play-based learning and foundational learning outcomes in Ghana.

5. J. E. Lemuel Company Limited. 2024. Enhancing Quality Early Childhood Education in Ghana. Endline Report.



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