



**RIGHT TO PLAY**  
PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

# Enhancing Quality and Inclusive Education (EQIE)

## Midline evaluation - Mozambique

Final version

March 2024

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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

|             |                                                                                                           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ALDE        | <i>Avaliação Longitudinal da Desistência Escolar</i><br>(Longitudinal Assessment of School Dropout)       |
| AMME        | <i>Associação Moçambicana Mulher e Educação</i> (Mozambican Association Women and Education)              |
| CO          | Country Office                                                                                            |
| CoP         | Community of Practice                                                                                     |
| CP          | Child Protection                                                                                          |
| CSO         | Civil Society Organization                                                                                |
| CWD         | Children With Disabilities                                                                                |
| CWPM        | Correct Words Per Minute                                                                                  |
| EGRA        | Early Grade Reading Assessment                                                                            |
| EPC         | <i>Escola Primária Completa</i> (Complete Primary School)                                                 |
| EQIE        | Enhancing Quality and Inclusive Education                                                                 |
| FGD         | Focus Group Discussion                                                                                    |
| GBV         | Gender-Based Violence                                                                                     |
| GDPR        | General Data Protection Regulation                                                                        |
| HQ          | Headquarters                                                                                              |
| INDE        | <i>Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação</i> (National Institute for Educational Development) |
| INE         | <i>Instituto Nacional de Estatística</i> (National Institute of Statistics)                               |
| ISELA       | International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment                                                    |
| KII         | Key Informant Interview                                                                                   |
| MEL         | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning                                                                       |
| MINEDH      | <i>Ministério da Educação e Desenvolvimento Humano</i> (Ministry of Education and Human Development)      |
| NORAD       | Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation                                                              |
| OECD        | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development                                                    |
| OOS         | Out-Of-School                                                                                             |
| PAQE/TALOOM | Power of Play Program                                                                                     |
| PBL         | Play-Based Learning                                                                                       |
| PE          | Physical Education                                                                                        |
| PSS         | Psychosocial Support                                                                                      |
| RCA         | Read, Connect and Apply                                                                                   |
| RTI         | Research Triangle Institute                                                                               |
| RTP         | Right To Play                                                                                             |

|        |                                                                   |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RWC    | Readers With Comprehension                                        |
| SDG    | Sustainable Development Goal                                      |
| SDI    | Service Delivery Indicators                                       |
| SEL    | Social Emotional Learning                                         |
| SES    | Socio-Economic Scale                                              |
| ToC    | Theory of Change                                                  |
| UN     | United Nations                                                    |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme                              |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization       |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund            |
| UNPF   | United Nations Population Fund                                    |
| USAID  | United States Agency for International Development                |
| WASH   | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene                                     |
| ZIP    | <i>Zona de Influência Pedagógica</i> (Pedagogical Influence Zone) |

# Executive Summary

## Background to Enhancing Quality and Inclusive Education

The Enhancing Quality and Inclusive Education (EQIE) program is being implemented by Right To Play (RTP) in Mozambique, Lebanon, Palestine, Ethiopia and Tanzania with the collaboration of local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and government partners. The project started in 2020 and will continue until 2025, with funding by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The project's primary goals are to **improve the learning outcomes of children from Grade 1 to Grade 4** in terms of reading skills and socio-emotional learning, and to **improve the enrolment and retention of out-of-school (OOS) children with disabilities (CWD) and girls**. EQIE project goals are achieved by building the capacity of education staff, teachers, and parents to provide children with more frequent and higher-quality opportunities to practice reading skills (both inside and outside school) using child-centred, play-based and active learning methodologies, as well as by building the capacity of CSO partners to identify OOS girls and CWD and to develop follow-up and support systems.

This evaluation focuses on **Mozambique**, where EQIE is implemented in the Namacurra district of the Zambezia province, in the center of the country, and involves 22 schools. The project reached 12,718 children in 2021 and 12,321 children in 2022.

## Evaluation design and methods

This report summarizes evaluation findings through a comparison of baseline and midline **quantitative data**, as well as the analysis of midline **qualitative data**. The evaluation focused on project design and emerging results, assessing its **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability**.

The data collection involved 298 children, 40 teachers, and 20 headteachers across **20 schools**, as well as 15 focus group discussions (FGDs), ten key informant interviews (KIs), and ten classroom observations. Children were sampled among Grade 3 students in project schools. We collected quantitative data with children through the **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)** and the **International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA)** tools.

Importantly, changes cannot be attributed directly to the project due to the lack of a control group in the evaluation design. Qualitative data played an important role in understanding how the project is being implemented and how it is affecting participating communities.

## Key findings

### Relevance

EQIE was designed to be a **holistic intervention** that works on various elements contributing to learning, such as teaching quality and home and school learning environments, as well as the

inclusion of OOS girls and CWD in education. Overall, the project is quite complex, as it comprises **many different packages** belonging to different intervention areas.

Despite government commitments, academic achievement in Mozambique remains low, in particular for reading skills, due to external and structural factors. In addition, various types of barriers still prevent equal access to education for girls and CWD. The evaluation findings show that **EQIE has been carefully designed and is relevant** to the context of low educational quality (for instance, thanks to the focus on teaching practices) and inequality in access to education, in particular in the Namacurra district. EQIE's activities were tailored to the needs of its stakeholders and designed based on previous experience in the country, as well as extensive research carried out at baseline.

### Effectiveness

The baseline evaluation established values against which **effectiveness** was assessed at midline.

Quantitative and qualitative data highlighted **improvements compared to baseline in both reading and socio-emotional skills of children**. Children showed improvements in all the foundational skills related to reading<sup>1</sup>, but not in reading comprehension, suggesting that more time might be needed to reach proficiency. Given the very low level of reading skills found at baseline and the complex context in which the project operates (where, for example, only a minority of children are native Portuguese speakers), this can be considered an important result. Girls improved more than boys in reading, and **the gender gap in reading skills found at baseline appears to have closed**. As for the ISELA test, children showed improvements in the domains of relationships, stress management, collaboration, perseverance, and conflict resolution, while there were no significant improvements in the areas of empathy and self-concept. Some **positive spillovers** were found in the areas of self-confidence and communication, which were not directly measured by the ISELA tool.

There is mixed evidence on **teachers' practices in the classroom**, including knowledge of play-based learning (PBL) and its application to teaching literacy, as well as frequency of implementation. Teachers showcased **limited theoretical knowledge of PBL and its application to teaching literacy skills,<sup>2</sup> while reporting using it fairly often**. Quantitative and qualitative data suggests that there may have been some **improvements in the gender-responsiveness of teaching practices**, which might have contributed to closing the gender gap in reading skills. Overall, teachers benefit from **limited support** in general and from the project, in their profession, and in particular in the application of PBL to literacy teaching practices.

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<sup>1</sup> These include letter identification, phonemic awareness, familiar words reading, reading of a passage, and listening comprehension. For further details, please refer to [Section 3.2.1.1](#).

<sup>2</sup> More specifically, teachers displayed both limited theoretical knowledge of using PBL for teaching literacy and limited theoretical knowledge of teaching literacy in general.

Improvements were found in the **home and community learning environment**, with increased awareness about the importance of education for all children. There have been tangible improvements in **learning support provided to children by their caregivers** and in their participation in **initiatives supporting reading** (mainly reading clubs and reading centers), although the latter is far from being universal. The presence of **reading materials** at home (mostly textbooks and religious books) has also improved compared to baseline.

The learning environment was reported to be somewhat safer than it was at baseline, with improvements in the reported implementation of the schools' physical and emotional security plans. The **physical safety** of school infrastructure remains low, while there have been improvements in **emotional safety**, including the management of children's safety concerns. The children's feeling of safety around and at school, as well as violence by adults, remained stable compared to baseline. At the same time, there has been a worsening in reports of bullying, which could also be due to increased awareness of the issue. **Safety conditions in the home environment** were also stable compared to baseline.

**Since baseline, considerable numbers of OOS CWD and girls have been enrolled in school**, and there has been progress in community awareness of the importance of education for these two groups. A higher proportion of children enrolled in project schools were CWD, compared to the average of the province. Progress reports data from the first period of the project show that **virtually all of the CWD supported remained enrolled in school**, and a large majority was able to progress to the following academic year. However, CWD still face difficulties in school, mainly due to **insufficient teacher training and lack of adequate materials and infrastructure**. While only few surveyed children were reported to be CWD, a few others reported difficulties that might indicate the presence of a disability which has not been officially identified. Lastly, the project is not able to assist children with severe and/or multiple disabilities.

EQIE's implementation model, based on **close collaboration with local CSOs and government partners**, has been critical to its success, while supporting the capacity development of local organizations. Another crucial success factor was the involvement of local communities, particularly for the inclusion of OOS children. The project faced **external and internal challenges**, including Covid-19, natural disasters, and the wide variety of activities to be led with limited funding.

The project had to **adapt** to these unexpected circumstances, which on occasion significantly slowed down or modified its implementation. Adaptation was possible through several mechanisms that are embedded in its monitoring framework, such as outcome monitoring.

## Efficiency

**Efficiency** gains were achieved through close collaboration with **specialized partners** that had existing presence in the community. This was especially important in light of the focus on community awareness around disability, where RTP had limited prior experience.

## Sustainability

While project activities were seen as valuable by both implementation and government partners, likely barriers to **sustainability** remain. Especially for materials-intensive interventions, such as specific resources for CWD, additional funding would be needed to continue the activity. Other project components, such as inclusion committees and including PBL in existing teacher training initiatives, were deemed lower-resource and more likely to continue independently. In general, **the lack of resources is seen as one of the main risk factors for sustainability**, together with the possibility that implementation partners discontinue their activities. We did not find evidence of government or implementing partners' concrete funding or programming commitments to continue EQIE interventions.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

### Lessons Learned

**LL 1:** The EQIE project is trying to implement many activities with limited resources. It would be advisable to make a strategic decision on whether the core focus in the last year of implementation should be inclusion (enrollment and retention of CWD and/or OOS girls) or reading skills. While important results have been achieved in both areas, the final year of implementation could benefit from further targeted efforts in the priority area for the project.

**LL 2:** Findings highlighted the important need for learning materials in the communities involved in the project. The reported frustrations regarding the distribution of materials point to the need for a clear and transparent system that can manage the expectations and requirements of stakeholders.

**LL 3:** EQIE has correctly identified the needs of target communities, and its approach has proven promising in terms of effectiveness and operational efficiency, although it could benefit from targeted efforts in one of the main areas of implementation (see **LL 1**). Activities and outputs are consistent with the overall project outcomes and objectives. There have been considerable improvements compared to baseline in almost all domains, indicating that the project is on the right path to achieving its goals, although not all targets have been reached.

**LL 4:** The positive changes reported in the school and community environment may have played a role in enhancing the overall learning experience, confirming the importance of context for learning and socio-emotional outcomes. There is also evidence of promising results in gender-responsive teaching practices. This indicates the potential for similar interventions to make

substantial progress in addressing gender disparities in educational outcomes. On the other hand, the limited provision of coaching and mentoring may have hindered implementation.

**LL 5:** Due to the linguistic and educational context of Mozambique, it is not surprising that Portuguese native speakers progress more and/or faster than non-native ones when target teaching practices are introduced in an environment where Portuguese is the language of instruction. This points to the need to consider this additional source of inequality.

**LL 6:** Forming inclusion committees proved to be a pivotal element for the inclusion of OOS CWD and girls. This points to the importance of dedicated groups to focus on inclusivity and the need to cooperate with and empower local communities.

**LL 7:** Partnerships were instrumental to the project's success. Working with local partners with strong community presence enabled RTP to work on a relatively new area – inclusive education – and run successful awareness-raising campaigns. At the same time, local partners reported their strong appreciation for the capacity-building activities provided by RTP. These initiatives have led to significant improvements in their performances. However, RTP faced some challenges related to mismanagement and to the limited organizational capacity of one of the implementation partners.

**LL 8:** The limited amount of data available on CWD and OOS girls due to the evaluation design prevented a more comprehensive assessment of their learning experience once enrolled in school. Although the focus of the project is on enrolment and retention of these children, understanding their experience in school would be important to inform future interventions.

**LL 9:** The ambiguity in the formulation of some questions in the baseline tools posed difficulties in data analysis, pointing to the importance of clear and precise questionnaires. Survey designs that included an "other" option sometimes failed to capture the full spectrum of experiences or practices, leading to incomplete data. The reliance on self-reported data by teachers and headteachers also emerged as a challenge, as it could misrepresent reality. There is instead a need for more objective measures of the project's outcomes on teacher behaviours, which can then be used to analyze mechanisms behind observed results.

**LL 10:** The high threshold set for asking a sufficient number of reading comprehension questions at baseline resulted in limited insights into students' reading skills.<sup>3</sup> This highlighted the need for progress indicators tailored to the context where each intervention takes place.

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<sup>3</sup> The EGRA reading comprehension task is structured so that children are asked a different number of questions depending on the point they reach in the passage. Children in our sample were reading quite slowly, which prevented them from being asked a number of reading comprehension questions that is sufficient to assess their level of comprehension.

**LL 11:** The ISELA tool did not capture all of children's improvements in SEL skills, as highlighted by qualitative data. This confirms the importance of triangulating quantitative and qualitative data to provide the most comprehensive possible picture of progress made. It also points to the need of carefully tailoring quantitative data collection tools to measure domains that may be affected by the intervention.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** If the project is aiming to focus on further strengthening reading outcomes in its final phases, teachers will require more support.<sup>4</sup> This can include refresher training, coaching and mentoring and regular CoPs. Areas where teachers require additional support include: i) classroom management; ii) playful lesson planning and alignment of games to the curriculum objectives; iii) using PBL for behavioural management; and iv) inclusive learning. Evidence from classroom observation and EGRA tests also points to the need for a particular focus on playful reading methods. An investment in these key areas in the remaining year of implementation is advised to foster improvements in reading comprehension not yet observed in the evaluation. Focusing on reading outcomes could also prove beneficial for increasing evidence on the benefits of PBL towards reading – an area that the final evaluation could further explore.

**Recommendation 2:** For the remaining part of the EQIE project, it is recommended to enhance communication strategies around the distribution of materials, if this is planned. This involves providing clear information on the recipients, the criteria for distribution, and the process involved. Stakeholders should be informed about further distributions and if there is a plan to include others in the future. Providing further information can help manage expectations and foster a sense of transparency and fairness. Moreover, since this is an expensive activity, it should be considered whether it would be preferable to focus on teacher training instead, particularly in light of **Recommendation 1**.

**Recommendation 3:** For the final year of implementation, we recommend focusing on the targets that have not yet been reached, working closely with partners to achieve gains in those areas which are further behind, such as support provided to teachers and supplemental reading activities. It is also fundamental that indicators and targets for future projects are contextualized and set taking into account the initial conditions in the areas of implementation, so that they are both realistic and achievable.

**Recommendation 4:** For refresher training and future interventions, we recommend continuing to include gender-sensitivity training in the packages offered to teachers, and to assess whether this kind of training can be included in other projects or contexts where gender differences

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<sup>4</sup> This includes teachers in both urban/suburban and rural areas.

represent a significant challenge. In doing so, it is fundamental to maintain a focus on gender balance, and to frequently assess gender dynamics and gender differences in learning, adjusting activities to new emerging trends and needs.

**Recommendation 5:** To prevent further widening the gap between native and non-native speakers of Portuguese, and to avoid creating one in future projects, it would be recommendable to design literacy instruction activities tailored to the needs of second-language learners, aiming to maximize their exposure to the Portuguese language. For the final year of the project, we recommend considering if it would be feasible to tweak existing materials and provide additional support to learners who do not speak Portuguese in the home.

**Recommendation 6:** To continue delivering on the inclusion component of the program in the last year of implementation and beyond, we recommend strengthening community engagement and inclusion committees. These supported the delivery of important results for both CWD and OOS girls, and it would be advisable to plan ahead to strengthen their prospects for sustainability. This could include discussions with partners on potential incentive mechanisms for committee members, as well as increasing linkages with more established school structures, such as School Councils.

**Recommendation 7:** To enhance collaboration with local partners, we suggest continuing capacity-building activities for the remaining part of EQIE. Focus areas for improvement include additional training on CWD support and refresher sessions. Implementing a regular needs assessment and feedback collection process from partners can help tailor training and enhance effectiveness. For future interventions, we recommend that RTP thoroughly assess potential partners' capacities and systems, prioritizing capacity building at the project's outset. This proactive approach will help mitigate challenges during implementation.

**Recommendation 8:** If the project aims to strengthen its inclusion component, then the endline evaluation should focus on collecting data on CWD and OOS girls in a more systematic manner. In this case, we would recommend a qualitative study design with a focus on CWD, due to limited evidence to date (see [Annex 2](#)).

**Recommendation 9.1:** To strengthen the validity of the data on teaching practices, it is essential to rely more on classroom observations in the final stages of the project, to collect more objective insights than self-reported measures. Including a larger sample of classroom observations, in more diversified locations, would be advisable. A sufficiently large sample, coupled with a targeted classroom observation tool, would allow to investigate the effectiveness of the teacher training and of specific practices, highlighting areas for improvement. To do so, it is also essential that data can be triangulated with those from teacher surveys.

**Recommendation 9.2:** When surveys include an "other" response option, it is critical to allow respondents to specify their answers. However, this should be applied selectively to avoid excessively lengthening the survey. Determining which questions require this level of detail is important for gathering comprehensive data without burdening respondents.

**Recommendation 10:** Future evaluations employing EGRA assessments should contextualize the thresholds set for reading skills assessments. These benchmarks should be tailored to the specific literacy levels and language proficiencies of the student population to ensure that they yield meaningful and actionable insights.

**Recommendation 11:** We recommend continuing to include in-depth qualitative data collection into the evaluation of projects that directly target or might have an impact on socio-emotional skills. For the endline evaluation of EQIE, we suggest including a few additional items in the learner assessment that allow to quantitatively measure skills not currently included in the ISELA, such as communication skills and self-confidence.

# Introduction

The report is structured in four sections. **Section 0** provides an overview of the project's background, while **Section 2** focuses on the high-level evaluation methodology. **Section 3** presents the evaluation findings on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. **Section 4** concludes and dives into lessons learned and recommendations from the evaluation.

Annexes include the detailed evaluation methodology (**Annex 1**), thematic insights on disability and gender (**Annex 2**), an overview and review of the project's Theory of Change (**Annex 3**), the Evaluation and Analysis and Research frameworks, where all project indicators are reported (**Annex 4**), the respondent list (**Annex 5**) and the bibliography (**Annex 6**).

## 1 Project Background

### 1.1 Background and Context

Right To Play (RTP) is a global organization committed to improving the lives of children and youth affected by conflict, disease and poverty. Established in 2000, RTP has pioneered a play-based approach to learning and child development that focuses on quality education, life skills, health, gender equality, child protection (CP) and building peaceful communities. RTP began working in Mozambique in 2002 and is active in the Maputo, Zambezia, Sofala, Manica, and Gaza provinces, as well as Maputo City.

RTP's mission is to support children through play-based methods, leveraging the power of play to improve their lives. Today, the work of RTP revolves around three different primary areas<sup>5</sup>:

1. **Education, using play to improve learning outcomes.** Right to Play usually develops activities to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills, mainly targeting primary-school pupils, but also teenagers, youth or children in pre-primary education.
2. **Gender-sensitive programming.** Right to Play initiatives apply a gender-sensitive approach through training, implementation, and advocacy sessions. Some projects are more directly gender-focused and include behavioural change on gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriage as the explicit project goal.
3. **Health, well-being, and PSS.** This is a newer area for the organization, which has more long-standing experience in the education sector. The projects in health range from sexual and reproductive health, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, to psychosocial support (PSS).

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<sup>5</sup> For more detailed information, see the RTP website [here](#).

Enhancing Quality and Inclusive Education (EQIE) is a five-year education program (2020-2024), financed by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and implemented by RTP and various local partners. In Mozambique, its primary goal is to enhance the learning outcomes of both boys and girls, with a specific focus on improving minimum proficiency levels in reading for students in lower primary Grades 1-4, as well as increasing the retention rates of out-of-school (OOS) girls and children with disabilities (CWD). The program implements tailored and context-specific intervention strategies in Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Palestine, and Tanzania. This report includes findings from the Midline Evaluation in Mozambique.<sup>6</sup>

EQIE's goals are achieved by building the capacity of education staff, teachers, and parents to provide children with more frequent and higher-quality opportunities to practice reading skills (both inside and outside school) using child-centred, play-based and active learning methodologies. RTP is also building the capacity of Civil Society Organization (CSO) partners to identify OOS girls and CWD and to develop follow-up and support systems. The project is implemented in a total of 196 schools, reaching a total of 97,661 children across its five countries of implementation. In Mozambique, the project is implemented in 22 schools in the district of Namacurra, Zambezia province. It reached 12,718 children in 2021 and 12,321 children in 2022.<sup>7</sup>

The EQIE intervention in Mozambique is possible thanks to long-term funding from NORAD. Although more countries were previously included in EQIE's predecessor, the Enhancing Quality Education through the Power of Play Program (PAQE/TALOOM)<sup>8</sup>, the focus has now shifted to fewer countries to allocate more resources per country and have a stronger focus on local implementation partners.

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<sup>6</sup> The evaluation was initially designed to focus on EQIE interventions in three countries: Lebanon, Mozambique, and Palestine. Due to the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, this Midline Evaluation will not cover project implementation in Palestine, while a different timeline and approach were developed to adapt to Lebanon's emergency context.

<sup>7</sup> No children were reached by the project in 2020 due to school closures related to Covid-19. For details on the effects of Covid-19 on education in Mozambique and on project activities, see [Sections 3.1.1, 3.2.5, and 3.2.6](#).

<sup>8</sup> For further information on the PAQE program, please see [here](#).

## 2 Evaluation Methodology

This Midline Evaluation is a follow-on from the 2021 baseline. The report explores project results to date and identify recommendations for the final year of implementation.

### 2.1 Overview of Evaluation Design

Learn More was contracted together with its data collection partner, Co-Profit, to lead the Midline Evaluation. The evaluation focuses on four of the criteria provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC)<sup>9</sup>, namely:

- + Relevance – The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to participants, country, and partner needs, policies, and priorities.
- + Effectiveness – The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.
- + Efficiency – The extent to which the intervention was well-managed.
- + Sustainability – The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.

This Midline Evaluation identifies the contribution of EQIE activities to the observed outcomes of interest (reading and socio-emotional skills, school enrollment of CWD and OOS girls) through triangulation of multiple data sources. Its mixed-methods approach includes a large-scale survey for children, combining the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA), a survey for teachers, and one for headteachers. We worked with the project team to ensure comparability of the assessments with baseline tools, and followed a similar approach to the extent possible. Quantitative data collection with children was complemented by in-depth qualitative research with a small sub-sample of stakeholders, including focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and classroom observations. For details on quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, see [Section 1.2 of Annex 1](#). For a complete list of the evaluation questions, as well as data sources used to answer each of them, see [Annex 4](#).

As agreed with RTP, qualitative and quantitative data collection was carried out only with stakeholders in project areas, because of challenges in ensuring a robust control group at baseline. We thus pivoted to a cross-sectional study, comparing data collected with Grade 3 children with baseline data of Grade 4 children. The absence of a control group implies that

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<sup>9</sup> For further information, please refer to the OECD DAC webpage [here](#).

there is no counterfactual scenario to which data from project participants can be compared. This means we are not able to attribute any observed changes to the project directly.

The strong focus on qualitative data collection allowed us to investigate the contribution of the EQIE project through interviews with a wide range of stakeholders. This approach enabled us to explore pathways to change and process evaluation questions. Upon discussions with the RTP team, we tweaked and further adapted the evaluation approach outlined in the proposal, to ensure comparability of data with the baseline report, and to adequately reflect learning priorities for RTP and its partners in Mozambique.<sup>10</sup> Further details on the study design and its limitations are provided in [Section 1.3](#) of [Annex 1](#).

### **2.1.1 Sampling Approach**

Quantitative data was collected from a total of 298 Grade 3 children (assessment including administration of EGRA and ISELA), 40 teachers (teacher survey), and 20 headteachers (headteacher survey) in 20 schools. To triangulate data about learning outcomes, the sample of teachers prioritized the inclusion of teachers of the surveyed children. We collected qualitative data through 15 FGDs with children, teachers, and caregivers, ten KIIs with implementation partners, government partners, and RTP staff, and ten classroom observations. Qualitative data collection with children, caregivers, and teachers was conducted in a subset of the schools involved in the quantitative data collection. The sample was selected to be representative of different locations (urban/rural) and relatively easy to access for the data collection team.

### **2.1.2 Quantitative Data Collection Tools**

Below we describe the main features of the tools used to collect quantitative data. Quantitative data was collected using SurveyCTO and analyzed using STATA.

#### **2.1.2.1 Learner assessment**

The survey for children included a set of questions on their background, reading materials available at home, and their activities outside school hours. These questions were followed by the EGRA and ISELA assessments described below. Importantly, because of the limited time frame for data collection, and consistently with baseline, it was not possible to have

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<sup>10</sup> The proposal initially suggested a longitudinal design, where children sampled at baseline would be traced and followed up with over time. Although it was possible to trace 85% of the children, the absence of a control group and of 60% of traced children when data was collected made a longitudinal study unfeasible. In absence of a control group, it would not be possible to infer whether progress made in reading between Grade 1 and Grade 3 is due to the project itself, or is a consequence of the natural growth process of children. The inability to collect longitudinal data from a large number of children also prevents any other kind of longitudinal comparison.

enumerators conduct some of the assessments in pairs. Accordingly, it was not possible to compute the inter-rater reliability rate for the assessment.<sup>11</sup>

A separate tool, the Life Skills and Reading Teacher Interview for Children with Disabilities, was available for cases when children with a severe disability were present in the classroom and unable to take part in the learner assessment directly, but was not used.<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.1.2.2 The Early Grade Reading Assessment

The EGRA is a widely recognized tool designed to measure the fundamental skills necessary for literacy development in the early grades of schooling, typically from Grade 1 to Grade 4. EGRA aims to assess various components of reading proficiency including letter names, letter sound recognition, familiar word reading, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension.<sup>13</sup> For the Midline Evaluation, we used the same tool (including the same stimuli) used at baseline with Grade 4 students, to maximize the comparability of results.<sup>14</sup> The tool was tailored at baseline to the specific linguistic and cultural context of Mozambique. The tool employed for the evaluation differs from standard EGRA across some characteristics in each of the tasks, including auto-stop rules, stimuli format, and others (please see the [Inception Report](#) for further details). Further details on the various tasks are provided in [Section 3.2.1](#).

#### 2.1.2.3 The International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment

The ISELA is a performance-based tool designed to assess the development of self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, and conflict resolution in children between six and twelve years old in low-resource and crisis contexts.<sup>15</sup> For this evaluation, we used the same tool, including the same stimuli, used for the baseline evaluation. The RTP Mozambique Country Office chose the ISELA indicators developed and validated by [D'Sa and Krupar \(2021\)](#) in Iraq (relationships, stress management, collaboration, empathy, perseverance, conflict management, self-concept).

Although there is no set standard, as ISELA needs to be deeply adapted to context, it is customary to compute scores by domain (such as stress management and perseverance) using items that have been specifically designed to measure that domain. The methodology adopted

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<sup>11</sup> Inter-rater reliability is the degree of agreement among independent observers who assess the same phenomenon. In this context, it would have been relevant to assess the reliability of ISELA data.

<sup>12</sup> The survey was identical to that prepared for the baseline evaluation. It included questions on child background, disability type and severity, life skills and coping mechanisms, and reading skills.

<sup>13</sup> For more details, see [here](#).

<sup>14</sup> The only change made to the tool has been expanding available options for one of the questions. See the [Inception Report](#) for further details.

<sup>15</sup> For more details, see [here](#).

in Iraq is specific to that context, and uses more items for some sub-indexes than it is customary to do. Further analyses conducted by the Consultancy's Assessment Specialist did not validate this approach to be used with our Mozambique data, as the context is profoundly different (for example, an item that measures an aspect of stress management in Iraq does not necessarily measure stress management equally well in Mozambique).<sup>16</sup>

Following discussions with the RTP team, ISELA scores were computed with a different methodology with respect both to baseline and to our proposed approach.<sup>17</sup> In particular, there were changes in the number of indexes we calculated (with the addition of the relationships index), in the items included in some of the indexes, and in the way in which some indexes were computed. Overall, only the indexes for self-concept and collaboration have not been modified at all. Further details on the skills measured by each indicator are provided in [Section 3.2.1.2](#).

#### 2.1.2.4 Teachers and Headteachers Surveys

To collect data on teachers and headteachers, we administered two specific surveys that closely follow those used at baseline. The surveys were provided by RTP and were adapted to allow for a slightly shorter, streamlined, and clearer data collection process.

The survey for teachers included questions on professional background, training and support received by RTP on PBL, teaching practices (with a focus on PBL and reading), children's behaviour and classroom management, learning environment, inclusion of girls and CWD, and teacher wellbeing. The survey was slightly modified with respect to the one used during the baseline evaluation, without compromising comparability.<sup>18</sup>

The survey for headteachers included questions on professional background, school characteristics (including gender ratio and dropout trends), training and support provided by RTP on play-based methodologies, implementation of activities focused on reading, teaching

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<sup>16</sup> For each domain, Cronbach's alpha was also computed to give a sense of the score's reliability, based on the internal consistency of the items therein included. Cronbach's alpha is a number between 0 and 1, measuring to what extent items included in each sub-index measure the same concept. This measure, although useful, should be interpreted with caution, given that one of its assumptions was violated (since some of the items were asked conditional on the children's answers to previous items), and that it is a fairly conservative measure of consistency. ISELA sub-indexes correspond to Cronbach's alpha values generally considered acceptable (0.7 and above), with the exception of the indexes for perseverance (0.60, deemed questionable) and collaboration (0.33, very low).

<sup>17</sup> Scores were computed according to the instructions contained in the document *Steps for ISELA Data Cleaning and Basic Analysis* shared by RTP.

<sup>18</sup> We achieved this by removing a group of questions on teachers' beliefs, which did not provide much additional information while lengthening response times considerably. Moreover, one question on attitudes about reading was moved to be asked after a question on knowledge about reading, and one question clarifying the meaning of leadership roles was added. Finally, we added some questions to collect teachers' feedback about the project.

methods, gender differences in learning, inclusion of CWD, headteacher wellbeing and safety measures implemented in the school. The survey used for the baseline evaluation was slightly modified, removing questions on teacher classroom practices and safety issues in the school. Information on the former was collected from both teacher surveys and classroom observations, while the latter was gathered during classroom observations.

Section 1.2 of Annex 1 further details the sampling approach for primary data collection, as well as changes to the original plan and qualitative data collection tools used. Further considerations on sampling and its limitations, as well as on the calculation of the project indicators of the Evaluation and Research Framework (see Annex 4), are reported in Section 1.3 of Annex 1.

## 2.2 Data Collection

Data collection took place in the Namacurra district, in the same 20 schools included in the baseline sample. This was complemented by remote interviews and extensive desk research, as described in Section 2.1 above. Enumerators who collected data in person received a five-day, in-person training immediately before the beginning of the data collection. Data collection took place between the third week of October and the third week of November.<sup>19</sup> Detailed descriptions of the training and fieldwork activities are provided, respectively, in the Data Collector Training Report in the Fieldwork Completion Report.

For details about project and fieldwork management, please see Section 3 of the Inception Report.

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<sup>19</sup> Data collection in person took place over the course of ten working days, between October 17 and November 2 2023, due to the subsequent school closure for final examinations. Online data collection continued until the third week of November.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Relevance

*This criterion aims to assess how EQIE's goals and implementation methods are aligned with participants' and stakeholders' needs. It investigates to what extent project stakeholders view the intervention as useful and valuable.*

The box below summarizes the main findings of this section. We will follow the same structure in [Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4](#).

#### + Socio-economic and educational context

EQIE has proven relevant to the context of low educational quality and inequality of access to education in Mozambique, and in particular in the Namacurra district of Zambezia. Despite institutional commitment, academic achievement remains low, in particular in reading skills, due to external and structural factors. Various types of barriers still prevent equal access to education for girls and CWD.

#### + EQIE design

EQIE was designed to be a holistic intervention that works on various elements contributing to learning, such as teaching quality, home and school learning environments, and inclusive education for OOS girls and CWD. Overall, the project is quite complex, as it comprises many different packages in various intervention areas.

#### + Relevance of different project packages to different users

Project users, as well as other stakeholders, reported all intervention packages to be relevant.

### 3.1.1 Socio-Economic and Educational Context

#### 3.1.1.1 EQIE in Context

This section outlines desk-review findings on the socio-economic and educational environment of Mozambique and Zambezia. It also includes findings on the characteristics of the communities where EQIE is implemented, as reported by project stakeholders. The yellow boxes highlight contextual findings on communities reached by EQIE. Demographic insights on our sample are presented in [Section 3.1.1.2](#) below.

#### *Socio-economic Context*

Mozambique is a sub-Saharan African country with a population of about 34 million people, among whom 43% are under the age of 14 ([UNFPA, 2023](#)). It has one of the lowest Human Development Indexes in the world, ranking 185<sup>th</sup> out of 191 countries ([UNDP, 2021](#)). The country was subject to Portuguese colonial rule from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to 1975. At the time of independence, 93% of the population was illiterate ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)). To this day, 42 different languages are spoken in the country, including indigenous Bantu languages such as

Chuabo ([Ethnologue, n.d.](#)), which is spoken in the Namacurra district, while Portuguese is the mother tongue for 17% of the population (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística – INE, 2019*).

About 19% of the Mozambican population lives in Zambezia. The province has higher rates of child poverty than the national averages, both in terms of multidimensional poverty and monetary poverty.<sup>20</sup>

EQIE implementation partners and RTP staff members reported that most families reached by the project live in extreme poverty, relying on agriculture and casual jobs. Caregivers explained that some families had to move because of the lack of food, and 40% of children reported to have been hungry because of the lack of food. Surveyed children scored, on average, 3.5 points out of nine in the socio-economic scale (SES), which is based on household asset ownership.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, children who attended schools in urban and suburban areas had significantly higher SES scores. While, in general, the score has increased slightly from baseline (when it was measured as 3.1), it remains quite low.<sup>22</sup>

Several stakeholders reported that many children live with only one parent or with another caregiver, and 35% of surveyed children reported having a family member who had been away from home for six or more months. Implementation partners and RTP staff members explained that some parents, fathers in particular, left the house to find work elsewhere. There were also several reports of orphaned children. Both girls and boys reported in the quantitative assessment and in FGDs that they frequently carry out household chores. Several of them also had to work.<sup>23</sup> Working was also cited by most headteachers (80%) as the main reason for school dropout for both girls and boys. Similarly, reasons indicated by children for peers in their school not going to school include farming (21%), working (19%), caring for younger siblings (8%), and doing other chores at home (13%).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Multidimensional poverty refers to the dimensions of housing, participation, family, nutrition, WASH, health, education, and child labor ([UNICEF, 2020](#)). In Zambezia, 59% of children live in multidimensional poverty (46% in Mozambique), and 60% live in monetary poverty (49% in Mozambique).

<sup>21</sup> The SES is captured by a score between 0 and 9, depending on the number of assets owned by a household from a predefined list (constructed at baseline). In particular, 83% of sampled households had a toilet; 71% had a mobile phone, but only 39% had electricity; 43% had a radio, 24% had a TV; 54% had a bike, 20% had a motorbike, 2% had a car.

<sup>22</sup> Most surveyed children reported living in houses made of bricks (39%), mud (31%), or cement (15%), with roofs made of iron sheets (51%) or straw/reed (47%), and floors made of mud (62%) or cement (23%).

<sup>23</sup> Answers to the quantitative survey highlighted that 93% of children did chores in the morning, 76% did them in the afternoon, and 19% did them in the evening, while 35% had had to work to support their family. During FGDs, children reported that their friends often worked inside and outside the home, for example washing dishes, sweeping, and selling various types of objects.

<sup>24</sup> Very few children (2%) mentioned distance from school. Reported reasons were similar for peers in the children's community (namely, those who lived in the same communities as the surveyed children but did not attend the same school as them).

Half of the population in Zambezia is illiterate, including 64% of women and 34% of men ([INE, 2017a](#)), which is ten percentage points (p.p.) above the national average ([INE, 2017b](#)). Only 38% of the population is able to speak Portuguese ([INE, 2017c](#)).

In this study sample, Portuguese was the main language spoken at home for 30% of surveyed children, while Chuabo was the main language for 68% of them.

### *Government Education Policy and Plans*

The government of Mozambique spends 7% of its GDP on education, representing 19% of total government expenditure, which is above the average expenditure both of Sub-Saharan countries and low-income countries ([UIS, 2021a](#); [UIS, 2021b](#)).<sup>25</sup> The ministry responsible for education policy is the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH), whereas school curricula and programs are managed by the National Institute for Educational Development (*Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação*, INDE). MINEDH's educational policy is implemented at the provincial level by eleven Provincial Education Directorates. Moreover, District Education Offices identify educational needs in local communities ([Park, 2017](#)). Another important institution is the Pedagogical Influence Zone (*Zona de Influência Pedagógica*, ZIP), a pedagogical support body that gathers a group of few schools from basic and/or secondary education located close to each other, aiming at the pedagogical improvement of their respective teachers.

One of the government's priorities, included in its 2020-2024 plan, is the development of human capital, under which are the strategic objectives of promoting an inclusive, efficient, and effective education system and gender equality and equity ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)).

In 2017, a National Reading and Writing Action Plan was established to foster a positive environment for reading and writing among students ([MINEDH, 2017](#)). This plan recognizes the significance of reading and writing in education and focuses on promoting these behaviours in schools, homes, communities, and libraries. Implementation has been gradual, with some positive developments ([UNESCO, 2023](#)).

The country has also adopted a strategy for the inclusive education and development of CWD for 2020-2029, emphasizing the need for a community-based approach and for professional training of educators ([MINDEH, 2020b](#)). While inclusivity is a policy target, one of EQIE's implementation partners noted that there are important implementation gaps. For further details on inclusive education and CWD's experiences, refer to [Section 3.2.4](#) and [Annex 2](#).

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<sup>25</sup> Sub-Saharan countries spend on average 3.5% of their GDP on education, representing 15.1% of total government expenditure, while low-income countries spend on average 3.9% of their GDP, representing 15.7% of total government expenditure.

The low number of native Portuguese speakers poses an important challenge to the education system, which uses Portuguese as the language of instruction. Following several years of experimentation (with a first pilot in 2000), bilingual education is implemented in 109 districts across all provinces, and its expansion is part of the government's plans to guarantee quality education ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)).

### *Learning Outcomes*

Despite institutional commitment, the education sector faces many challenges, and academic achievement remains low, even by regional standards ([Bassi et al., 2019](#)).

Pre-primary education has very limited reach (especially in rural areas), with just 3.5% of children of pre-school age enrolled in the pre-primary educational system ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)).

In the EQIE sample, 16% of surveyed children reported having attended kindergarten (*escolinha*), 77% of whom were from urban and suburban schools.

In 2016, only 4.9% of Mozambican students in Grade 3 had acquired literacy competencies adequate to their level, which represents a worsening with respect to the 6.3% recorded in 2013 ([UNESCO, 2023](#)).<sup>26</sup> A 2017 EGRA conducted in the provinces of Zambezia and Nampula found that only 0.7% of the assessed Grade 3 students qualified as readers with comprehension (RWC), with 48-62% not being able to read any word of a grade-appropriate text ([USAID, 2018](#)).<sup>27</sup> In addition, the devastating impacts on education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic led to a worsening in basic literacy skills. Schools in Mozambique were fully closed for 22 weeks and partially closed for the remaining 31 weeks of 2020, resulting in the loss of an entire school year ([UIS, 2022](#)). Data from the nationally representative Longitudinal Assessment of School Dropout (ALDE) showed that children in Grades 3 and 4 across the country performed significantly worse in letter reading in 2021 compared to 2019 ([UNICEF, 2023](#)). In 2021, schools reopened, but class sizes remained smaller throughout the year, with 25-30 children per classroom. To accommodate the resulting higher number of classes, the length and number of school days per week were reduced ([EQIE Progress Report, 2021](#)).

In addition to a generalized low academic achievement, there are large gaps between girls and boys, between students in rural areas and those in urban areas, and between students in the center and north of the country with respect to the south. In all cases, the former performed worse than the latter ([Bassi et al., 2019](#)). Similar results on gender were reported

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<sup>26</sup> These figures may be overestimated due to student absenteeism ([Van der Berg et al., 2017](#)).

<sup>27</sup> Note that the level of difficulty might vary between different EGRA tests, which might not be equivalent. Therefore, it is not advisable to quantitatively compare the scores of different EGRA tests.

in Zambezia by one study ([USAID, 2018](#)) and in EQIE's baseline, while another study in the province found a gender gap only in some domains ([USAID, 2013](#)).

### *Education Quality and School Infrastructure*

The completion rate for primary education is 42%, with children taking on average twice the expected time to complete this level ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)).<sup>28</sup> In Zambezia, 3-5% of students repeat a year, while another 3% of students drop out every year from grade 1 to grade 4 ([MINEDH, 2022a](#)).

In the EQIE sample, surveyed children were on average 9.7 years old, with 50% older than 10 years old and only 28% aged seven or eight, which is the correct age for Grade 3. This suggests a high incidence of late entry and/or grade repetition, which is confirmed by the fact that 32% of children reported having repeated at least one grade.

The longer duration of primary education due to repetition, together with rapid population growth, causes increased economic strain for families and contributes to high pupil/teacher ratios and high dropout rates in primary education, which further worsens the quality of education ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)).

One EQIE project teacher confirmed that the large number of students in the classroom limits their ability to teach reading skills.

Large age ranges in the classroom are also likely to pose significant instructional and management challenges ([UNICEF, 2020](#)). Zambezia has the third-highest pupil/class ratio in the country (55) and the second-highest pupil/teacher ratio, above 70 ([MINEDH, 2022a](#)).<sup>29</sup>

Surveyed teachers in the EQIE sample reported teaching, on average, 47 students each, with 25% teaching 37 students or less, and ranging from 25 to 76. Similarly, classes included in classroom observations comprised, on average, 47 students each, ranging from 32 to 60.

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<sup>28</sup> The primary school completion rate is calculated by dividing the number of new entrants in the last grade of primary education, regardless of age, by the population at the entrance age for the last grade of primary education. This measure is only partly informative in Mozambique, where late enrolment and grade retention are very common. Taking the latter into account, it is estimated that 68% of children ultimately complete primary school ([UNESCO, 2023](#)).

<sup>29</sup> The pupil/class ratio represents the average number of students per class ([UNESCO, n.d.](#)), while the pupil/teacher ratio represents the average number of students taught by a teacher ([UNESCO, n.d.](#)). The former is an indicator of the learning environment conditions, while the latter is an indicator of resources invested in education. In this context, a pupil/teacher ratio higher than the pupil/class ratio may indicate that teachers are likely to teach more than one class (for instance, one class in each of the two shifts).

As mentioned above, another factor affecting performance is that primary education is often taught in a language unfamiliar to many children, especially in rural areas ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)).

In the EQIE sample, 68% of surveyed teachers reported speaking the language of all students, 25% could speak the language of a majority of students but had difficulties with some, and 7% had difficulties in communicating with many students. One RTP staff member highlighted that it is not uncommon for teachers to be transferred to areas whose language they do not speak.

The low quality of education is also partly due to some teachers' limited skills<sup>30</sup>, stemming from inadequate training programs and insufficient pedagogical supervision and support ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)). The second round of the Service Delivery Indicators Survey (SDI) found that primary school teachers in the center of the country mastered only around 45% of the Portuguese content they were supposed to teach, and training struggled to fill these gaps ([Bassi et al., 2019](#)). There is also a significant issue of teacher absenteeism, with 28.4% of teachers being absent from school during unannounced visits ([Bassi et al., 2019](#)).

One RTP staff member reported that the main reason for teacher absenteeism is the lack of an adequate salary.

Absenteeism is an issue that affects students even more strongly, with 46% of students being absent during unannounced visits ([Bassi et al., 2019](#)).

Several children participating in the EQIE project reported in FGDs that some of their friends do not always attend school because they do not want to and prefer to play. Caregivers explained that some parents do not have time to check on their children, and might think that they are in school, while they are playing at home or working. Other reasons for not attending school highlighted by teachers and caregivers were lack of food or clothing and child labour (especially during the summer season).

Other factors affecting the pupil/class and pupil/teacher ratios are the shortage of teachers and the lack of classrooms. The former is due to both budget constraints and the lack of qualified individuals who can enter the profession ([Van der Berg et al., 2017](#)). The latter is strongly impacted by natural disasters, to which Mozambique is prone. To mention only the most recent ones, Cyclone Gombe struck the provinces of Zambezia, Nampula and Sofala in March 2022, affecting 1,458 classrooms and 143,904 students ([UNICEF, 2022](#)). The following year, between February and March, Cyclone Freddy struck the Zambezia and Inhambane provinces, resulting in the destruction of 3,754 classrooms and affecting almost 400,000 students ([UNICEF, 2023](#)). School infrastructure in the province also suffered greatly after the

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<sup>30</sup> This issue might have been exacerbated by the need to hire large numbers of teachers following the expansion of access to education ([Van der Berg et al., 2017](#)).

civil war following independence, where almost 90% of schools were closed or destroyed, from which it never fully recovered ([Bonilla et al., 2019](#)).

Several teachers and caregivers participating in the EQIE FGDs reported classes being held under trees, with children sitting on the ground, and lacking basic Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities such as water wells. These conditions have worsened following Cyclone Freddy: caregivers reported that the cyclone destroyed the few school materials that were available, including notebooks and uniforms.<sup>31</sup> Another consequence of the cyclone, reported by one caregiver, is that many documents have been lost, affecting school enrollment heavily, since it is not possible to enroll in school without them. Moreover, for classes that do not have a roof, classes are suspended during rainy days and especially during the rainy season. In 2022, three weeks of implementation were lost on average during the rainy season in EQIE schools, with classrooms built from local materials being most affected. Ten classrooms in six EQIE schools were partially damaged or destroyed by Cyclone Gombe, affecting about 1,777 children who continued their education outdoors (EQIE Progress Report, 2022).

### *Girls' Education and Its Challenges*

Despite substantial progress, girls are still at a disadvantage in education across the country. In fact, 94 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled in primary school ([World Bank, 2021](#)), but over half drop out before completing 5<sup>th</sup> grade ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)). This jointly results in the number of primary school age girls who are out of school surpassing that of boys by 5,3 million ([Our World in Data, 2019](#)). School dropout is particularly high among girls due to cultural norms and gender roles, with early pregnancy and forced marriage being major reasons ([MINEDH, 2020a](#)). In Zambia, 48% of students in Grades 1 to 4 are girls, and 47% of those who drop out of school in Grades 1 to 4 are girls, which is in line with national trends ([MINEDH, 2022b](#)). In general, factors that affect the school enrollment and attendance of both boys and girls are financial costs, opportunity costs (including working in or outside the house), inadequate access to basic necessities, distance from school, danger on the way to school and in school<sup>32</sup>, and caregivers' expectations and skepticism about the benefits of education. All these barriers affect girls more strongly ([Roby et al., 2009](#); [UNICEF, 2022](#)). For instance, although GBV in and around schools impacts both boys and girls, girls face a higher risk of sexual violence, harassment, and abuse. This includes sexual violence from teachers. Such violence mirrors deeper societal norms and power imbalances, making girls more vulnerable and less likely to report incidents ([National Foundation for Educational Research, 2018](#)). Furthermore, many of these factors are correlated to one another. For example, some of the reasons why girls get married early are so that families have one less child to feed and to receive a bride price. This,

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<sup>31</sup> For more details on the available teaching and learning materials, see [Section 3.2.2](#).

<sup>32</sup> Dangers mentioned by [Roby et al. \(2009\)](#) include sexual or physical assault and learning about prostitution.

in turn, fosters the belief that educating a girl is not too useful, as she will not be able to help her family after she is married ([Roby et al., 2009](#)).

One EQIE implementation partner confirmed that the dropout of girls was a serious concern in the district of Namacurra, especially after they reached a certain age, because of a lack of decent school infrastructure and materials. One caregiver confirmed that the lack of adequate WASH facilities impacted negatively on older girls' school attendance. Moreover, caregivers reported that girls faced a disproportionate house chores burden with respect to boys, which increased as they grew older, as confirmed by surveyed children<sup>33</sup> and teachers.<sup>34</sup> As reported by another implementation partner and by one RTP staff member, this was due to the gender norms still in place, where school is believed to be for boys, and girls are expected to take care of the house from a certain age. One implementation partner reported that some girls stopped studying because of financial reasons, which, as mentioned above, is an issue affecting high numbers of children. Moreover, both implementation partners highlighted that in the area of Namacurra early marriages and early pregnancies are quite common. Several of the surveyed teachers also reported that traditional gender roles prevented girls from participating to classes equally (see further details in [Section 3.2.2.3](#)).

### *Education of Children with Disabilities and Its Challenges*

There are over 200,000 people with disabilities aged 5-24 in Mozambique, and 70% of those aged 5-19 live in rural areas. Furthermore, it is estimated that only 36%-45% of CWD are covered by the national educational system<sup>35</sup> ([MINEDH, 2020b](#); [ActionAid et al., 2020](#)). In Zambezia, CWD represent 0.4% of the students enrolled in Grades 1 to 4 ([MINEDH, 2022](#)).

Both EQIE implementation partners and several RTP staff members reported that families of CWD tend to hide them at home, are not fully aware of their children's right to education and the assistance to which they are entitled. This led to challenges in identifying CWD. They also reported an important issue of bullying against CWD, confirmed by some caregivers. As one implementation partner shared, there tends to be stigma against CWD, as well as financial issues, as some families may not be able to afford the materials needed by their children.

Despite the efforts of educational policies, many challenges still need to be overcome to ensure the effective inclusion of CWD. These include curriculum adaptation, pre- and in-

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<sup>33</sup> Although the house chore burden affected heavily both boys and girls, the proportion of surveyed girls who reported doing chores in the morning or in the afternoon is statistically higher. In particular, 90% of boys reported doing chores in the morning, versus 96% of girls, and 72% of boys reported doing them in the afternoon, versus 82% of girls. Survey data confirms that the gender gap increases with age: the proportion of girls who reported doing chores in the morning went up to 100% when considering only girls older than ten (compared to 91% for boys), and to 90% for afternoon chores (versus 72% for boys).

<sup>34</sup> Many teachers mentioned that girls face a heavier burden of household duties, including caregiving responsibilities and supporting parents in agricultural tasks.

<sup>35</sup> The exact figure depends on whether we consider the age range 5-24 or 5-19.

service teacher training, school accessibility (in terms of both infrastructure and equipment), and community awareness ([ActionAid et al., 2020](#); [Akungondo, 2023](#); [Franco, 2023](#)). The high teacher/pupil ratio prevents teachers from responding fully to the needs of CWD ([ActionAid et al., 2020](#)), as confirmed also by one EQIE teacher.

EQIE implementation partners and caregivers reported that teachers usually lack the training to adequately teach CWD, which was confirmed by teachers themselves. Moreover, one caregiver reported that schools lack basic infrastructure such as ramps and toilets.

One RTP staff member highlighted that children with multiple and/or severe disabilities need specialized assistance, which is complicated by limited or missing referral mechanisms in some areas.

Among children, only one reported disability to be a reason for their community peers not to go to school. This indicates that children may not be fully aware of this issue, or not willing to discuss it.

### *Play-based Learning and Its Effects on Socio-Emotional Learning and Reading*

There is extensive evidence on the beneficial effects of play-based learning (PBL) on socio-emotional skills and academic outcomes at pre-primary level. Theoretical and empirical studies across different countries highlight the role of play in developing socio-emotional competencies of children aged four to five, including cooperative skills, social interactive behaviours, feelings of capability, social identity construction, positive peer relationships, and social literacy skills ([Pyle et al., 2017](#)). Other studies emphasize the effectiveness of play-based activities, and in particular of directed play, in teaching literacy skills to children of the same age, including print conventions, phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, and writing behaviors ([Pyle et al., 2017](#)). For example, a UNICEF pilot intervention in Zambezia, the Accelerated School Readiness program, used PBL to support preschool children in preparing to enter Grade 1.<sup>36</sup> Primary school teachers noted that students who participated in the pilot had better literacy skills in Portuguese; stronger socio-emotional abilities (such as playing well with others and participating in class) and higher executive functions, including greater focus and ability to follow directions, compared to those who did not take part ([Bonilla et al., 2019](#)).

Evidence regarding primary school children is scarce, and almost non-existent beyond early grades ([Murtagh et al., 2022](#)). A preliminary study conducted in Zambia found that the Catch Up intervention implemented by the government<sup>37</sup>, which has a play-based component, promoted the development of empathy and conflict resolution skills among primary school children ([Phiri et al., 2023](#)). Another two-year intervention in Northern Ireland with children in the first two years of primary school showed that the play-based curriculum had no significant

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<sup>36</sup> Further information about the program can be found [here](#).

<sup>37</sup> The Catch Up program uses the Teaching at the Right Level approach pioneered by Pratham and Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. See [here](#) for further information.

positive effects on reading and mathematics in the medium term ([McGuinness et al., 2013](#)). However, the overall quality of the learning experience in the same play-based classrooms was significantly higher in terms of children's learning attitudes, social development and emotional well-being compared to traditional teaching classrooms ([Walsh et al., 2010](#)).

In general, evidence about PBL should be taken with caution. There is widespread agreement on the role of play in fostering children's socialization, enjoyment, problem-solving skills, physical and emotional growth, and overall well-being. However, opinions differ regarding its effectiveness in academic learning, which might derive from the challenge of defining play for the purpose of research ([Murtagh et al., 2022](#)). Evidence suggests that the understanding of and value placed on play vary across different sociocultural contexts, highlighting the importance of culturally relevant play-based approaches (for example, [Mendenhall et al., 2021](#)). In addition, teachers may face structural and material barriers that limit or prevent the implementation of PBL, such as large class sizes and inadequate classroom infrastructure, especially in crisis-affected contexts ([Mendenhall et al., 2021](#); [Murtagh et al., 2022](#)). Overall, it is not advisable to generalize findings across cultures and intervention modalities.

#### 3.1.1.2 Sample Demographic Insights

The Midline Evaluation's quantitative sample includes 298 children, 40 teachers, and 20 headteachers. This section includes insights about their demographic characteristics.

Among the sampled children, 51% were boys and 49% were girls. Only four were identified by teachers as CWD. Another four were identified as national migrants, while all the others were non-migrant. Sixty percent of them attended schools in rural areas, 25% in suburban areas, and 15% in urban areas.<sup>38</sup> They lived in households which comprised, on average, 5.9 people.

As for teachers, the sample comprises mostly women (83%), who were on average 35 years old. One of them (2.5%) reported having no education, 7.5% completed high school (with no additional training), 17.5% completed ten years of education and three years of training, 47.5% completed 12 years of education and one year of training, and 25% had a bachelor's degree.<sup>39</sup> They were all permanent teachers and had been working as teachers for ten years on average, with great variability (from two to 25 years of service), spending an average of 6.5 years in the current role. Most of them taught Grade 3 (88%).<sup>40</sup> They spent on average five hours per day teaching, of which two hours were dedicated to Portuguese.

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<sup>38</sup> The distinction between rural and suburban/ urban is based on the reports by headteachers.

<sup>39</sup> Since the 1980s, there have been more than 10 pre-service teacher training models in Mozambique, with the required minimum education level varying from 6th to 12th grade, and the additional training period ranging from one to three years, resulting in a wide range of training levels among teachers ([UNESCO, 2023](#)).

<sup>40</sup> One taught Grade 1, one taught Grade 2, one taught both, and one taught Grade 4.

Among the ten classrooms included in classroom observations, six were from Grade 3, while the remaining were either from Grade 1 (two classes), Grade 2 or Grade 4 (one class each). Seven of the classes were in schools located in urban areas, while the remaining were in suburban areas. On average, half of each class was made up of boys, and the other half of girls. All the observed classes focused on Portuguese.<sup>41</sup>

Conversely, headteachers were mostly male (65%), and slightly older than teachers, being on average 41 years old. Most of them (75%) had a bachelor's degree, while the remaining either completed high school or also had a one-year training as teachers. They had been working on average for six years as principals, out of which they had spent five in the current role. They all managed state schools, located on average 21 km away from the district center (with half of the schools being 6.5 km away or less), coordinating the work of 17 teachers on average.

In total, 11,376 children were reported by headteachers to be enrolled in the sample schools, among which 49% were girls and 1.1% were CWD.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.1.2 EQIE Design

The Namacurra district was chosen by RTP for the project due to its high vulnerability, with schools selected by the district education service based on their level of need. The district was selected among other vulnerable ones due to its ease of access for RTP.

EQIE's approach is holistic, involving teacher training in literacy and other areas to foster a positive learning environment, leading to improved learning outcomes. This comprehensive model extends beyond the classroom, incorporating parent engagement and the establishment of reading centers and other community initiatives. This holistic approach to education is at the core of the EQIE project design, as confirmed by one RTP staff member.

*"When we started thinking about the design of the of the project, we decided to take a holistic approach to education. [...] we would have one intervention that is focused specifically on teachers and teacher capacity, both in terms of delivering good literacy sessions but also [...] of delivering sessions in general. [...] The focus is also on improving the learning environment with the assumption that a positive learning environment also influences positively children's learning. And then [...], we understood that learning is not just happening within the school, it's also happening outside. And we wanted to tap [into] that, especially [...] supporting parents to*

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<sup>41</sup> All observed teachers were female, on average 37 years old, permanent teachers, had worked for 10.5 years as teachers, and 5.7 in the current role. Six of them had completed high school or had a teaching certificate, two either studied for a few years in the university or had a teaching diploma, and two graduated from university. They spent on average three hours per day teaching, of which one and a half were dedicated to Portuguese.

<sup>42</sup> On average, 575 children were enrolled in each school, with great variability: the smallest school had 129 students, while the biggest one had 1670.

*be more engaged in children's learning [...] also through these community reading centres that then can operate [...] when schools are closed."*

*RTP staff member*

The main feature of the EQIE project, and RTP's approach in general, is the use of PBL. The play-based component initially surprised the communities, as evidenced in several FGDs.

*"I've heard about it [the project] in the community. It's a project that's linked to fun and is totally dedicated to learning, teaching and learning; it has its ways to facilitate a student to understand."*

*Caregiver, Complete Primary School (Escola Primária Completa, EPC) 22 de Abril*

*"Parents found their children outside. Yes, they were astonished. Why aren't children in their classrooms? Why are they outside? But once they realised what was really going on, I think they were pleased."*

*Teacher, EPC Malinguine*

Several RTP staff members reported that inclusion is a fundamental component of the project, distinguishing EQIE from other RTP projects in Mozambique and other countries.

Some aspects of the project, particularly those related to inclusion, were strengthened in line with donor interest in the area and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). RTP hired an international consultant to design the inclusion components of the project, as there was no prior experience in this area within the organization. This learning process involved building knowledge from the ground up, thanks also to the strong collaboration with local CSOs who have expertise on the topic.

Great attention was devoted to understanding the needs of children and the community, as highlighted by an RTP team member.

*"I think that [since the baseline stage] we tried to understand what the children were like, how they were doing, [what their daily life was like] and then take action. Right to Play carried out this exercise and continues to do so in order to understand how these children live [...]."*

*RTP staff member*

Some components were co-designed with participants themselves, as reported by another RTP staff member.

*"Right To Play conducted or conducts meetings on a monthly basis, [...]. This was done with the parents as if it were a focus group. These meetings are an activity that emerged [...] as a response to baseline findings. A meeting allows you to be in a smaller group [...]. When you have a very large group, there is a slightly different dynamic, so we carried out these focus group discussions in school with the parents in charge of education, at most 30 [...] caregivers, and I*

*think many of the topics we are speaking about now [importance of education for girls and CWD, GBV] came up in those groups.”*  
*RTP staff member*

The program has also had to adapt significantly due to changing circumstances, such as Covid-19 and cyclones, which have heavily affected the region (see [Sections 3.1.1, 3.2.5 and 3.2.6](#)).

Aligning with the needs discussed above and in [Section 3.1.1](#), the project mainly consists of the activities outlined in [Table 1](#).<sup>43</sup>

*Table 1: Activities implemented in the EQIE project*

| Reading and socio-emotional skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Training of teachers, headteachers and supervisors on PBL</li> <li>+ Establishment of quarterly communities of practice (CoP) for teachers</li> <li>+ Provision of teaching and learning materials to schools</li> <li>+ Training of caregivers to support children’s learning at home (Learning Together Toolkit)</li> <li>+ Establishment of reading centers and reading clubs</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Safety of learning environment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Community sensitization initiatives on child rights and CP</li> <li>+ Establishment of Child Clubs (focusing on CP, child rights, issues faced by CWD and GBV)</li> <li>+ Training of school focal points on CP case handling</li> <li>+ Establishment of school protection committees</li> <li>+ Support and training of Parent-Teacher Associations and School Management Committees on school plan development, fundraising and fund management, seed funding</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Enrollment and retention of CWD and OOS girls                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Training of teachers, headteachers and supervisors on inclusion of CWD</li> <li>+ Improvement of physical accessibility of schools</li> <li>+ Establishment of School Inclusion Committees</li> <li>+ Establishment of Girls’ Clubs</li> <li>+ Training of CSOs working with CWD and OOS girls on CP<br/>Safeguarding, gender equality, positive masculinity, finance management, HR and administration, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), organizational policies and development</li> <li>+ Sensitization initiatives implemented by CSOs on importance of education for CWD and girls, rights of CWD, eradication of GBV and early marriage</li> </ul> |

<sup>43</sup> Information on implemented activities was sourced from 2021 and 2022 [Progress Reports](#).

### 3.1.2.1 Suggestions for Improvement Reported by Stakeholders

This section reports general suggestions for improvement that emerged most strongly during the data collection with stakeholders. Further suggestions presented by project stakeholders are reported in the relevant sections of the report.

There was a widespread feeling of unfairness and frustration regarding the distribution of materials<sup>44</sup> among teachers and caregivers in almost all locations where qualitative data was collected. There was a perception of scarce transparency in how materials were distributed, suggesting that teachers and caregivers may not have been fully aware of who is receiving the materials and why. It could also indicate issues in the distribution itself. Teachers and caregivers also extensively reported the need for additional materials. Importantly, the selection of recipients is not undertaken by RTP, but rather by community actors including school boards, school inclusion committees, school leaders, and school councils, depending on the target group. The role of RTP is limited to supporting the definition of selection criteria. It would be advisable to promote a better communication of selection criteria to improve trust in the project among community members.

One teacher highlighted that incentives in the form of small snacks may motivate children to attend school. Another mentioned that their work should be more recognized, given the level of effort required by the project. Teachers also complained that at the beginning of the project they received a higher compensation for the training, which included a meal in addition to monetary compensation, while they subsequently only received the monetary compensation. As clarified by RTP, this might be due to limited awareness of governmental policies, which establish that teachers receive a participation allowance, transport reimbursement and meals when they participate in training, and transport reimbursement and meals only when they participate in COPs. For this reason, it would be useful to inform them about the governmental provisions, so as to avoid discontent towards RTP.

One implementation partner also reported that offering PSS to children would be useful, in light of the conditions of extreme poverty in which they live.

### 3.1.3 Relevance of Different Project Packages to Different Users

As outlined above, the EQIE project is very complex and comprises numerous activities from different strands. Several stakeholders, including implementation partners and RTP staff members, reported that **all packages of the intervention are relevant and complimentary** to each other, contributing holistically to the project's outcomes.

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<sup>44</sup> Most participants referred generically to “materials”. One teacher referred to books, while an implementation partner referred to school kits.

*“All the activities contribute to a certain objective, to a certain purpose. [...] I think all activities are relevant to the project.”*

*Implementation partner*

As for **teacher training**, one RTP staff member reported that teachers already knew games, but initially were not able to integrate them into their lessons. Teachers also reported that, in the past, they were struggling with the inclusion of all students in the lessons, especially older ones. Initially, some teachers were skeptical about the PBL approach, but overall, they found all areas covered in the training to be useful.

*“[The PBL approach] wasn’t so easy to accept. At first it was difficult, because we thought it would be hard to get used to the Right to Play activities, but over time we realised that Right to Play has also come to help us in the teaching and learning process.”*

*Teacher, EPC Malinguine*

From a broader perspective, providing teachers with training may also address the for more continuous professional development, as reported by one government partner.

Similarly, **training caregivers** to support children in their studies contributes to addressing their difficulties due to not being able to read, as shared by one RTP staff member. Another staff member noted that the creation of **reading clubs** was helpful in providing additional support to students, especially those who have difficulties in reading.

Several stakeholders highlighted the relevance of **community awareness and inclusion committees’ activities**.

*“One [activity] that is really relevant is [the] “awareness campaign for school reintegration” [...] [It] doesn’t just cover the caregivers/parents who have children with disabilities at school; it covers the whole community. [It] is the place where people discuss and exchange ideas. [...] It’s from there that people start to gain another way of thinking.*

*I think [another component] that [...] is very, very relevant [is the] community dialogues, which are carried out with parents to raise awareness [about] their children’s education and also training parents [on the Learning Together Toolkit]. This helped [them] understand what their role is [...], because children spend little time at school and more time at home with their parents. Being in the classroom, the teacher has to pay attention to many children, but the parent [...] has maybe one or two.”*

*Implementation partner*

One partner reported also on the relevance of **school kits** provided to children to encourage them to keep studying.

## 3.2 Effectiveness

*By effectiveness, we mean the extent to which EQIE achieved its objectives and results, including differential results across target groups. As outlined in the Theory of Change (please refer to Annex 3), EQIE's expected outcome is to improve the reading and socio-emotional skills of children, as well as the school enrolment and retention of CWD and OOS girls.*

In the following sections, we report the relevant measurement framework indicators, comparing each of them to both the baseline and target values. Note that a target will be reported to be reached when it falls within the confidence interval for the indicator's value.<sup>45</sup>

### + Changes in children's reading and socio-emotional skills

Quantitative and qualitative data highlighted improvements from baseline in both the reading and the socio-emotional skills of children. Children showed improvements in all the foundational skills related to reading, but not in reading comprehension. The gender gap in reading skills found at baseline appears to have closed. Improvements were found also in the ISELA domains of relationships, stress management, collaboration, perseverance, and conflict resolution, while there were no significant improvements in the areas of empathy and self-concept. Some positive spillovers were found in the areas of self-confidence and communication.

### + Teacher's practices and professional development

Evidence about teachers' practices in the classroom is mixed. Teachers seemed to have limited theoretical knowledge about PBL and its application to teaching literacy skills, while reporting using it fairly often. Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that there may have been some improvements in the gender-responsiveness of teaching practices, which might have contributed to closing the gender gap in reading skills.

### + Learning environment and culture of reading

Improvements were found in the home and community learning environment, with increased awareness about the importance of education for all children. There have been tangible improvements in learning support provided to children by their caregivers and in their participation in initiatives supporting reading, although the latter is far from being universal.

### + Safety and inclusivity of the learning environment

The learning environment was reported to be somewhat safer than it was at baseline. There were improvements in the reported implementation of the schools' physical and emotional security plans. The physical safety of infrastructures remains low, while there have been improvements in emotional safety,

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<sup>45</sup> A confidence interval is a range of values in which we can be *sufficiently sure* that the actual value of the target is included. By *sufficiently sure* we mean that the probability of this happening is above a given level, which is customarily set at 95%. This is due to the fact that data are measured on a sample of the population, thus the sample value for a certain indicator might vary depending on the sample that is extracted. Computing a confidence interval allows us to "control" this error in measurement and obtain a reasonable range for the population value of an indicator. Thus, a target will be reported to be reached when it falls within the confidence interval of the indicator, even if the sample value of the indicator is, in itself, below the target. See [Footnote 46](#) for further discussions on statistical aspects of measurement.

including the management of safety concerns. The feeling of safety around and at school, as well as violence by adults, remained stable compared to baseline, while there has been a worsening in reports of bullying (which could be due to increased awareness of the issue).

#### + Enrollment and retention of children with disabilities

Considerable numbers of OOS CWD and girls have been enrolled in school, and there has been progress in community awareness of the importance of education for these two groups. CWD still face difficulties in school, mainly due to insufficient teacher training and lack of adequate materials and infrastructure.

#### + Success factors

EQIE's implementation model, based on close collaboration with local CSOs and government partners, has been effective and critical to the project's success, while also contributing to the capacity development of local organizations. Another crucial factor of success was the involvement of local communities, particularly for the inclusion of OOS children. The project faced external and internal challenges, including Covid-19, natural disasters, and a wide variety of activities to be led with limited funding.

#### + Project's adaptability

The project had to adapt to these unexpected circumstances, which on occasion significantly slowed down or modified its implementation. Adaptation was possible through several mechanisms that are embedded in its monitoring framework, such as outcome monitoring.

### 3.2.1 Changes in Children's Reading and Socio-Emotional Skills

#### 3.2.1.1 Reading Outcomes of Children

Learning outcomes in reading are measured through EGRA scores. Compared to baseline, there have been statistically significant<sup>46</sup> improvements in almost all EGRA tasks. However, a non-negligible proportion of children still scored zero on several subtasks, and reading comprehension skills have not improved significantly, indicating that program objectives have not been fully reached. Overall, it seems that children have improved in the foundational skills needed to read and comprehend a text but have not yet reached the point where comprehension is achieved.<sup>47</sup> This is consistent with the very low baseline level of reading skills, and it is an important outcome in this context, considering also the relatively short time frame of the project, interruptions caused by external factors, and issues of student and

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<sup>46</sup> Statistical significance is a measure that quantifies the probability that a certain result is due to chance versus actual changes in the outcome. Saying that a result is statistically significant indicates that there is a sufficiently high probability that the result is real, and not due to chance (conventionally, the *sufficiently high* probability is set at 95%). The measure of statistical significance employed in this study is the p-value (p), which can be roughly interpreted as the probability that a result is due to chance. Accordingly, results are presented as statistically significant when  $p \leq 0.05$ .

<sup>47</sup> Only after children learn to apply the foundational reading skills with a certain level of automaticity (namely, without having to explicitly think about the task) they are able to move from the task of decoding a text to that of understanding its meaning ([RTI, 2010](#)).

teacher absenteeism (see [Section 3.1.1.1](#)). [Sections 3.2.2](#) and [3.2.3](#) further explore possible mechanisms behind these results.

*There were no statistically significant differences in any of the tasks between boys and girls, while at baseline the former had outperformed the latter in most of them (see*

Table 3). This indicates that girls have improved more than boys, and that the gender gap in reading skills has closed. Possible reasons as to why this happened are discussed in [Sections 3.2.2](#) and [3.2.3](#), include the adoption of gender-responsive teaching practices as well as, according to some, a higher participation of girls in activities supporting reading (such as reading clubs and reading centers), although establishing clear cause-effect relationships is not possible.

Students whose primary language is Portuguese scored significantly higher on almost all tasks. Interestingly, at baseline, there was no statistically significant difference between native and non-native speakers on any subtask, except for reading fluency.<sup>48</sup> This indicates that native Portuguese speakers have improved more than non-native speakers in almost all domains. This may mean that, in a context of low education quality, learning is a challenge for all, while improved teaching practices may benefit more those that are in a better position to learn thanks to their linguistic background.

Differently from what had emerged at baseline, where no differences were registered according to participants' socio-economic background, EGRA results also correlate significantly with households' SES scores.<sup>49</sup> Those who attend schools in urban or suburban settings also scored higher on almost all tasks. This may be explained by the fact that most Portuguese native speakers (57%) attended school in urban and suburban areas and that they had a higher SES score than their rural counterparts.<sup>50</sup> While another possible explanation behind this result may be that urban schools received more support because they are easier to reach, this is not confirmed by the data (see [Footnote 83](#)).

Lastly, subtask scores were higher whenever children reported that their teacher conducted literacy instruction activities involving domains tested in the subtasks (for example, children who reported that their teacher asked questions about what they read in the previous week scored higher in reading comprehension). As these reports are imprecise and differ between children with the same teacher, caution is advisable when interpreting these results.

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<sup>48</sup> At baseline, Portuguese native speakers could read correctly, on average, 16.6 words per minute, while non-native speakers could read 8.7 (p=0.04).

<sup>49</sup> For more details on the SES score, see [Section Socio-Economic](#) and [3.1.1](#).

<sup>50</sup> The SES score is, on average, 2.8 for rural students and 4.5 for urban/suburban students.

For an overview of EGRA scores, see [Table 2](#) presents a summary of the EGRA results by task, comparing them with baseline.

Table 2 at the end of this subsection. Disaggregated results and detailed statistics for each subtask are presented in the following subsections.

Qualitative data confirm the findings emerging from the EGRA assessment. In interviews and FGDs, all stakeholders unanimously acknowledged improvements in children's reading skills. RTP staff linked this improvement to better teaching quality and accelerated learning among children. The take-up of a playful teaching approach was seen as instrumental in supporting more effective and swifter learning experiences for children.

Many parents also reported a notable increase in children's likelihood to do homework or read books at home. This rise in independent learning among children may have positively influenced their reading skills. At the same time, children may have engaged more in independent reading because their improved skills made it a more enjoyable activity.

*"For me, [when she] started the project, she changed a bit. When she comes home, now, she doesn't play child's games. Now, when she arrives home, [if the teacher has assigned homework], she plays and she does her homework. In the first year [...] she was reading a little, but now she can even correct my mistakes: 'Mum, it's not like that'. So, Right to Play, for me, helped that little girl. [...] From the year that the girl is in that project there, I'm seeing a bit of change with her."*

*Caregiver, EPC 22 de Abril*

[Table 2](#) presents a summary of the EGRA results by task, comparing them with baseline.

*Table 2: Comparison of baseline and midline EGRA scores by subtask*

| Task                           | Description                                                     | Baseline avg | Midline avg | p-value of difference <sup>51</sup> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Task 1: Letter Identification  | # correct letters/ minute out of 100                            | 18.5         | 30.1        | 0.00*                               |
| Task 2: Phonemic awareness     | # correct initial sounds out of 10                              | 3.9          | 5.4         | 0.00*                               |
| Task 3: Most Used Words        | # correct words/ minute out of 50                               | 7.2          | 10.2        | 0.00*                               |
| Task 4a: Reading               | # correct words/ minute out of 120                              | 10.9         | 17.6        | 0.00*                               |
| Task 4b: Reading Comprehension | % correct answers out of 4                                      | 7%           | 12%         | 0.00*                               |
|                                | % readers (at least five correct words in the first 30 seconds) | 25%          | 42%         | 0.00*                               |

<sup>51</sup> Asterisks indicate statistically significant changes.

|                                 |                                    |      |      |       |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|------|-------|
|                                 | % RWC (at least 3 correct answers) | 2.6% | 1.3% | 0.28  |
| Task 5: Listening Comprehension | % correct answers out of 4         | 44%  | 63%  | 0.00* |

Table 3: Comparison of baseline and midline EGRA scores by subtask and by gender

| Task                            | Description                                                     | Baseline avg (F) | Midline avg (F) | Baseline avg (M) | Midline avg (M) | p-value of difference (baseline) | p-value of difference (midline) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Task 1: Letter Identification   | # correct letters/ minute out of 100                            | 13.8             | 28.9            | 22.8             | 31.2            | 0.00*                            | 0.37                            |
| Task 2: Phonemic awareness      | # correct initial sounds out of 10                              | 3.5              | 5.3             | 4.2              | 5.6             | 0.10                             | 0.49                            |
| Task 3: Most Used Words         | # correct words/ minute out of 50                               | 5.0              | 10.2            | 9.2              | 10.2            | 0.00*                            | 0.97                            |
| Task 4a: Reading                | # correct words/ minute out of 120                              | 8.7              | 15.3            | 12.9             | 19.8            | 0.16                             | 0.18                            |
|                                 | % readers (at least five correct words in the first 30 seconds) | 17%              | 40%             | 32%              | 43%             | 0.01*                            | 0.61                            |
| Task 4b: Reading Comprehension  | % correct answers out of 4                                      | 5%               | 12%             | 8%               | 12%             | 0.22                             | 0.68                            |
| Task 5: Listening Comprehension | % correct answers out of 4                                      | 44%              | 63%             | 47%              | 63%             | 0.47                             | 1.00                            |

### Task 1: Letter Identification

In the letter identification task, children had to name as many letters as possible in one minute, reading in order from a grid of 100 upper- and lower-case letters. If they could not read correctly any letter in the first line (namely, any of the first ten items), the task was

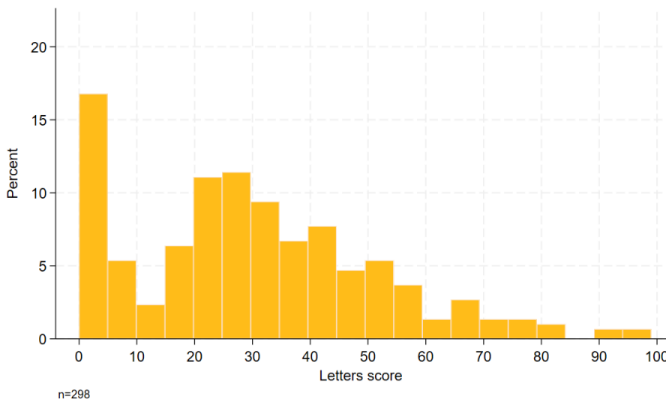


Figure 1: Distribution of letter identification task scores

automatically stopped. Scores were adjusted for time remaining in the task.<sup>52</sup>

**Children read, on average, 30.1 correct letters per minute, which is significantly higher than the 18.5 averaged at baseline ( $p=0.00$ ), representing a 63% increase.** This result is robust to the exclusion of outliers<sup>53</sup> ( $p=0.00$ ). Moreover, children read correctly 75% of the letters that they attempted, which is also a

significant improvement from the 56% averaged at baseline ( $p=0.00$ ).<sup>54</sup> These averages hide great variability (see [Error! Reference source not found.](#)). More than 10% of children could read between zero and two letters correctly per minute (18% at baseline), while 28% got more than 40 letters correct per minute (12% at baseline).<sup>55</sup>

Children whose first language was Portuguese read, on average, 35.9 correct letters per minute, while non-Portuguese speakers read 27.6 ( $p=0.00$ ), performing significantly worse.

## Task 2: Phonemic Awareness

<sup>52</sup> Without adjusting, scores would not capture the situation fully. For example, a child who is able to read five words correctly in ten seconds (and then stops, for any reason) is very different from a child who reads five words in one minute. Thus, baseline scores for timed subtasks were recomputed in order to account for the remaining time.

<sup>53</sup> Outliers are identified as observations whose difference with the lower/upper quartile of the interquartile range is greater than 1.5 times the interquartile range itself. The interquartile range is the range where the middle 50% of the data fall. Thus, “excluding outliers” refers to running the analysis excluding those observations that differ by a large enough measure from the majority. Repeating analyses excluding outliers serves the purpose of checking whether certain results are driven by very few individuals who score very differently from the others, or whether there is a more general trend in the data.

<sup>54</sup> The result is robust to the exclusion of outliers ( $p=0.00$ ). Note that this measure is computed as an average of accuracy scores of children who could read very different amounts of letters (or, as discussed below, words). In this respect, it is different to read, for example, 100% out of three letters, compared to 80% of 100 letters. Thus, this measure should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>55</sup> About 11% read between two and ten correct letters per minute, while one-third read between 11 and 30, and 18% read between 31 and 40.

In the phonemic awareness task, children had to indicate the sound of the first letter for ten words, which were pronounced one by one by the enumerator. The task was not timed.

**Children were able to indicate, on average, the initial sound of 5.4 words, with a statistically significant improvement from the 3.9 sounds recognized at baseline ( $p=0.00$ ), representing a 38% increase.** Despite 13% of children being able to indicate none or only one sound, there has been an improvement compared to the baseline, where 38% of children scored zero. Conversely, 9% of children answered all the items correctly (see [Error! Reference source not found.](#)).

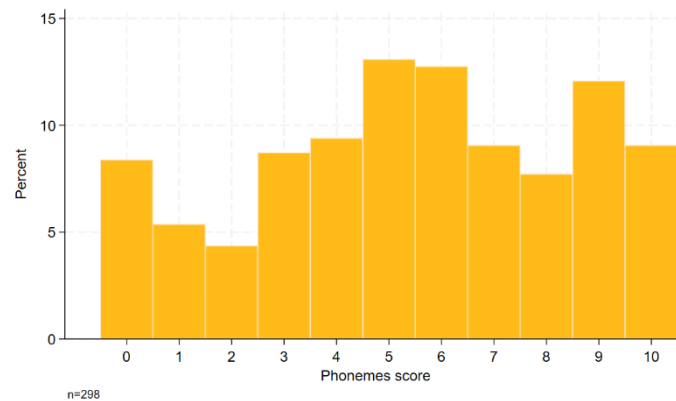


Figure 2: Distribution of scores for the phonemic awareness task

Portuguese native speakers were able to identify more sounds correctly than non-native Portuguese speakers ( $p=0.02$ ), but the difference between the two groups was rather small, with the former identifying on average 6.0 sounds out of ten and the latter identifying 5.1.

Children who reported that their teacher taught them the sounds of letters or words in the previous week (68% of the total, versus 38% at baseline) scored higher on this subtask (6.0 correct sounds versus 4.5,  $p=0.00$ ).<sup>56</sup>

### Task 3: Most Used Words

In the most used words task, children were asked to read as many words as possible in one minute, in order, from a grid of 50 familiar words. If the child could not read any word correctly in the first ten seconds, the task was automatically stopped. Scores were adjusted for time remaining in the task.

<sup>56</sup> Note that this correlation is reported, instead of the one between this practice and the letter identification awareness, because the letter identification task requires children to identify the name of letters, rather than their sound.

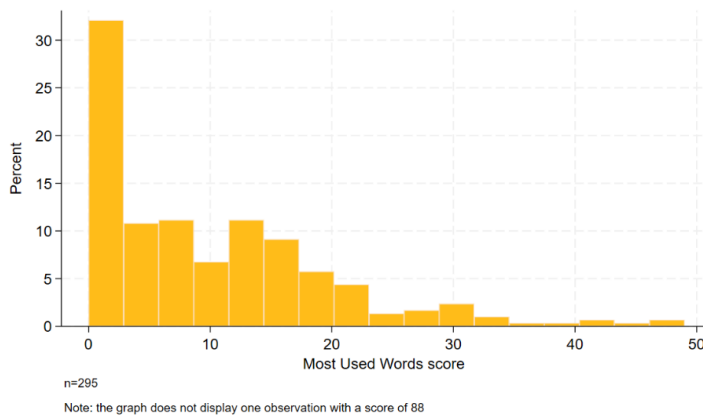


Figure 3: Distribution of scores for the most used words task

( $p=0.00$ ). The distribution is skewed to the right, indicating that most of the children performed worse than the average (see Error! Reference source not found.).<sup>57</sup> In fact, 38% of them were able to read correctly four words or less (23% getting zero correct answers), while 43% read more than ten words correctly, and 8% read 25 or more. At baseline, 22% of learners had gotten zero words correct.

Portuguese native speakers read, on average, 13.7 CWPM, significantly more than non-native speakers, who read 8.7 ( $p=0.00$ ).

Children who reported that their teacher taught them the sounds of letters or words in the previous week (68% of the total, compared to 38% at baseline) scored higher on this subtask (11.7 CWPM versus 7.4,  $p=0.00$ ).<sup>58</sup>

#### Task 4: Reading and Reading Comprehension

Children read, on average, 10.2 correct words per minute (CWPM), which is significantly higher than the 7.2 words their counterparts could read at baseline ( $p=0.00$ ), representing a 42% increase. The result is robust to the exclusion of outliers ( $p=0.00$ ).

Moreover, 53% of the words they attempted to read were correct, which is significantly higher than the 33% attained at baseline

<sup>57</sup> In short, the average value is the result of “a lot” of children who score low and “much fewer” who score much higher than them.

<sup>58</sup> The relationship and its significance are robust to the exclusion of outliers.

In the reading task, children were asked to read as many words as possible from a 120-word text in one minute. If the child could read less than five words correctly in the first 30 seconds, the task was automatically stopped. Scores were adjusted for the time remaining in the task.

Following the reading task, up to four comprehension questions were asked to the children, depending on the point reached in the text. Children qualified as RWC if they could answer at least three out of four questions correctly.

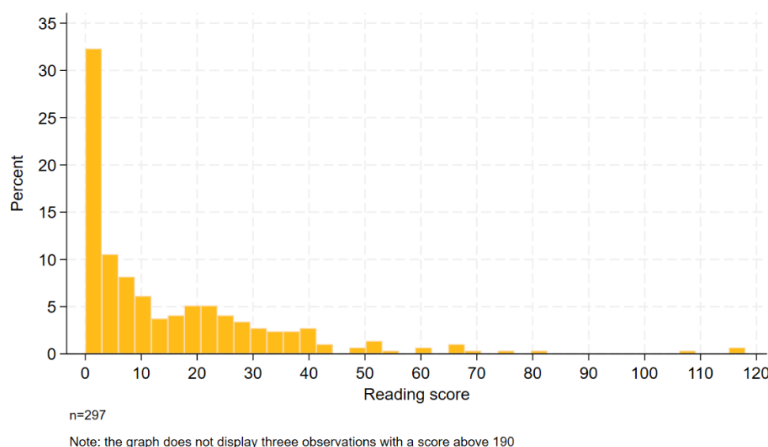


Figure 4: Distribution of scores for the reading task

Children read, on average, 17.6 words correctly per minute (see [Error! Reference source not found.](#)), improving significantly from the baseline average of 10.9 CWPM ( $p=0.00$ ).<sup>59</sup>

Children read correctly 55% of the words they attempted, a significant increase compared to the 31% reached at baseline ( $p=0.00$ ).<sup>60</sup>

Overall, **42% of the children qualified as readers (a significant improvement from 25% at baseline<sup>61</sup>)**, meaning that they were able to read five or more words correctly in the first 30 seconds of the task. Children qualifying as readers were able to read, on average, 31.0 CWPM.

Table 4 reports a comparison of baseline and midline performance bands for reading fluency. The proportion of children who could read less than 15 CWPM decreased remarkably from baseline, as well as the proportion of children who could read no words at all. Accordingly, the proportion of children who could read between 16 and 45 words more than doubled, while the number of children who could read more than 46 CWPM has remained stable.

Table 4: Reading fluency performance bands

| # CWPM | % baseline | % midline |
|--------|------------|-----------|
| 0      | 32%        | 22%       |
| 1-15   | 49%        | 40%       |

<sup>59</sup> This value corresponds to [indicator 1000.2](#) of the analysis and research framework, for which no target has been set.

<sup>60</sup> The result is robust to the exclusion of outliers ( $p=0.00$ ).

<sup>61</sup>  $p=0.00$ .

|       |     |     |
|-------|-----|-----|
| 16-45 | 13% | 31% |
| 46+   | 5%  | 7%  |

**Children were able to answer correctly, on average, 12% of the reading comprehension questions.** Although this is statistically higher than the baseline proportion of correct answers (7%,  $p=0.00$ ), reading comprehension remains low. More specifically, 61.1% of children did not answer any question correctly, 31.1% answered one, 6.3% answered two, and 1.3% answered three. Nobody answered all four questions correctly. Only 1.3% of the children (four children) qualified as RWC, which is not significantly different from the 2.6% attained at baseline ( $p=0.28$ ).<sup>62</sup> **This value corresponds to indicator 1000.1 of the analysis and research framework, for which a target of 30% of RWC had been set. The target was probably too ambitious given the children’s initial level of reading skills.**

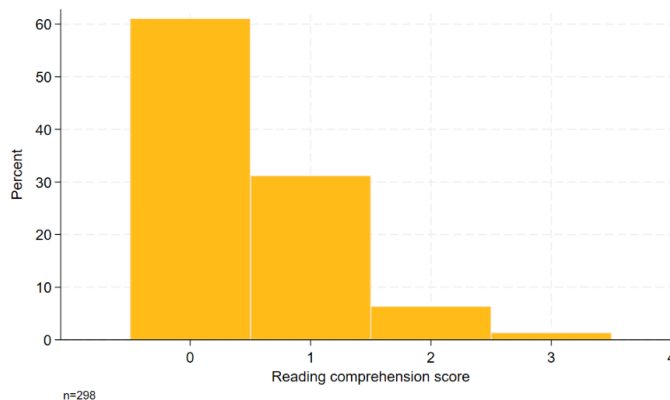


Figure 5: Distribution of reading comprehension scores

This result can be partly explained by the fact that children read slowly, which prevents them from reaching the point in the passage which would qualify them to be asked three or four questions, which in turn would allow them to try to qualify as RWC. The four children who qualified as RWC were able to read on average 104 CWPM, representing on average 98% of the words they attempted

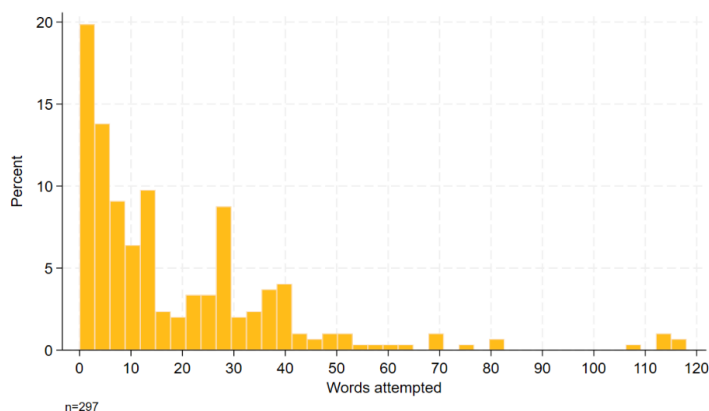


Figure 6: Distribution of attempted words in reading task

to read. Children attempted to read, on average, 18.7 words out of 120 (see Figure 6), with 50% attempting 12 or less. At least 70 words are needed to be asked three questions, and only nine children managed to reach that point. Thus, the almost totality of children could

<sup>62</sup> Due to a technical issue in questionnaire programming, a small number of children (28) were asked fewer questions than they should have. This does not change any of the conclusions, as without the mistake the number of children qualifying as RWC could have reached, at most, 2.0% (with six RWC in total, instead of four).

have not qualified as RWC in any case. This has not changed significantly from baseline ( $p=0.25$ ), when children attempted to read, on average, 16.5 words of the passage. The increase in the average number of CWPM that children read is given by the higher number of children who could read *something* (see Figure 7), but **children were still reading slowly**.

Interestingly, results from the midline assessment of another study focusing on literacy in Zambezia and using an identical EGRA<sup>63</sup> to that of this evaluation found very similar results after two years of implementation. The distribution of correct comprehension questions was very similar, with only 2.4% of children qualifying as RWC in the full (most intense) treatment group after two years of implementation. The proportion of children who were able to read 45 words or more in the passage is also very similar between the two evaluations ([USAID, 2015](#)).

It should also be considered that cognitive neuroscience shows that short-term working memory can process information for about 12 seconds. For effective comprehension, it is

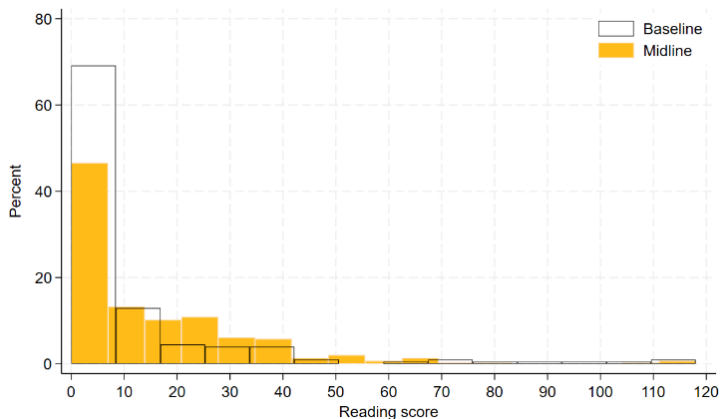


Figure 7: Comparison of baseline and midline reading scores distribution

necessary to read at a pace of 35 to 60 words per minute ([Abadzi, 2006](#); [Abadzi, 2008](#)). If reading too slowly, children may lose track of the sentence's beginning due to the limited processing time of their working memory, leading to repeated reading of the same sentence. This inefficient process could hinder their ability to comprehend the text fully ([RTL, 2010](#)). Moreover, the 70-word benchmark itself is far too

ambitious, given the initial level of children in the sample.

Table 5 shows the proportion of children by number of attempted reading comprehension questions, both at baseline and midline. First, looking at the last column, it should be noted that children did comprehend, at least in part, the sentences they read. Second, the comparison between baseline and midline results should be taken carefully. In fact, the baseline sample for reading comprehension comprises only 64 children (22% of the total), since the majority did not reach a point in the passage to be asked any comprehension question. The midline sample for reading comprehension, instead, comprises 210 children

<sup>63</sup> The word “identical” here indicates an EGRA that uses the same stimuli and the same thresholds for reading comprehension as the EGRA used in this study, which makes the results of the two studies comparable.

(70% of the total). The children who were included in the sample at baseline likely represented the top performers in reading, while more children are included in the midline sample, being spread across a wider range of reading comprehension skills.

Table 5: Proportion of children attempting and answering correctly comprehension questions

| # questions attempted<br>(# words to be read to be asked the question) | % attempted baseline | % correct baseline | % attempted midline | % correct midline |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 0                                                                      | 78%                  | -                  | 30%                 | -                 |
| 1 (15 words)                                                           | 14%                  | 64%                | 60%                 | 49%               |
| 2 (35 words)                                                           | 5%                   | 68%                | 8%                  | 89%               |
| 3 (70 words)                                                           | 2%                   | 67%                | 3%                  | 58%               |
| 4 (110 words)                                                          | 2%                   | 95%                | 0%                  | -                 |

Children whose first language was Portuguese averaged 21.4 CWPM, 19% correct answers to the reading comprehension task, and 63% correct answers when asked the first comprehension question. Conversely, those who did not speak Portuguese as first language scored significantly lower on reading comprehension but not on fluency, averaging 16.0 CWPM ( $p=0.11$ ), 9% correct answers ( $p=0.00$ ), and 43% correct answers to the first comprehension question ( $p=0.00$ ). The difference in fluency becomes statistically significant excluding outliers, with non-native speakers averaging 11.1 CWPM ( $p=0.00$ ). Overall, the fact that there is no gap in fluency, while there is one in comprehension, might be due to the fact that **non-Portuguese speakers might be able to sound the words, but might not always understand their meaning.**

Children who reported that they read with a classmate in school in the previous week (51% of the total, versus 44% at baseline) did not score higher in reading fluency, but the relationship becomes significant when outliers are excluded (14.3 CWPM versus 11.5,  $p=0.04$ ). Similarly, children who said they read by themselves without any help in the previous week (41% of the total, versus 32% at baseline) scored higher on reading fluency (21.7 CWPM versus 15.1,  $p=0.02$ ).<sup>64</sup> Because of how these two questions were formulated, it is not clear whether this was a teacher-assigned task or an individual pursuit.<sup>65</sup> There may be an issue of reverse causality, where children who read better are those who also engaged more in reading, limiting the amount of information conveyed by this relationship.

<sup>64</sup>  $p=0.00$  excluding outliers.

<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the formulation of the individual reading question does not specify that the reading happened at school, so children might have also referred to individual reading at home.

Children who reported that their teacher asked them questions about what they read in the previous week (61% of the total, stable compared to 57% from baseline) scored higher in reading comprehension (15% correct answers versus 7%,  $p=0.00$ ).

### Task 5: Listening Comprehension

In the listening comprehension task, the enumerator read a short story to each child and asked four questions related to the text.

**On average, children were able to answer 63% of the listening comprehension questions correctly, which is statistically higher than the 44% averaged at baseline<sup>66</sup> ( $p=0.00$ ). Ten percent of children were not able to answer any of the questions, while 55% got three or four answers correct (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).**

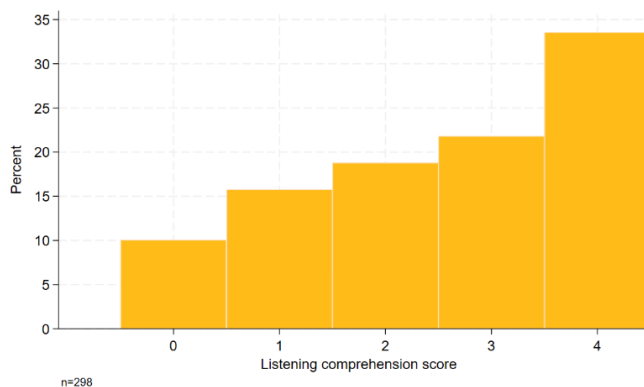


Figure 8: Distribution of listening comprehension task scores

Native Portuguese speakers were able to answer, on average, 77% of the questions correctly, while non-native speakers scored significantly lower, at 57% ( $p=0.00$ ). This gap suggests a difference between native and non-native children's understanding of the language, which is to be expected and could contribute to explaining the lack of progress in reading comprehension.

Children who reported that their teacher had read to them in the previous week (78% of the total, stable compared to 76% from baseline) scored higher in this subtask (66% correct answers versus 52%,  $p=0.00$ ).

#### 3.2.1.2 Socio-Emotional Learning Outcomes of Children

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) outcomes are measured using several measures from the ISELA, namely relationships, stress management, collaboration, empathy, perseverance, conflict resolution, and self-concept. **Compared to the baseline, there have been statistically significant improvements in all these domains, except empathy and self-concept.** The highest average scores (above 60%) are reported for indices of relationships, stress management, collaboration, and perseverance (which is the index reaching the highest

<sup>66</sup> Note that, given the limited number of questions asked, differences between percentages may inflate the perception of the actual difference between values. In this case, 63% of correct answers correspond to 2.5 correct answers, and 44% to 1.8.

values, being on average 81% of the maximum score). Conversely, comparatively low scores are reported for conflict resolution and self-concept. In general, scores that changed significantly from baseline increased by 10-15 p.p. There are no statistically significant differences between boys and girls, similar to the baseline.

Findings from **qualitative data** also showed an improvement in SEL outcomes, specifically for relationships, conflict resolution, and two skills that were not measured by ISELA: communication and self-confidence.

For an overview of ISELA scores, see Table 6. Disaggregated results and more detailed statistics for each subtask are presented below. **ISELA scores correspond to indicator 1000.3 of the analysis and research framework. Targets had been set for all of them, but following changes to their calculation methodology (see Annex 1) only those for collaboration and self-concept are still comparable to midline results**, as discussed below.

Table 6: Comparison of baseline and midline ISELA scores by domain

| Index                | Description                 | Baseline<br>avg<br>Grade 4 | Midline<br>avg<br>Grade 3 | p-value of<br>difference <sup>67</sup> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Relationships        | % correct answers out of 15 | 54%                        | 66%                       | 0.00*                                  |
| Stress<br>management | % correct answers out of 7  | 47%                        | 62%                       | 0.00*                                  |
| Collaboration        | % correct answers out of 4  | 57%                        | 69%                       | 0.00*                                  |
| Empathy              | % correct answers out of 9  | 51%                        | 54%                       | 0.19                                   |
| Perseverance         | % correct answers out of 8  | 71%                        | 81%                       | 0.00*                                  |
| Conflict resolution  | % correct answers out of 8  | 30%                        | 41%                       | 0.00*                                  |
| Self-concept         | % correct answers out of 6  | 29%                        | 35%                       | 0.07                                   |

### Relationships

Children were asked about their relationship with members of their social networks (household members, peers, other people in the community).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Asterisks indicate statistically significant changes.

<sup>68</sup> Children were asked, for each category of people in the network, whether they talked to someone when they were sad, asked someone for help with problems with peers, asked for help when working on something difficult, and knew when a person was feeling sad.

In this domain, given a maximum score of 15, children averaged 66% of correct answers, improving from the baseline average of 54% ( $p=0.00$ ). Almost half of the children scored above 67% (more than ten points), while 14% scored below 33% (five points or less).

**Quantitative findings are consistent with insights from the qualitative data.** Various stakeholders (RTP staff and a government representative) observed enhanced relational skills in children, contributing positively to relationships between children and teachers, children and the community, and among the children themselves. Teachers also confirmed the development of improved relational skills between children.

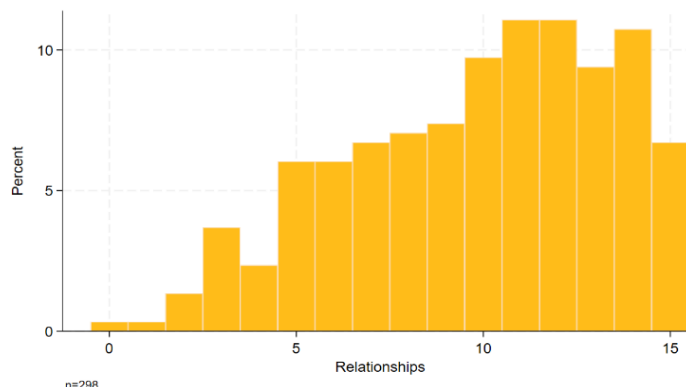


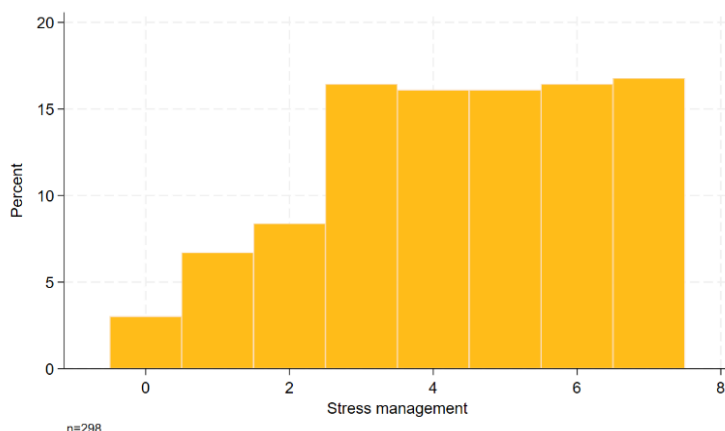
Figure 9: Distribution of relationship index scores

### Stress Management

Stress management items assessed children's ability to identify strategies they used to calm down if angry or upset.<sup>69</sup>

The maximum score for stress management is 7, and the average score improved significantly from 47% at baseline to 62% ( $p=0.00$ ). About one-third of children scored near the maximum (six or seven points).

<sup>69</sup> Scores reflect whether the child could accurately define up to three appropriate, non-destructive stress-management strategies. If the child could not identify an appropriate strategy, they were not asked for additional strategies. The index also includes items about the management of sadness (see the description of the relationship index above).



No specific insights on stress management emerged from qualitative data collection.

Figure 10: Distribution of stress management index scores

### Collaboration

This index includes items asking children for ways to work in a team, and whether they had spent time with friends, in the previous week, either individually, playing, or doing homework.

The average score improved significantly from 57% at baseline to 69% at midline ( $p=0.00$ ), on a scale where the maximum score is 4. **This value surpasses the target of 63% set for indicator 1000.3.**<sup>70</sup> One-fifth of the children reached the maximum score, while 11% scored between zero and one. While very high proportions of children had spent time with their friends in the previous week, scores are driven down by the fact that less than half of the children could identify ways to work in teams.

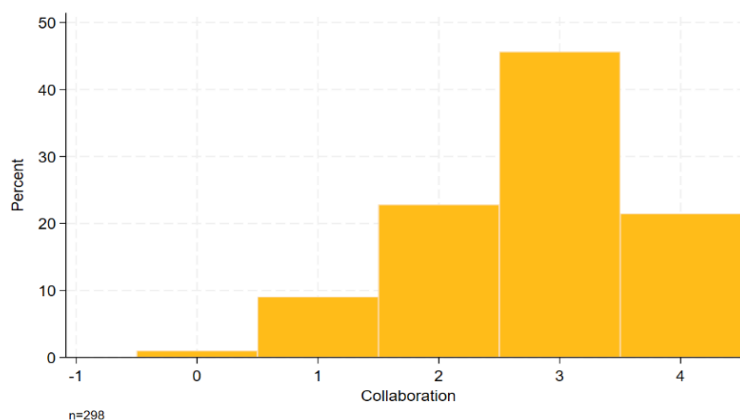


Figure 11: Distribution of collaboration index scores

<sup>70</sup> Looking at data disaggregated by gender shows that males scored on average 72% of the total (95% confidence interval: between 68% and 75%), surpassing the target set for them at 74%, while females almost reached the target set for them at 72% (95% confidence interval: between 63% and 71%), scoring on average 67% of the total. See [Footnote 45](#) for further details about the meaning of confidence intervals.

### Empathy

This domain refers to the children's capacity to recognize emotions of sadness and anger, and how to manage them.<sup>71</sup>

In this domain, the average score is not statistically different from baseline ( $p=0.19$ ), with children scoring approximately half of the maximum score (9) on average (51% at baseline, 54% at midline). Scores are spread across the entire distribution, with over 70% of children scoring six points or below, and nobody attaining the maximum score. Most children (83%) were able to identify the emotion of sadness, while some (53%) identified anger. While almost half of children proposed an appropriate way to comfort a sad child, less than one-third was able to identify an appropriate way to help an angry child calm down.

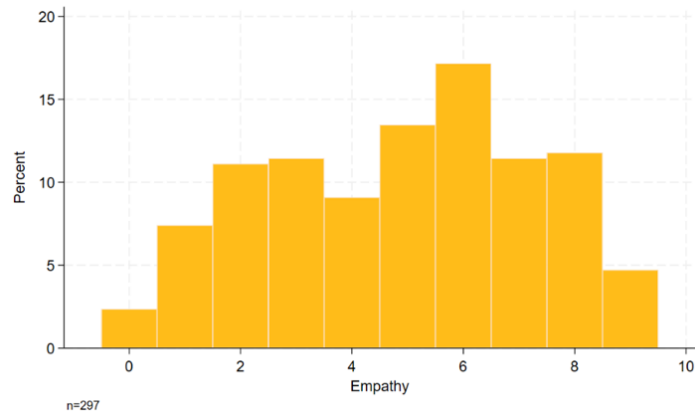


Figure 12: Distribution of empathy index scores

### Perseverance

Children were asked to complete a difficult drawing task, and their willingness (or lack thereof) to continue drawing has been used a proxy for their perseverance.<sup>72</sup> The index also includes questions asking whether the child looks for help when doing something difficult (see the description of the relationship index above).

<sup>71</sup> Children were asked to identify emotions of sadness and anger from a drawing of two children (one boy and one girl) and to describe four things they could do to make, respectively, a sad and an angry child feel better. The index includes also questions asking whether the child notice when someone in their social network was sad (see the description of the relationship index above).

<sup>72</sup> Children were asked to draw four increasingly difficult geometric figures using their nondominant hand. At 20 and 40 seconds into each of the four drawing activities, the enumerator asked the child if they wanted to stop and proceed to the next subtask. Scores reflect the child's ability to persist with each drawing for 60 seconds. If a child asked to stop at any point, they were not shown the subsequent geometric figures.

Children scored, on average, significantly higher in this domain with respect to baseline (71% versus 81%,  $p=0.00$ ), with the maximum possible score being 8. This is the domain with the highest scores among those measured by the ISELA, with 25% of children who attained the maximum score, and almost two thirds (64%) scoring either seven or eight points. It would be interesting to investigate whether this reflects improvements in self-confidence (see the paragraph on unexpected positive spillovers below) and willingness to try things out more.

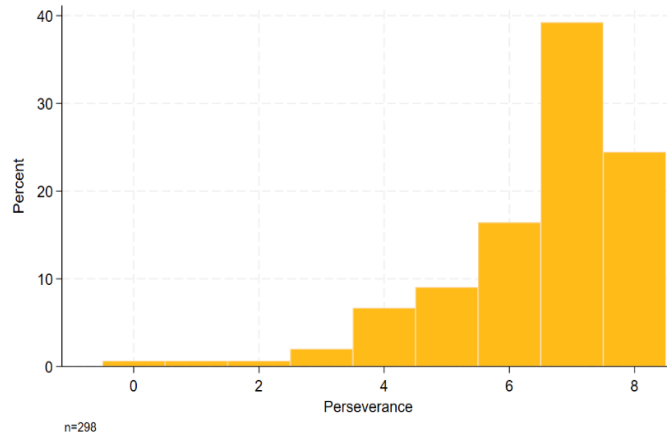


Figure 13: Distribution of perseverance index scores

### Conflict Resolution

This domain refers to children's reactions to situations of conflict, including management of the situation and recognition of other people's intentions.<sup>73</sup>

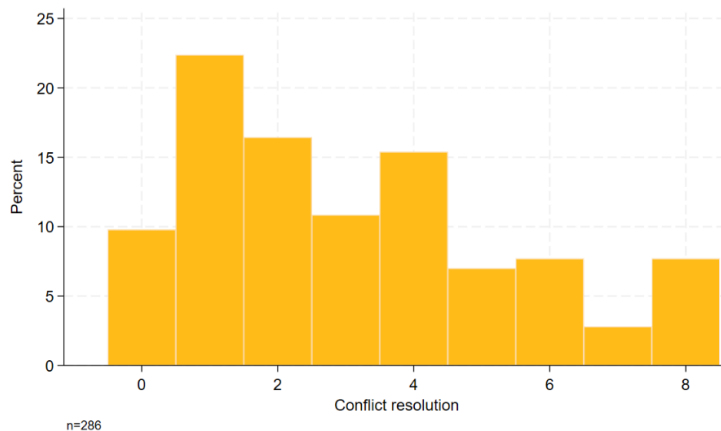


Figure 14: Distribution of conflict resolution index scores

The average score for this index improved significantly from 30% to 41% ( $p=0.00$ ), out of a maximum of 8. This is one of the domains where children obtained the lowest scores, with 73% scoring four points or less, and 9% scoring zero. Conversely, only 11% score above six points (75% of the maximum score).

The relatively low average values for this index are driven, at least in part, by the last four questions

<sup>73</sup> Children were asked to name two things they would do if they were playing with a toy and another child asked to play with the same toy. They were then asked to name two things they would do if the other child took the toy from them without asking and started playing with it. The index comprises also four questions in which children were asked to interpret the intentions and consequent feelings of a child whose action caused another child to feel sad or angry.

described above. These relate to empathy in situations of conflict, more than conflict resolution itself. Less than half of the children interpreted the intentions of a child who caused others to be sad or angry in a non-hostile way (more specifically, thought that the child upset others by accident or because of an honest mistake). Even fewer attributed to the child emotions of regret or guilt.

Qualitative data, in partial contradiction with the results above, highlights a reduction in conflict dynamics among children during playful activities, as reported by several teachers. It is important to consider that the toy situation described in the ISELA items might be too hypothetical for children, as it seems that they do not have much access to toys due to poverty and lack of recreational materials at school (see [Section 3.2.2.1](#)).

### Self-Concept

Children were asked to draw and reflect on their future self.<sup>74</sup>

The maximum score for self-concept is 6, and there is no statistically significant difference ( $p=0.07$ ) between this score at baseline (29%) and at midline (35%). **The target for this component of indicator 1000.3 (45%) has not been met, even when considering males and females separately.** This is a domain with relatively low scores, with almost two-thirds of children scoring one or less, including 24% who attained a score of zero. Conversely, 21% of them reached the maximum score, while very few scored in the middle range of the distribution. This distribution is similar to that of baseline scores (see Figure 16).

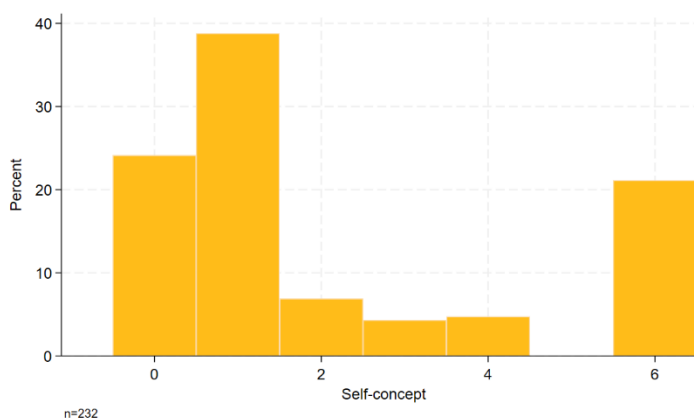


Figure 15: Distribution of self-concept index scores at midline

<sup>74</sup> Children were asked to identify one or two things that they hoped would happen to them in the future, as well as a barrier to and support for each. Scores reflect whether the child could imagine a future and articulate what would support them or stop them from attaining that future.

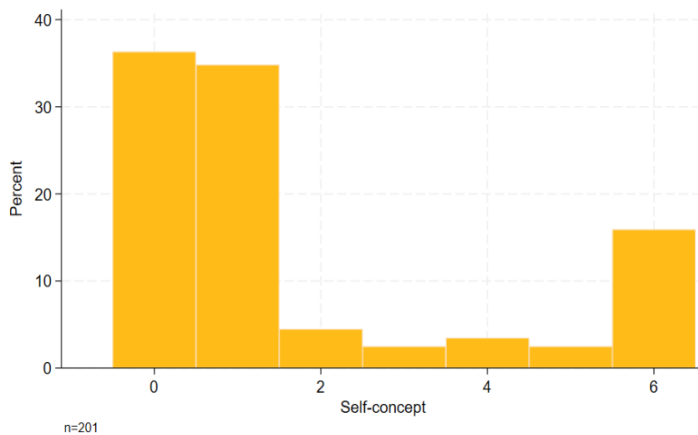


Figure 16: Distribution of self-concept index scores at baseline

While most children (76%) were able to describe one desire for their future, much fewer identified a barrier (46%) and a support (39%) to its realization, while only one third identified a second desire and even less (28%) reported a barrier or a support to its realization.

### Unexpected Positive Spillover Effects

As outlined in [Section Error! Reference source not found.](#), the evaluation focused on the assessment of children's improvement in life skills targeted by EQIE activities. However, teachers across different schools mentioned having observed improvements in some of the children's life skills that may not fully be measured by the ISELA scores outlined above.

Teachers reported increased self-confidence and enhanced communication skills among students. Specifically, children who were initially shy demonstrated a greater likelihood of actively participating in lessons after engaging in the activities.

*"We took the shyness out of the boys. The boys are now active, [even] those who used to find it difficult to speak in front of a teacher [...]. But now we're facing it thanks to Right to Play."*

*Teacher, EPC 22 de Abril*

In general, it seems that the ISELA was not able to capture all the changes in socio-emotional skills that children faced, in particular changes in self-confidence and communication skills.

### 3.2.2 Teacher's Practices and Professional Development

As outlined in [Section 2.2](#), 40 teachers and 20 headteachers responded to two different surveys to assess, among others, their teaching practices, with a focus on PBL, literacy instruction, and gender-inclusiveness, as well as teacher and headteacher wellbeing. These quantitative findings are complemented by qualitative data from FGDs with teachers and KIIs with implementation partners and RTP staff. The evaluation also included ten classroom observations to assess teachers' ability to apply PBL and other training content in their daily activities.

All the teachers in the EQIE sample reported to have been **trained by RTP**, on average 3.3 months before the survey<sup>75</sup> or 3.7 months before the classroom observation.<sup>76</sup> About one-third (30%) of surveyed teachers and one of the observed teachers said they received training on PBL from other organizations as well. On average, teachers reported to have been trained on 2.7 modules, with 30% trained on only one module and 57% trained in three or more. Similarly, headteachers reported that teachers in their school were trained on average in three modules, three months before the survey, with 50% reporting them to be trained in four or five modules. The modules reportedly offered to teachers are listed in Table 7.

Table 7: RTP training topics

| Module topic                                    | % teachers trained on topic (baseline) | % teachers trained on topic (midline) | % headteachers reporting teachers trained on topic (baseline) | % headteachers reporting teachers trained on topic (midline) |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initial training                                | 17%                                    | 88%                                   | 15%                                                           | 35%                                                          |
| PBL                                             | 77%                                    | 25%                                   | 70%                                                           | 70%                                                          |
| Positive learning environment: Child protection | 23%                                    | 70%                                   | 15%                                                           | 45%                                                          |
| Positive learning environment: Gender equality  | 40%                                    | 45%                                   | 20%                                                           | 80%                                                          |
| Positive learning environment: Inclusion        | 34%                                    | 23%                                   | 25%                                                           | 80%                                                          |
| Other topics                                    | 14%                                    | 85%                                   | 15%                                                           | 5%                                                           |

In the open-ended question included in the final part of the survey, 52% of teachers mentioned explicitly that they appreciated the PBL methodology and/or the integration of games in their lessons. This could indicate a reporting issue in this section of the survey, where only 25% reported to have been trained on PBL (see Table 7, “PBL”).

Importantly, most teachers surveyed at baseline (68%) had reported having received training by RTP before the start of the EQIE project, in the context of the PAQE project.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is important to consider that **comparisons between baseline and midline results in the following subsections do not fully capture changes in teaching practices that may have been supported by the project**, as many of the teachers could have already received training at

<sup>75</sup> 22.5% of them did not know when they were last trained or refused to answer the question.

<sup>76</sup> According to progress reports provided by RTP, all teachers in project schools had been trained by 2022.

<sup>77</sup> This was confirmed by RTP.

baseline in some of the topics mentioned above. However, EQIE trainings included literacy instruction and the inclusion of CWD, which were absent in the PAQE project.

The following subsections describe several aspects related to **teaching practices**, including PBL and its application to teaching reading skills and gender-responsiveness, and to teacher wellbeing. **Teacher practices are also summarized in indicator 1100.1, which includes information about the knowledge and implementation of PBL practices. Teachers obtained, on average, 42% of the maximum score, which does not differ significantly from the 48% averaged at baseline.**<sup>78</sup> However, the small sample size and its non-representativeness (see [Section 1.3.2 of Annex 1](#)) limit the interpretation of these data more to the qualitative aspect than to the quantitative one. For this reason, it is useful to examine more in-depth data about teacher practices. The main findings of this analysis are reported in the box below.

Quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that teachers held positive attitudes on **PBL**. While they considered material support adequate to implement PBL, professional support was still very limited, although improving compared to baseline. Headteachers generally deemed supervision useful for the implementation of PBL, and teachers expressed the need for further training. Although they reported implementing PBL quite frequently, teachers have limited theoretical knowledge of the topic, and classroom observations suggest that implementation might be limited.

A similar picture can be traced about the teaching of **literacy skills** (letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading fluency, reading comprehension). While attitudes about the application of PBL to teach reading skills were very positive, teachers seem to have limited theoretical knowledge of both key reading skills and playful reading techniques, despite reporting that they implement them frequently. Classroom observations found mixed evidence on the implementation of techniques to teach the key reading skills, while there seems to be a limited application of playful reading techniques.

Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that there may have been some improvements in the **gender-responsiveness** of teaching practices, which in turn might have contributed to closing the gender gap in reading skills.

### 3.2.2.1 Play-Based Learning and Its Implementation

#### *Attitudes, Training, and Support Received*

Most of the surveyed teachers (97%) and all headteachers reported that **they considered PBL to be very useful for learning.**<sup>79</sup> During the classroom observations, all teachers were able to

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<sup>78</sup> No target has been set for this indicator.

<sup>79</sup> This attitude could be due to the improvements in relationships, conflict resolution, self-confidence and communication skills mentioned by teachers during FGDs (see [Section 3.2.1.2](#) above).

share the plan for the lesson that day, and all of the plans included strategies for teaching literacy skills through games.<sup>80</sup> In half of the observed classes, the learning objectives were clarified to the children at the beginning of the lesson.

Qualitative data confirm this finding. Both implementation and government partners highlighted that teachers were more **systematically planning their lessons** using the RTP approach. This shift not only enhanced their capability in teaching, but also helped them to share knowledge more effectively. One implementing partner also noted that there was a collaboration between teachers and school management to fulfill the project's objectives.

When asked about **resources available for implementing PBL** to develop the children's reading skills, most surveyed teachers reported having adequate teaching and reading materials<sup>81</sup> (75%), which is partly contradicted by findings from the classroom observations.<sup>82</sup> Other areas were reported to be lacking: only 17.5% reported having adequate classroom space, which is in line with qualitative findings (see [Section 3.1.1](#)). Professional support was also limited, with only 32.5% receiving coaching and mentoring, 20% taking part in regular and documented performance appraisals, and 17.5% receiving regular monitoring from their supervisor.<sup>83</sup> Lastly, there was a lack of motivating professional development opportunities, reported by only 17.5% of respondents. With respect to baseline, there were sizable improvements in the presence of adequate materials and coaching and mentoring (with an increase of ten or more p.p. each), while the situation is stable (with a variation of about five p.p. or less) for performance appraisals, monitoring, and professional development opportunities. One RTP staff member highlighted that it would be useful to intensify coaching and mentoring activities, which are currently carried out quarterly due to financial constraints, and which might also contribute to reducing teacher absenteeism. Notably, the

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<sup>80</sup> However, this sample could be biased (see [Section 1.3.1](#) of [Annex 1](#)) and include some of the "best" teachers.

<sup>81</sup> A few teachers reported in FGDs that they also appreciated being able to use materials they created from available materials, such as cardboard boards.

<sup>82</sup> In the observed classrooms, there was a sufficient amount of pencils/pens for all (80%) or most of the class, and a sufficient amount of textbooks for all (70%), most (20%), or a part (10%) of the class. Here, "most" indicates about three quarters of students, and "a part" indicates about half of the students. Conversely, three classes (30%) had word cards, labels, or word trees, one class (10%) had illustrated storybooks, and six classes (60%) had other materials, while none had reading corners or posters, and one class had none of the reading materials cited above. Most of the materials (90%) were in Portuguese. Classroom observations also showed that a lack of recreational materials: only one classroom had games, and one had sports equipment, while three had other types of recreational materials. None of the observed classes had toys.

<sup>83</sup> The hypothesis that teachers in urban and suburban schools may receive more coaching and mentoring or more regular monitoring is not confirmed by the data, as the proportion of those who report receiving these is very similar between urban/suburban and rural teachers.

proportion of teachers who deemed the available classroom space appropriate almost halved, possibly due to the effects of cyclones Gombe and Freddy.

According to most headteachers (80%), the **support provided by supervisors** greatly helped teachers to implement PBL, while for the remaining minority it was somewhat helpful. Ninety percent of the teachers said that additional training would be beneficial, including mainly on how to manage large classes using PBL (requested by 50% of those who reported needing additional support), adapting PBL to different lessons or topics (33%), using PBL for behaviour management (27%), and inclusive learning with PBL (25%).<sup>84</sup>

**Overall support received by teachers for the implementation of PBL is summarized in indicator 1110.2 of the analysis and research framework, whereby only 8% of the teachers (3% at baseline) reported to have received an appropriate level of support.** While the target set for this indicator (48%) might be too ambitious given the context of project schools (see [Section 3.1.1](#)), this value is an important indicator that additional support might be needed by teachers to implement PBL.

### *Implementation*

Ninety-two percent of surveyed teachers reported **applying content learned during the training** always or most of the time.<sup>85</sup> Similar proportions were reported by headteachers,<sup>86</sup> while evidence from classroom observations is mixed. Most teachers reported sometimes discussing the implementation of PBL with their colleagues<sup>87</sup>, while headteachers described these discussions as happening quite often.<sup>88</sup>

Despite this, **there are important discrepancies between what the teachers seemed to know about PBL and what they reported doing in the classroom.** When asked to name as many PBL techniques as they could, teachers were able to mention, on average, 1.8 techniques out of seven, with 15% of them not mentioning any and most naming one to three techniques (see Table 8). Notably, the proportion of teachers who mentioned each technique differs

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<sup>84</sup> Other areas in which additional support was deemed useful include gender equality (19%), child rights (17%), planning lessons with PBL (14%), equal access to education (14%), and children's life skills (14%).

<sup>85</sup> The remaining seven percent reported they sometimes apply it.

<sup>86</sup> 85% of headteachers said teachers in their school implement PBL always or most of the time, 10% do it sometimes, 5% do it rarely.

<sup>87</sup> Ten percent of teachers shared that they regularly discussed the implementation of PBL with colleagues from the same school, while 68% did it sometimes or a few times and 23% never did. Similarly, ten percent discussed PBL regularly with colleagues from other schools, 45% did it sometimes or a few times, and 45% did not discuss it with colleagues from other schools at all.

<sup>88</sup> Note that some teachers initially said that they do discuss the implementation of PBL with colleagues, but then reported they never do when asked how often these discussions happen.

substantially from baseline only for art (18 p.p. increase at midline), music (10 p.p. increase), open-ended questions (6 p.p. increase), and leadership opportunities (9 p.p. decrease).

When, subsequently, teachers were asked how often they implement these techniques, they reported using them quite often (see Figure 17). This could be due to two reasons. First, there may be a strong social desirability bias, which is to be expected in this type of surveys. Second, teachers may be unable to link what they do in class to the theoretical concepts of PBL, despite applying some or many of them, or may not adopt the technical terminology.

Classroom observations highlighted that there might indeed be a **disconnect between theoretical concepts and practical application of PBL**, at least for some of the PBL techniques, although this should be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size and the non-representative sample.

Table 8: PBL techniques mentioned by teachers

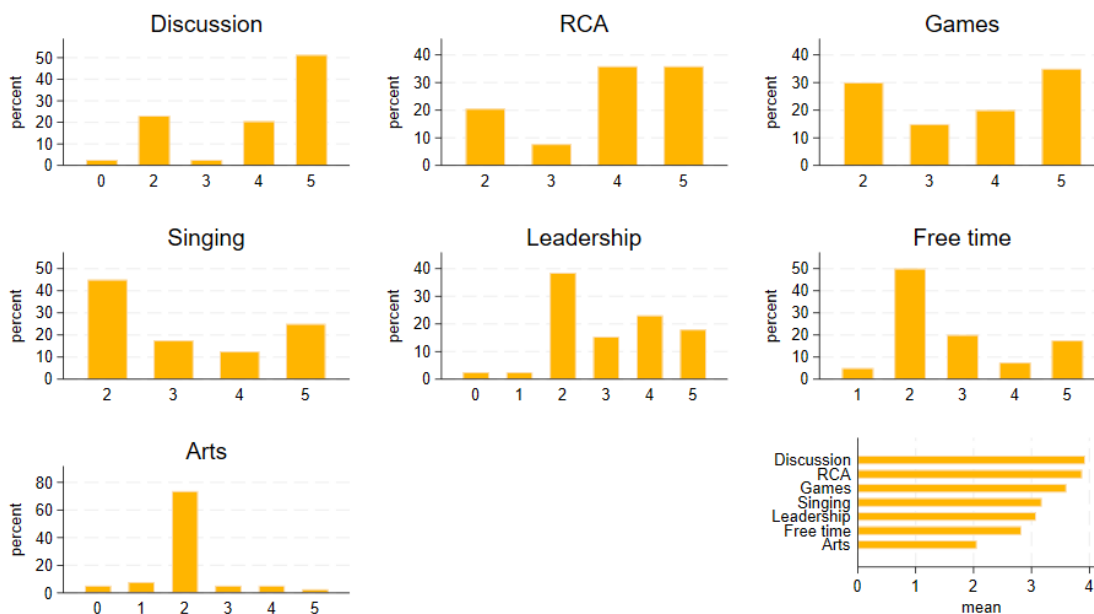
| Technique                                             | % mentions baseline | % mentions midline |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Games and play activities                             | 57%                 | 53%                |
| Arts (drama, drawing, etc.)                           | 14%                 | 33%                |
| Songs, rhymes, chants                                 | 17%                 | 28%                |
| RCA approach                                          | 25%                 | 23%                |
| Ensuring equitable participation                      | 14%                 | 15%                |
| Open-ended questions                                  | 11%                 | 18%                |
| Discussion among students                             | 9%                  | 8%                 |
| Giving students leadership/facilitation opportunities | 11%                 | 3%                 |

The **PBL activities that teachers reported applying most often** are: giving children time to ask each other questions and discuss the lesson (with 73% of teachers saying that they did it almost every day, every day, or in every class); the Reflect, Connect and Apply (RCA) approach (78%); and using subject-specific games and play activities linked to the lesson (70%).<sup>89</sup> Only 7% of the teachers who reported asking students to discuss among themselves almost every day or more often mentioned small-group discussion among PBL techniques, while this proportion rises to 29% for RCA and to 54% for games. Similarly, 31% of teachers who

<sup>89</sup> Consistently with this (although the content of the questions does not align perfectly), 77% of children reported that they learnt music or games in class during the week previous to the assessment (at baseline, this proportion was 57%), and none of the observed classes involved songs, arts, or drama. Conversely, only four of the observed classes involved games related to the content of the lesson.

reported using singing, rhymes, and chants almost every day or more often mentioned it among PBL techniques, while 30% of those reporting involving students in artistic activities at least some days per week mentioned it. Conversely, only one teacher mentioned giving students leadership roles among PBL techniques, reporting also that they did not use it themselves.<sup>90</sup>

Figure 17: Teacher-reported frequency of implementation of PBL techniques



0 = Never / 1 = One day / 2 = Some days / 3 = Almost every day / 4 = Everyday / 5 = (Almost) every class

Evidence regarding the **active participation of children** is mixed. Only one observed class was reported to be mostly led by the teacher, while in the others either the children and the teacher spent the same amount of time speaking or actively doing something, or children were speaking or doing activities most of the time, supervised by the teacher.

Classroom observations attempted to measure a variety of active learning behaviours. In most of the observed classes (70%), teachers asked open questions to children (only two teachers asked closed-ended questions), while in half of them teachers created opportunities for children to talk to each other about the lesson. A few teachers (30%) gave opportunities to children to ask questions, and others (20%) asked children to complete some tasks in small groups. Only one gave children the opportunity to practice and expand on what they learned.

<sup>90</sup> To gather information about the meaning of leadership, teachers were asked for examples of leadership roles among children. Most of them indicated that children take a role of leadership as class monitors, or when they act as teachers or teacher aides, coordinate other children in group work, or coordinate the daily activities.

In half of the classes, children were given opportunities to facilitate activities that contributed to the key message or learning (such as leading classroom discussions). Only in one case, facilitation roles were arranged in advance and children prepared for facilitation. In most of the classes (70%), children had free time to structure their own activities or games. Half of the teachers summarized the learning at the end of the activity or lesson, while only 20% concluded the class by giving students time to discuss and reflect on what they learned using the RCA approach.

In one of the interviews, a RTP staff member reported that applying the RCA approach was one of the main challenges encountered in teacher training. They highlighted that these difficulties and those in the integration of the game-based approach to the lessons were addressed with continuous training and CoPs. Our findings confirm that further support is needed by teachers in this area.

### 3.2.2.2 Using Play-Based Learning to Teach Reading Skills

#### *Key Reading Skills*

Almost all surveyed teachers (98%) considered the five reading skills very useful to teach children how to read.<sup>91</sup> Teachers were initially asked to mention the five skills, and were able to name 1.8 of them on average.<sup>92</sup> Only 10% mentioned all five, while 38% mentioned three or more, and another 38% did not mention any.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, 88% of surveyed teachers reported using games to teach reading almost every day or more, while the proportion is 65% for teaching letters, and to 50%-60% for teaching sounds, vocabulary, and comprehension (see Figure 18). These proportions do not differ greatly from the baseline, except for the teaching of letters and comprehension (which increased by ten or more p.p. each).

Classroom observations paint a mixed picture. On one hand, most teachers (60%) used an activity to teach or review letters. This is consistent with the fact that this was the most cited skill in the survey, and half of the teachers used an activity to teach vocabulary – in line with the proportion that mentioned using games to teach vocabulary in the survey (see above). On the other hand, only a few used an activity to teach sounds (30%), despite many saying that they did so almost every day or more often. Moreover, only one-third of teachers read to the children or asked them to read out loud, and only one practiced comprehension with the students. While the number of observed classes does not allow to draw statistically significant conclusions (see [Section 1.3.1 of Annex 1](#)), it may be that children might not practice

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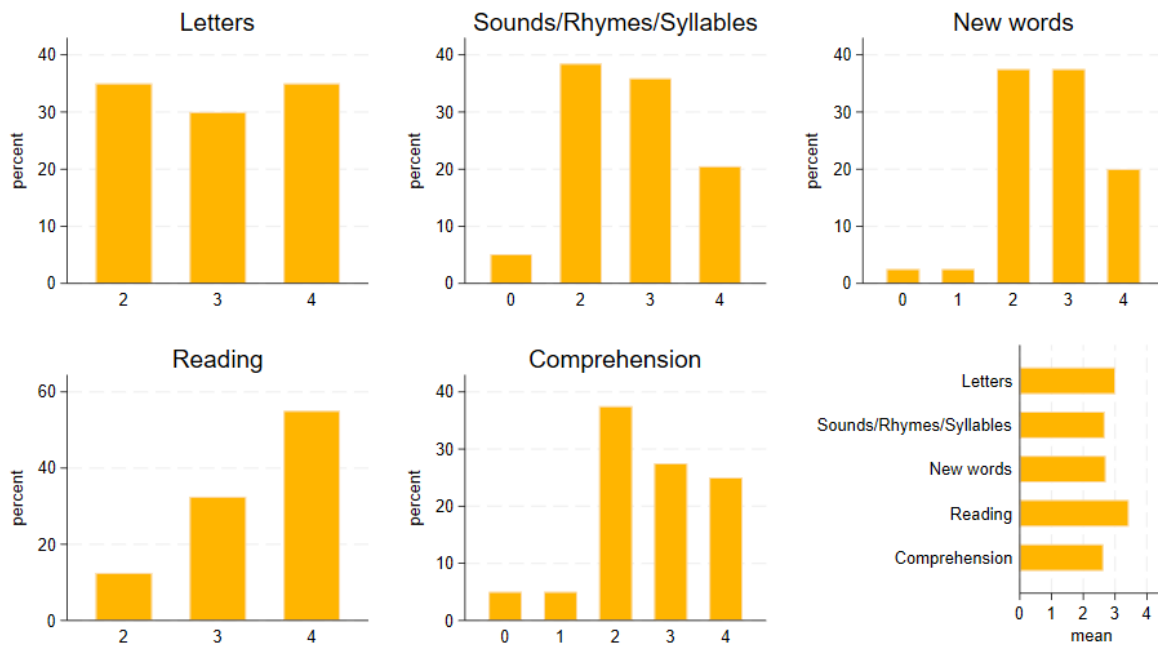
<sup>91</sup> The remaining teacher deemed them somewhat useful.

<sup>92</sup> Specifically, 50% mentioned letter knowledge, 27.5% mentioned phonemic awareness, 27.5% mentioned vocabulary, 30% mentioned fluency, and 47.5% mentioned comprehension.

<sup>93</sup> This includes 25% of teachers who mentioned other skills, and 13% who did not know or refused to answer.

comprehension skills very often, which would partially explain their reading comprehension results (see [Section 3.2.1.1](#)).

Figure 18: Teacher-reported frequency of implementation of PBL to teach the key reading skills



0 = Never / 1 = One day / 2 = Some days / 3 = Almost every day / 4 = Everyday / 5 = (Almost) every class

### Playful Reading

When surveyed about playful reading techniques they used to read to students, most teachers (73%) said that they read fluently or with expression (changing their tone, making voices for characters) and that they showed illustrations to children (33%), while other techniques were mentioned by very few of them (see

Table 99). There is also a non-negligible proportion of teachers (18%) who did not mention any of these techniques. On average, teachers were able to name 1.4 techniques, with most mentioning one or two, and 13% mentioning all of them. Notably, there was a general decrease in the number of teachers who mentioned each technique compared to baseline<sup>94</sup>, except for reading with expression.

<sup>94</sup> This could be partly due to the fact that, at baseline, teachers were trained on average closer to survey (2.1 months, versus 3.3 at midline).

Table 9: Playful reading techniques mentioned by teachers

| Technique                                                                                    | % mentions baseline | % mentions midline |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Reading fluently or with expression                                                          | 57%                 | 73%                |
| Showing illustrations                                                                        | 51%                 | 33%                |
| Asking children questions about the story that relate to children's own lives                | 26%                 | 13%                |
| Giving children opportunities to discuss the story/ interact with each other using the story | 14%                 | 10%                |
| Asking children predictive questions or ask children to imagine something about the story    | 11%                 | 8%                 |
| Asking children problem-solving questions about the story                                    | 20%                 | 3%                 |

Classroom observations suggest limited use of playful reading techniques, and in particular of the RCA approach. While most teachers (80%) read fluently or with expression and half of them showed illustrations to children, nobody asked children questions relating to their lives, and only one asked problem-solving questions or predictive questions about the story, respectively. Conversely, a few (40%) proposed an activity about the story where children would interact with each other. One of the teachers did not read out loud to the children at all. As mentioned above, while these results cannot be taken to be statistically significant, they are mostly in line with evidence from the teachers' survey, and might help explain the reading comprehension scores of children.

Consistently with these data, **only 14% of children reported that their teacher engaged in all of six PBL techniques (indicator 1100.2 of the analysis and research framework).**<sup>95</sup>

Overall, students' reading scores do not correlate significantly with either their teacher's knowledge about the key reading skills or their reported application of PBL to literacy

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<sup>95</sup> There was no difference between reports of girls and boys; no target had been set for this indicator. The value is similar to the baseline one (11%). Techniques included reading to students, asking questions about what they read, having students read by themselves or in pairs, teaching songs or games, and teaching the sounds of letters or words. Importantly, the way in which two of these questions were posed is not unambiguous, making it impossible to distinguish, for them, between teacher-initiated and student-initiated practices (see [Section 4.2](#)). This refers in particular to the questions: "In the last week, did you read with a classmate in school?" and "[...] did you read quietly by yourself without help?".

teaching; namely, with the number of concepts/techniques that they mentioned.<sup>96</sup> This could be due, as for the PBL approach, to a combination of social desirability bias and a possible lack of connection between the theoretical concepts and classroom practice. For both the PBL approach and its application to literacy instruction, the number of techniques/concepts that teachers could mention is not significantly correlated to the distance in months from the RTP training. Overall, this may indicate that teachers need more support and more in-depth training.

Despite mixed quantitative evidence, stakeholders across the board observed a noticeable shift in classroom dynamics with the implementation of PBL. Right To Play staff members noted empowerment among teachers who embraced a familiar methodology - the use of games - and integrated it into a learning setting, in particular for teaching how to read.

*“After [playing] the game, you're going to ask the students [...]: “What did we do?” They'll be able to identify what was done outside and then they'll be more open in class. They can tell that we did that and then the teacher [...] links the lesson with the game [...]. So, we're going to continue talking about it, [and] it helps the student's development.”*

*Teacher, EPC 22 de Abril*

This positive change is reflected in students' experiences and echoed by their caregivers. Several caregivers shared that when their children talked about their day at school, they often mentioned games. Some children said that they played a lot of games in school, a practice that was not as prevalent in the past. This integration of games into the learning process noticeably increased their enjoyment of school. This was confirmed by several teachers, who reported that children are more motivated.

Teachers themselves appreciated the PBL approach, despite some initial difficulties in integrating it into lessons.<sup>97</sup> They reported being able to teach lessons that are more inclusive of all students, including shy or older students. This was confirmed by one of the implementation partners, who highlighted that teachers had also learnt to include CWD. There were still some challenges in the inclusion of CWD, further explored in [Annex 2](#).

### *Child-Friendly Practices*

Evidence from classroom observations suggests that there are still some challenges in teachers' communication style with children. Only 60% of the observed teachers used

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<sup>96</sup> Moreover, there is no significant association between children reporting their teacher adopting a certain practice in the previous week and the frequency of use of such practice reported by the teacher themselves.

<sup>97</sup> This is confirmed also by the headteacher survey. The only headteacher reporting that PBL is rarely implemented by teachers in their school attributed this to the fact that teachers were not able to use play activities as learning tools.

appropriate language for the age of the children, while half of them adjusted the volume and speed of their speech to be heard. Less than half of teachers (40%) reformulated questions or instructions if children did not understand them, and only one-third showed actively to be listening when children spoke.

### 3.2.2.3 Gender-Responsive Teaching Practices

Half of the surveyed teachers shared that both boys and girls participated actively in classes, while the remaining half is split between those who said that boys were more active (28%) and those who said that girls were more active (23%). Moreover, 40% of teachers reported that the two groups learnt equally well, while 38% said that boys performed better, and 23% that girls performed better. Headteachers' perceptions followed similar trends.<sup>98</sup> When asked about the barriers preventing girls from participating equally, many surveyed teachers reported that girls were more shy and less confident than boys. These results do not differ excessively from baseline<sup>99</sup> and do not indicate large shifts in gender norms in the classroom.

According to one RTP staff member, an important component that was well received by teachers was the discussion around gender equality in the classroom and the equal treatment of boys and girls. The teacher survey investigated the role of teachers in ensuring equal leadership opportunities in the classroom, revealing that 25% of them intervened to ensure a balance between boys and girls, while 55% reported that there was a balance even without their intervention.<sup>100</sup> This constitutes an important improvement with respect to baseline, when 40% of teachers said that boys took leadership roles more often and only 14% reporting that they had to intervene to ensure a gender balance in leadership among students.

In general, 70% of teachers reported being able to adapt their teaching to ensure gender equality. Importantly, 25% did not know or refused to answer this question, suggesting either limited awareness about the topic or embarrassment in discussing it if the teacher did not adopt gender-responsive practices. This nonetheless represents a significant improvement with respect to the baseline.<sup>101</sup> Among headteachers, 85% reported that teachers most of the time or always adapted their teaching to favour gender equality, while 15% said that they

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<sup>98</sup> 40% said that they performed equally well, 35% that boys performed better, and 25% that girls performed better.

<sup>99</sup> At baseline, 40% of teachers reported that both boys and girls participated actively in classes, while 31% said that boys were more active and 29% that girls were more active. Moreover, 43% reported that the two groups learnt equally well, while 34% said that boys performed better, and 23% that girls performed better.

<sup>100</sup> The remaining 7.5% said that boys took leadership roles more often, while 12.5% said that girls took leadership roles more often.

<sup>101</sup> At baseline, only 29% of the teachers said that they were able to adapt their practices to ensure gender equality, while 6% said that they were not able to do so, and 66% did not know or refused to answer.

sometimes did it. Examples given by teachers on how they adapted their teaching practices referred mostly to giving equal opportunities for active participation to both boys and girls (for example when calling them to the blackboard or asking them questions). A few also mentioned that they required boys and girls to sit together (which they would not do by themselves). Classroom observations confirmed that all teachers gave girls and boys equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities. Overall, the use of gender-responsive teaching practices might have contributed to closing the gender gap in reading skills (see [Section 373.2.1.1](#)).

It seems that teachers did not give much importance to proposing gender-equal models in learning materials. Among surveyed teachers, only 24% (out of the 85% who reported being able to choose reading materials to be used in class<sup>102</sup>) mentioned equality of gender roles between male and female characters as a criterion for choosing reading materials.<sup>103</sup>

Classroom observations highlighted that most teachers (70%) intervened when children exhibited gender-biased behaviours towards their peers. Most also incentivized students to play non-traditional gender roles (60%). However, when behavioural issues emerged, only one teacher responded according to the behaviour of the child and their development needs, and not their gender.

Overall, while teachers adopted some of the practices that help ensure gender equality, classroom observations suggest that there is still room for improvement. In particular, it seems that teachers might understand gender equality as equal participation of girls and boys, rather than a deeper issue of gender norms.

#### 3.2.2.4 Teacher and Headteacher Wellbeing

In general, teachers found their job rewarding<sup>104</sup>, and **none of the surveyed teachers had considered leaving the sector in the previous year**. One possible factor supporting this is the possibility to share experiences and challenges with other teachers, for which there was a place according to 85% of teachers.<sup>105</sup> **Among headteachers, only one person had considered leaving the sector** in the previous year, but they refused to share the reasons for doing so.

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<sup>102</sup> At baseline, this criterion was mentioned by 17% of the teachers, out of the 85% who said they could choose reading materials.

<sup>103</sup> Other criteria mentioned by teachers include children's reading level (59%), a sufficient amount of illustrations (47%), children interests and relevance for their lives (21%), empowering roles for characters with disabilities (9%). Six percent of teachers did not know or refused to answer.

<sup>104</sup> In particular, 80% agreed or agreed fully that working as a teacher is rewarding, 5% were neutral, and 15% (six teachers) disagreed or disagreed completely.

<sup>105</sup> However, all but one of the teachers who did not find their job rewarding agreed that there are places where teachers can share experiences.

This corresponds to **indicator 1300.5** of the analysis and research framework, for which no target has been set.

Anecdotal evidence shared by RTP staff suggests that teacher absenteeism is a serious problem (see **Section 3.1.1**), which could be a proxy for teachers' commitment to their job.

### 3.2.3 Learning Environment and Culture of Reading

Implementation partners reported an increased interest among children in learning, seeing this as leading to improvements in school attendance. Both teachers and students confirmed this reported trend. In their view, using a more playful approach led to more enthusiasm towards school attendance. The improvement in children's relational skills, coupled with teachers' enhanced pedagogical practices, points to the positive influence that stronger relationships with teachers and classmates may have had on children's motivation to attend school. This could have partly reduced children's absenteeism, which in turn might have contributed to children's increased learning outcomes.

Both RTP staff members and implementation partners noted that awareness-raising initiatives were successful in increasing caregivers' perceptions of the importance of education for all children, as well as of themes such as CP and GBV, and should be reinforced. One RTP staff member reported that caregivers realized, through the training on the Learning Together Toolkit, that support to children does not necessarily mean tutoring them, or helping them with homework, but rather asking them about school, what they learnt, and in general taking an interest in their education.

#### 3.2.3.1 Home Environment

The home environment has changed significantly with respect to baseline.

Children report having, on average, 1.5 reading materials at home, with 50% of them who had one or none (8%). Reading materials consist mostly of textbooks (88%), religious books (36%), and health passports (28%). This represents a noticeable increase with respect to baseline. In the week before the assessment, more than half of the children had either seen someone in the house read (54%), had someone in the family help them to do homework (62%), or read to them (51%), while a slightly lower but considerable proportion had done literacy games with someone in the family (42%) and were told a story by them (39%). These proportions have considerably increased with respect to baseline, ranging from a 21-p.p. increase in children who had someone read to them to an 11-p.p. increase in children who were told a story. This is interesting in light of the low literacy rate registered in Zambia and likely indicates the success of community awareness raising and caregiver training on the Learning Together Toolkit. **Overall, 83% of children engaged in at least one reading behaviour at home in the previous week, which corresponds to indicator 1200.2 of the analysis and**

**research framework. This is a considerable improvement compared to both the baseline data (41%) and the target set (66%).<sup>106</sup>**

There is no statistically significant difference in the proportion of boys and girls who reported these practices (consistently with baseline), indicating that this might not be a critical factor in the closure of the reading gender gap. In general, these practices are significantly correlated to the children's reading outcomes. In particular, children who had someone in the family help them with homework, read to them, or play literacy games with them in the previous week scored significantly higher on all subtasks, except reading fluency. Children who had a story read to them scored significantly higher on the most used words, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension subtasks.<sup>107</sup>

While the relationship between home literacy environment and reading outcomes described above is linked to several external factors – most notably families' socioeconomic background<sup>108</sup> – the increase in the proportion of children who reported these practices (without large changes in the reported socioeconomic situation of the families) suggests that there might be a link between the two.

Overall, it seems that the school and community environments might have contributed to better learning due to their increased positivity.

### 3.2.3.2 Initiatives Supporting Reading

A significant part of the learning environment has been shaped by initiatives to support reading. RTP staff members reported that reading clubs and reading centers, as well as Reading Olympics, were successful activities. Teachers shared that reading centers and reading clubs had a positive effect on the community's perception of the project and were, in general, appreciated. One implementation partner described reading clubs as supporting the improvements in reading outcomes.

There were some initial challenges in the distribution of reading materials, because of insufficient resources for allocation to all households. The approach was adapted thanks to a suggestion from the district authorities, with books provided for children and caregivers at school and church. One RTP staff member reported that the children borrowing books at school were mostly those who participated in reading clubs or reading center activities. As

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<sup>106</sup> This is true also if we disaggregate data by gender.

<sup>107</sup> Excluding outliers from the analysis makes the relationship statistically significant for reading fluency as well, indicating that previous results were driven by a few individuals who scored very differently from others.

<sup>108</sup> For example, there is a statistically significant correlation between the household's SES score and the probability that children had been read a story or helped with homework by a family member ( $p=0.00$  for both).

they brought the books home, parents ended up reading them, too, supporting children if they were able to do so. Books at church, instead, were usually borrowed by parents.

The proportion of children who attended after-school reading activities such as reading camps, reading centers or reading games out increased considerably with respect to baseline, from 15% to 34%. The proportion of children who participated in out-of-school reading activities (such as those available through radio, TV, or mail) remained stable, and much lower.<sup>109</sup> The latter is particularly interesting if we consider the fact that baseline data was collected in Spring 2021, when many Covid-19-related restrictions were still in place. This suggests that participation in remote reading activities at baseline might not have been linked to the lack, or availability, of other activities. It seems, however, that children participated less often than at baseline in in-person activities.<sup>110</sup> **Overall, the proportion of children who participated in either in-person or virtual reading activities in the previous week is 21% (see indicator 1200.1 of the analysis and research framework). This value is below the target value of 46% and is in line with the baseline value.**

The increased interest in reading might be associated with taking part in extracurricular activities on the topic, which could in turn reinforce children's reading skills. In fact, children who participated in after-school reading activities scored significantly higher on all EGRA subtasks, including reading fluency and reading comprehension.<sup>111</sup> Please note, however, that it is not possible to establish the causal direction of this relationship: it could be that children who attended reading activities learned to read better than those who did not, or that those who attended reading activities were already reading better than the others.

Surveyed teachers reported spending, on average, 2.3 hours per week facilitating extracurricular activities. Among those who spent at least one hour doing so, 27% (nine teachers) reported they facilitated reading clubs, 9% (three teachers) led remedial activities for children who had difficulties in reading, and 70% (23 teachers) hosted other activities.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, almost all headteachers reported that teachers in their school facilitated extracurricular activities with a focus on reading.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> This was 4% at baseline, 7% at midline.

<sup>110</sup> 58% of those who attended an in-person activity reported having done so in the previous week (75% at baseline). The frequency of participation seems to have remained stable, instead, for remote activities, with 70%-75% of children who attended them reporting having done so in the previous week both at baseline and midline.

<sup>111</sup> This result is robust to the exclusion of outliers. Only for reading comprehension, the relationship is statistically significant at the 10% level, but not at the 5% level.

<sup>112</sup> Only one teacher reported facilitating both a remedial reading activity and another type of activity.

<sup>113</sup> 74% said that teachers facilitated reading clubs, 63% said they facilitated remedial activities, and 58% mentioned other activities.

Most teachers who facilitated reading clubs (78%) shared that boys and girls participated equally, while the remaining reported a higher participation from girls. Similarly, all teachers who facilitated remedial activities reported that boys and girls participated equally. Headteachers reported a similar situation.<sup>114</sup> Thus, it seems that higher participation of girls in reading-related extracurricular activities might have contributed to the closure of the gender gap in reading skills. While it is not possible to link participation in these activities to learning outcomes for CWD due to the lack of a sufficiently large sample, teachers who facilitated extracurricular activities reported that CWD participated sometimes (one teacher) or always (five teachers) in reading clubs, and they sometimes participated in remedial activities (all three teachers).<sup>115</sup> Similarly, almost all headteachers reported that CWD participated at least sometimes both in reading clubs and in remedial activities.<sup>116</sup>

### 3.2.3.3 Safety and Inclusivity of Learning Environment

The learning environment is reported to be somewhat safer than it was at baseline<sup>117</sup>. According to headteachers, 55% of schools had a moderately implemented physical and emotional security plan, 30% had an almost or completely implemented one, and 10% had a minimally implemented one. This shows some improvement compared to baseline, when 21% of schools had a minimally implemented plan and 18% did not have a plan or had one that was not implemented at all. Moreover, 95% of schools at midline had a code of conduct for teachers (75% at baseline).

<sup>114</sup> Most reported that boys and girls participated equally, while 20-30% said that girls participated more.

<sup>115</sup> Two of the nine teachers who facilitate reading clubs (and two headteachers) reported that there are no CWD who take part in the reading club. One headteacher reported that not CWD take part in the remedial activities.

<sup>116</sup> 57% of headteachers (eight out of 14) said that CWD participated sometimes in reading clubs, 21% that they participated most of the time or always, 7% that they rarely participated. 50% (six out of 12) said that CWD always participated in remedial activities, 25% that they participated sometimes, 17% that they rarely participated.

<sup>117</sup> In particular, **indicator 1300.1 of the analysis and research framework, summarizing the management of physical and emotional safety concerns inside the school, increased from 12% at baseline to 80% at midline (88% in urban schools, 75% in rural schools)**, although this value is an upper bound, since we removed one of the questions that was originally included in it (see **Annex 10 of the Inception Report**). Overall, the target of 100% was not reached. Conversely, **indicator 1300.2, summarizing the emotional safety conditions of schools, is quite low, scoring at 8% for surveyed teachers and 0% for observed teachers (3% at baseline), which is far below the target of 70%**. This is due mainly to the fact that almost half of the teachers reported unequal gender participation in class and that, more importantly, only three teachers were able to give an example of an adaptation of teaching practices for CWD (see **Section 3.2.4**). Moreover, **indicator 1300.3 highlights that 80% of the children had not felt afraid in or on their way to school in the previous week, which is stable compared to 75% at baseline (no target has been set for this indicator)**.

Teachers reported a slightly different situation but overall confirmed what was shared by headteachers.<sup>118</sup> Table 10 outlines issues tackled by the school safety plans as reported by both teachers and headteachers.

Table 10: Issues included in the school safety plan

| Issue              | % headteachers reporting | % teachers reporting |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| GBV                | 79%                      | 26%                  |
| Gender             | 68%                      | 47%                  |
| Inclusion of CWD   | 68%                      | 44%                  |
| Hygiene            | 53%                      | 32%                  |
| Bullying           | 47%                      | 50%                  |
| Teacher behaviour  | 32%                      | 3%                   |
| Violence           | 21%                      | 18%                  |
| Exploitation       | 5% (1)                   | 3% (1)               |
| Other              | 42%                      | 9%                   |
| Refuse/do not know | 0%                       | 3%                   |

Similarly to baseline, there are some disparities in reports of teachers and headteachers regarding issues included in the school safety plan, suggesting limited awareness of teachers on the topic and/or a desirability bias in the answers of headteachers.

### Physical Safety

During classroom observations, students and teachers identified safety concerns in two cases and one case, respectively. In most of the classes (70%), the teacher explained the safety concerns to the students. In just as many, appropriate action was taken to address the concern. Table 11 below reports the physical safety characteristics of the observed classes. Only one of the observed classes was free from a variety of hazards, none of them were properly lit, and only one-third had sufficient space for games. While most of them (80%) were reported to be well-ventilated, this might be due to the fact that the class was held outside (although no information is available on this aspect).

Table 11: Physical safety characteristics of observed classes

| Characteristics   | % classes observed |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Well-ventilated   | 80%                |
| Accessible to CWD | 50%                |
| Properly lit      | 0%                 |

<sup>118</sup> 42.5% of teachers reported the physical and emotional safety plan to be moderately implemented, 20% say that the plan is implemented completely or almost completely, 10% say that there is no plan or that there is a plan but it is not implemented, and 13% did not know or refused to answer.

|                                                                                                                                        |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| No hazards such as exposed foundation, cracked walls, exposed wires, hanging roofs, blind spots that could cause accidents or injuries | 10% |
| Sufficient space for games and active learning                                                                                         | 30% |

### Emotional Safety

Ninety percent of teachers said that students shared ideas, opinions, and feelings with them at least sometimes. All said that students asked questions at least sometimes, while 92%

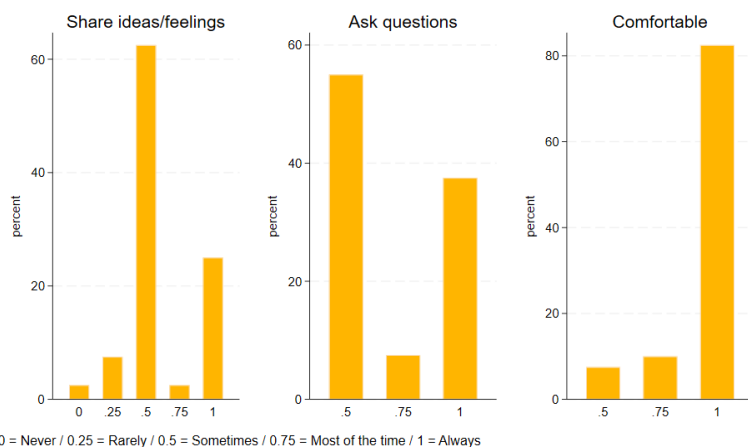


Figure 19: Teacher-reported indicators of emotional safety

reported that students always feel relaxed (see Figure 19), showing some improvement compared to baseline<sup>119</sup>. Classroom observations confirmed that interactions were positive, but highlighted, instead, that children were not always relaxed.<sup>120</sup>

Classroom observations also revealed that most teachers used positive, friendly, and caring body language and tone

(70%), and smiled for most of the class (60%), while only one-third encouraged and actively acknowledged children, even if they gave incorrect answers.

When they have to discipline bad behaviour, about half of the teachers said that they would talk to the child in a calm, patient, and non-stressed manner, and about one-third would discuss the child's behaviour with them to allow them to explain it. Almost 40% would establish rules or routines (similarly to baseline). Only five percent reported that they would physically punish the child, and nobody that they would yell at them or make fun of them. All discipline methods were reported in similar proportions by headteachers, with the exception of talking to the child calmly, which was reported to be adopted by the teachers in 95% of the

<sup>119</sup> At baseline, 77% of teachers reported that students shared ideas, opinions, and feelings with them at least sometimes, 86% said that students asked questions at least sometimes, and all reported that students always feel relaxed.

<sup>120</sup> Observations reported that children shared ideas, opinions, and feelings with the teachers in 70% of the classes and interacted comfortably with teachers in as many. Conversely, most children appeared to be relaxed in only one class out of ten, which might be due to the observation itself.

schools, and physical punishment, reported by one-fourth of the headteachers.<sup>121</sup> In general, nearly all headteachers said that their school consistently established rules and routines to help children understand the impact of their behaviour.<sup>122</sup> This is confirmed by evidence from classroom observations.<sup>123</sup>

According to almost all headteachers (95%), children trusted school staff members, coming to them to address safety concerns. In turn, school staff were described as having a mechanism to address such concerns. Teachers reported a more nuanced situation, with 85% indicating that students went to them for safety concerns at school at least sometimes, while fewer (60%) said that students went to them for challenges at home at least sometimes.

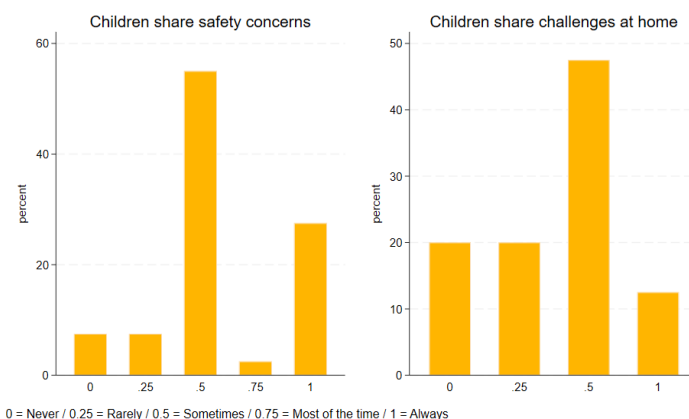


Figure 20: Headteacher-reported indicators of emotional safety

**Almost all (98%) of the teachers knew what to do when they had a concern about a child's safety.**<sup>124</sup> This is also an improvement with respect to baseline, when teachers had shared that children went to them for challenges at home or at school less often. Also at baseline, slightly fewer teachers knew what to do in case of safety concerns. When asked about the last safety concern reported to them, 25% of teachers said they resolved it by themselves, 13% informed the headteacher, 42% did something else<sup>125</sup>, and 5% did not know.

**Sixty-five percent of teachers said they had received training on PSS for students (17% at baseline), while only 38% had access to a focal point for PSS (23% at baseline).**<sup>126</sup>

Conversely, headteachers reported that most schools (65%) had access to a trained focal point for CP referral and PSS (30% at baseline), and that teachers in half of the schools had access to a person trained in PSS (40% at baseline). This suggests that teachers may have not

<sup>121</sup> About 38% of teachers and 65% of teachers reported that other methods were adopted.

<sup>122</sup> The remaining part of the headteachers said that these rules are established sometimes.

<sup>123</sup> In particular, 80% of the observed teachers discussed bad behaviour with children when it happened, while 70% involved them in the identification of a solution or alternative behaviour. Nobody used physical punishment, threats, or shame, and nobody ignored the bad behaviour.

<sup>124</sup> This corresponds to **indicator 1310.1** of the analysis and research framework, which has exceeded both the baseline value (11%) and the target (44%). The same result applies to data disaggregated by gender.

<sup>125</sup> This proportion is quite high (as it was at baseline), thus it would be useful to further investigate the issue.

<sup>126</sup> This corresponds to **indicator 1300.4** of the analysis and research framework, for which no target has been set.

been fully aware of the existence of a PSS focal point, or that there may be a problem of overreporting by headteachers.

Children were asked to report on emotional safety conditions around and at school in the previous week, as shown in Table 12. While the feeling of safety in and around school and the relationship between adults and children (violence) seem unchanged compared to baseline, there seems to have been a worsening in the relationship between children (bullying), which partially contradicts the findings of the qualitative data (see [Section 3.2.1.2](#)).<sup>127</sup> This might indicate greater awareness of bullying, better recognition of what it consists of, and more willingness or confidence to report it, thanks to increased self-confidence (as suggested for example by [Cowie and Olafsson, 2000](#)). In this case, these data would not contradict the reported improvements in relational skills. However, further investigation would be needed to fully understand these dynamics.

The only statistically significant difference between reports by boys and girls is that boys were more likely to have been personally involved in violence by an adult compared to girls (at baseline, there were no significant differences).

Table 12: Child-reported safety conditions around and at school

| Issue                                                     | % children reporting at baseline | % children reporting at midline |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Feeling of safety at and around school</b>             |                                  |                                 |
| Felt afraid in school                                     | 19%                              | 16%                             |
| Felt afraid on the way to school                          | 14%                              | 12%                             |
| <b>Relationships between children/bullying</b>            |                                  |                                 |
| Child teased another to make them angry                   | 29%                              | 48%                             |
| Child left another out of a game                          | 27%                              | 41%                             |
| Child said something mean to another                      | 23%                              | 37%                             |
| Personally involved in any of the above                   | 15%                              | 23%                             |
| Child got into a fight where someone was hit              | 19%                              | 36%                             |
| Personally involved in such fight(s)                      | 7%                               | 12%                             |
| Someone threw something at child to hurt them             | 13%                              | 24%                             |
| Personally threw something at child                       | 7%                               | 10%                             |
| <b>Relationships between children and adults/violence</b> |                                  |                                 |
| Adult screamed at child                                   | 18%                              | 18%                             |
| Adult hit child                                           | 13%                              | 14%                             |
| Adult threatened to hurt child                            | 16%                              | 17%                             |
| Personally involved in any of the above                   | 9%                               | 11%                             |

<sup>127</sup> On a less concerning but related note, classroom observations revealed that most children helped their peers to solve problems or understand questions in only two of the ten observed classes.

Children also reported on safety conditions at home, which were similar to baseline. Almost one-fifth of them had lived in a home where people pushed, slapped, or threw something at each other, while 11% had lived in a home where people shouted or yelled at each other. At a higher level, 12% had lived in a community where they did not feel safe, with 5% having to leave their home because of safety issues.

**Overall, about 30% of children would talk to a trusted adult if someone hurt them or a friend.**<sup>128</sup> Other answers include stopping playing with them (6%), hitting them (8%), doing something else (39%). Another 15% of children would not know what to do, and 7% did not answer.<sup>129</sup>

### 3.2.4 Enrollment and Retention of Children with Disabilities and Out-Of-School Girls

Among surveyed children, 71% reported that all their friends and all children of their age in their community go to school<sup>130</sup>. This corresponds to **indicator 1410.2** and is in line with data from baseline, not reaching the target set at 77%.<sup>131</sup> As highlighted in **Section 3.1.1**, two of the most vulnerable categories in the area of education are CWD and girls. The following subsections examine the results of the project in terms of enrolment of OOS children from these two categories, while **Annex 2** provides further details on other aspects related to disability and gender in this context.

#### 3.2.4.1 Children with Disabilities

Progress reports indicate that 341 CWD were supported between 2021 and 2022 to enroll in school. According to the project's 2022 progress report, out of the 96 CWD supported to enroll in the 2022 academic year, 86% were retained in school and progressed to the next

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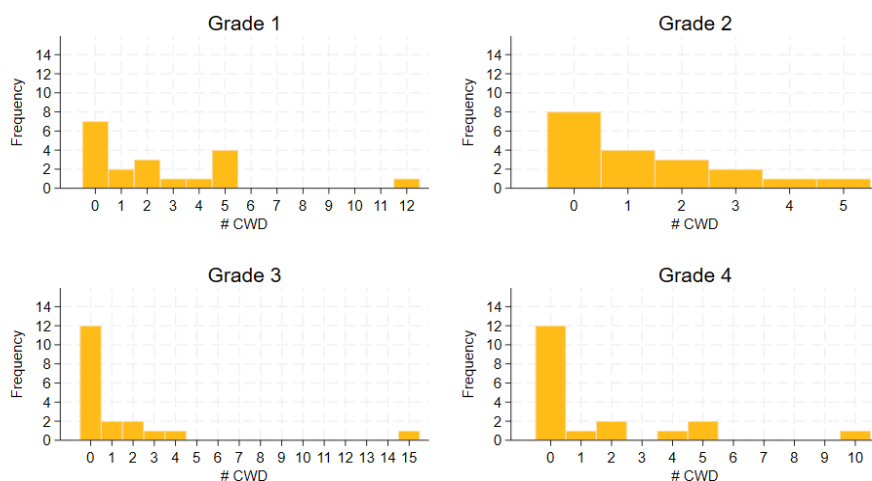
<sup>128</sup> This corresponds to **indicator 1310.2** of the analysis and research framework, for which no target has been set. At baseline, this proportion was equal to 40%.

<sup>129</sup> At baseline, this question ("If you or a friend were being harmed by someone else, what would you do?") included only two possible answers: "I would tell a trusted adult" and "Don't know" (in addition to "No response"). During the data collector training, both the trainer and the enumerators agreed that these answers were not sufficiently contextualized, as they could not capture the universe of possible answers given by children to such a question, and thus included additional options: "I would stop playing with him/her", "I would hit him/her", and "Other". This prevents the comparability of the answers from the Midline Evaluation with those from the Baseline Evaluation, but even a comparison derived from not having modified the options would not have been meaningful at all.

<sup>130</sup> Headteachers reported that a total of 11,376 children were enrolled in their schools, including 5,586 girls and 5,790 boys. **This corresponds to indicator 1400.2 of the analysis and research framework, and is below the target of 17,500 students, in line with the number of students who were reported to be enrolled at baseline (12,362).**

<sup>131</sup> The confidence interval for this indicator is (66%, 76%), meaning that the target may have been almost reached (see **Footnote 45**).

academic year, 14% struggled with their performance and did not reach academic set standards for their grade level, and only one of them was registered as having dropped out of school again.<sup>132</sup> Data about 2023 dropouts, in particular following Cyclone Freddy, were not yet available at the time of reporting. For further details on the type of disabilities of the supported children and support provided, see [Annex 2](#).



n=19

Figure 21: Headteacher-reported number of CWD in each grade

schools had ten or more, up to a maximum of 29. Most of the children were enrolled in grade 1 (36%), while the others were evenly spread across grades 2 to 4.<sup>133</sup> The distribution of CWD across schools within each grade is shown in [Error! Reference source not found.](#). Each school had on average 2.5 CWD in grade 1, 1.3 children in grade 2, and 1.5 children in each of grades 3 and 4. Most schools had between zero and five CWD in each grade.<sup>134</sup> Teachers who were surveyed as part of the quantitative data collection reported having less than one child each in their class, with 40% who had none, and 33% who had one.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, teachers from the classroom observations reported having either no CWD in their class (50%) or one (40%).<sup>136</sup>

Overall, headteachers reported that 1.1% of the total children enrolled in school were CWD, which is higher than the average for Zambezia (0.4%). There were, on average, 6.8 CWD per school, with great variability: three schools did not have any, while five

<sup>132</sup> One child with a physical disability became bedridden and has not attended school since then, and one child passed away.

<sup>133</sup> In particular, 19% were enrolled in Grade 2, 22% were enrolled in each of Grade 3 and Grade 4.

<sup>134</sup> EPC Malinguine had 12 CWD in Grade 1; EPC Coroa had 15 and 10 students, respectively, in Grades 3 and 4.

<sup>135</sup> Three teachers reported having, respectively, three, five, and six CWD in their class.

<sup>136</sup> One of the observed teachers (10%) reported having three CWD in her class.

Importantly, while only four children in the quantitative sample were identified by their teachers as CWD requiring specific adjustments for the assessment<sup>137</sup>, a few other children self-reported having difficulties with certain tasks or being unable to perform them at all, suggesting that they might also be CWD. In particular, two children reported having a lot of difficulty hearing, even with a hearing aid, and two others said that they were not able to feed or dress themselves at all. Moreover, a significant number of children without disabilities reported having some difficulty seeing, even with glasses (5%), hearing, even with a hearing aid (3%), walking or climbing steps (0.5%), concentrating on fun activities (10%), feeding or dressing themselves (0.5%), and communicating with their family or friends (2%). This indicates that teachers might not fully be able to identify and support all CWD in the class.

Similarly to baseline, attitudes towards the inclusion of CWD are encouraging, with 95% of headteachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that students should attend the same learning environments regardless of abilities and 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing that all students can study in inclusive classrooms if teachers are willing to adapt the curriculum.

Both RTP staff members and implementation partners reported very positive results in terms of community awareness regarding the rights of CWD, in particular regarding education, and suggested that these activities should be strengthened. These results involved not only families of CWD, but also the community at large. One RTP staff member shared that working with families of CWD was initially challenging, due to stigma and embarrassment within the families themselves. One RTP staff member highlighted that the process has been gradual, with the number of identified CWD tripling from the start of the project.

*“The community is already beginning to realise that children in the teaching and learning process must not be considered depending on their physical condition. Every child has the right and privilege to be in a school and study at the same level as any other child. So, the community has already started to realise this and I feel that even when we go to give talks and we get there, the community has realised that actually enrolling a child with a disability and a child who doesn't have a disability is all normal. [...] So, I think that one of the big gains for the community is this change in awareness.”*

*Implementation partner*

*“Now we find disabled children and other children in schools. Something is changing because of the support of the project: the training, the teachers, the local leaders, the school council. There are also appropriate places where this information is disseminated at community level. And the community is taking it on board, the parents and carers are taking this information on board. That is why we are finding children in school now. Although it is difficult, they are there*

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<sup>137</sup> All four children were boys, aged eight to twelve. Three had a physical impairment, and one had a speech delay. None of them had multiple disabilities.

*attending school. So, that is a substantial change that is happening. [...] I also notice that these children are involved in activities, both at school and in their own communities. So, I feel that everyone is involved."*

*Implementation partner*

One teacher also reported having a disabled child in their class, enrolled thanks to the project, who was very motivated to attend school. Only one headteacher reported having a CWD who dropped out. In general, the most cited reason for dropout by CWD was that school is not considered useful for them (55%), while a considerable number of headteachers (30%) could not mention any reason or refused to answer.<sup>138</sup>

A few teachers highlighted that transportation from home to school remained a problem for some CWD, and that others would need support to move around.

On the other hand, two RTP staff members acknowledged that the project is not able to assist children with multiple or severe disabilities, who are instead referred, to the extent possible, to social or health services.<sup>139</sup> As explained by one implementation partner, some children have disabilities that would require attending a school with a focus on special needs education, such as schools for blind children. The same RTP staff member also highlighted the role of intersectional factors, which compound difficulties caused by disabilities. Finally, they stressed that the project has had an important role in some children's quality of life, which should be regarded as the most important outcome.

*"I think there are children with different types of disabilities and I know that the project does not have enough resources to serve all of them, [...] but we try as far as possible, [...] to place those children within those government policies, social ones [...]. It certainly made a difference in the lives of one or 2 or 3 children. I'm sure now, the biggest challenge that I hear from the project team in relation to this is caring for children with multiple disabilities [...]. The challenge these vulnerable children already face are doubly vulnerable.*

*Being a child [...] makes you vulnerable, being poor makes you vulnerable. Being disabled, making you vulnerable and if you are a girl, then four times disabled, being a woman and also becoming a mother. Then if we can make a difference, even if it is in the lives of one or two people, a disabled girl, for example, we will be making project, managed to make a lot of difference in these people's lives. That's why I'm talking here, it's not a question of number and quantity, it's a question of the quality that you managed to bring to people. It's the question of [...] the level of impact, compared to the number of impacted children."*

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<sup>138</sup> The other reasons mentioned by headteachers for dropout of CWD are working (two mentions) and reaching the desired grade (one mention).

<sup>139</sup> According to the 2022 progress report, 75 CWD were identified but not enrolled in school for the academic year 2023. They were, instead, referred to other support services through the joint work of Okuluvela and school inclusion committees.

*RTP staff member*

**Annex 2** provides more information on the participation of CWD in classes and its effects, and the challenges they face in school.

#### 3.2.4.2 Out-of-school girls

Progress reports indicate that 641 OOS girls were supported to enrol in education. Implementation partners reported positive results in girls' enrollment. One shared that high numbers of girls are now attending school, while one RTP staff member suggested that the fact that inclusion committees were able to reach older girls is remarkable, due to the difficulties they face. Another partner shared a success story:

*"We have several success stories. We had some girls who would have left because of marriage. Today they're married [...], but they're studying. One of them is now in sixth grade. She started fourth grade with us. She passed and she is continuing to study, [...] even though she's still married. But whenever we talk to her, she says she's going to continue to study."*  
*Implementation partner*

One implementation partner highly valued this activity, as about 90% of the children enrolled in school had not dropped out. Moreover, its staff reported having received feedback from teachers on the increase in the number of CWD enrolled at school, as well as the return of some older girls who had dropped out. Despite these positive results, the partner also shared that not all the girls who received the school kit remained in school for the whole year.

Headteachers reported that 55% of children who dropped out of school in the previous year were girls, with a lot of variability (from 0% to 100%). Thus, although this number is higher than the average for Zambezia (47%), the small sample size and high variability prevent meaningful comparisons. Headteachers report that girls drop out mostly because of work (75%), early marriage (40%), or because school is considered unimportant (40%). Among these, the only reason that was reported to affect girls disproportionately is early marriage, consistently with the analysis of the context in **Section 3.1.1**.

**Annex 2** provides additional information on EQIE activities involving OOS girls, as well as challenges and changes reported.

### 3.2.5 Success Factors

#### *Factors Supporting Implementation*

Factors supporting the implementation of the project were all internal and linked to the project itself. RTP staff members reported that local authorities appreciated and actively

supported the project, and are also interested in its expansion. Local authorities shared appreciation for the project and that they wished for it to continue.

*“Right to Play has a very good connection with the local government [...]. Fortunately, the network of an organization that reaches the Ministry of Education, specifically the Ministry of Education, has its doors open. So we started working with [them] [...]. These groups carry out joint monitoring and [...] give suggestions [about] the best approach [...]. The government involvement from the first minute and this openness that they have they had with Right To Play, I’m sure that it accounted for [...] 80% of its success.”*

*RTP staff member*

Both RTP staff and implementation partners observed a warm reception of the project within the community, including local leaders, schools, and caregivers, with a climate of interaction and collaboration. RTP staff members reported that their interaction with the community was supported by the implementation partners’ strong local presence and knowledge of the context. A noteworthy aspect of this collaboration, as reported by a few members of RTP staff, was the relationship with local leaders. Their involvement was instrumental in connecting with the broader community and organizing awareness meetings.

Implementation partners emphasized the crucial role of inclusion committees. These committees, composed of influential community figures like local leaders, religious leaders, and secretaries, were pivotal in identifying OOS CWD and acting as liaisons between families, the community, and schools. Their involvement significantly enhanced the project’s reach.

### *Factors Hindering Implementation*

The project’s implementation encountered both **external challenges**, like natural disasters, and **internal** ones related to its design and implementation.

Among external challenges, Covid-19 significantly disrupted the project’s timeline, delaying the start of activities by a year, as reported by several RTP staff members. Cyclone Freddy further compounded these difficulties, causing destruction that led to school closures and the displacement of many children. During this period, project activities shifted focus to provide psychosocial and material support to affected children (see [Section 3.2.6](#) for further details on the project’s adaptability).

Another major external challenge was the lack of materials and adequate infrastructure, a concern voiced by teachers, caregivers, and partners. This issue particularly affected CWD. A notable problem in some families was a lack of caregivers’ involvement in the project and in their children’s education, contributing to student absenteeism, a concern echoed by teachers in two schools. Teacher absenteeism was another significant issue, exacerbated by limited monitoring from Ministry of Education officials, especially in rural areas. This risk was

not adequately anticipated during the project's design phase. Additionally, the project faced challenges due to stigma, fear, and lack of information regarding CWD rights to education. Deeply rooted social norms particularly affected girls, representing a barrier to education (see [Section 3.1.1](#) for details on barriers to education for girls).

Internally, the project faced challenges **related to its design and implementation**. The distribution of limited funding across various packages complicated their implementation. An implementation partner observed that in the early stages of the project, there was no coverage of transportation costs for staff members. This, as reported by RTP staff, resulted in a temporary absence of pedagogical supervision visits in hard-to-reach areas, with possible consequences on the quality of implementation. Adapting games to the local language and aligning them with lesson themes also posed a challenge for some teachers. Training was sometimes insufficient, with disparities in the materials and training received by teachers who were trained early in the project.

A significant challenge reported by RTP staff members was the lack of training for school councils, leading to unaddressed issues like teacher absenteeism. In general, one RTP staff member remarked that not being more involved in school management limited monitoring of issues such as punctuality and attendance, and consequently the possibility of addressing them.

The involvement of volunteers in reading centers also faced challenges, as they expected some form of compensation, despite not being promised payment. Incentives like bicycles or training were provided, but these were often insufficient, leading to high turnover. A teacher pointed out that the root cause of this issue was the volunteers' poverty. An implementation partner suggested that emphasizing the civic activism aspect of volunteering might enhance motivation. Similarly, an RTP staff member highlighted the importance of raising awareness in the community about the value of volunteering. The same teacher suggested that symbolic compensation may encourage volunteers to continue their work.

### 3.2.6 Project Adaptability

The project's adaptability is reflected in a series of measures reported by a few RTP staff members. A key component is the periodical updating of the risk matrix, which serves as a dynamic tool to identify and manage potential challenges in real time. Additionally, the project places a strong emphasis on outcome monitoring, enabling the team to act pre-emptively and make adjustments before formal evaluations if certain aspects are found to be ineffective. To further support this approach, Country Office (CO) staff shares monthly reports and holds monthly update calls with headquarters (HQ) staff. These discussions provide an opportunity to share experiences, address challenges, and collaborate on solutions, ensuring that the project remains responsive and flexible to changing circumstances. The updates and

discussions were reported to be very useful by several RTP staff members. This integrated strategy of continuous monitoring, communication, and risk management underscores the project's commitment to achieving its goals despite the uncertainties it faces. One teacher highlighted an area for potential improvement, noting that while data is being gathered regularly, there is a need for more visible actions to address the identified issues.

The EQIE project has had to adapt to several unexpected circumstances.

First, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly altered the educational landscape<sup>140</sup>, with schools remaining open in 2021 but under strict restrictions that affected teaching methods and overall quality of education. These restrictions included reducing class sizes, focusing on core curriculum elements, cancelling Physical Education (PE) classes to avoid close contact, and introducing double shifts. This situation posed challenges for teachers in planning and delivering effective PBL activities and conducting assessments as originally planned, since a large part of PBL activities should have been implemented in PE classes. There has been a greater emphasis on supporting teachers in integrating PBL methodologies into regular classroom instruction, particularly in teaching core subjects like reading, to navigate the constraints initially imposed by the pandemic (EQIE Progress Report, 2021).

In the aftermath of Cyclone Freddy, the project's adaptability was further tested. It was essential to collaborate with the local education cluster for emergency response, especially to provide PSS to children when continuing regular project activities was not feasible.

### 3.3 Efficiency

*This criterion assessed EQIE's efficiency from an operational point of view. In particular, it focuses on operational efficiency, that is on the efficiency of implementation, with a focus on the role of implementation partners.*

Efficiency gains were achieved through close collaboration with specialized partners that had existing presence in the community. This was especially important in light of the focus on community awareness and disability. Some challenges linked to institutional capacities and requirements for management support were promptly addressed through greater support from the RTP team.

#### 3.3.1 Operational Efficiency

Collaborating with **implementation partners** was a crucial factor in the success of the project. These partners, who have been working with RTP for many years, specialize in working with

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<sup>140</sup> See Section 3.1.1 for details on disruption caused by Covid-19 and Section 3.2.5 for consequences of Covid-19 on project implementation.

specific groups – Okuluvela focuses on CWD, while AMME (*Associação Moçambicana Mulher e Educação* – Mozambican Association Women and Education) concentrates on girls. Their strong local presence and deep understanding of the context supported the project's activities. Their pre-existing relationships with local leaders and the trust they had already established in the community before RTP's involvement have been particularly beneficial. Partners were instrumental in identifying educational barriers and areas with more pronounced issues, playing a significant role in raising awareness among caregivers and other community members. For further details on the activities in which implementation partners were most involved, please see [Section 3.2.40](#) and [Annex 2](#).

The **direct interaction** between the implementation partners and RTP was favourably received. One partner expressed satisfaction with the support provided by RTP, especially in cases of difficulties. This was echoed by RTP staff, who were available to offer assistance when needed or in areas outside the partners' expertise. One implementation partner remarked that the partnership with RTP also positively impacted their organization's reputation and represented an opportunity to gain experience in the area of education.

Despite this, some **challenges** arose, particularly in terms of management, leadership, and bureaucracy within one of the implementation partners. Addressing these issues required a significant efforts towards institutional development and managerial support. This investment was deemed worthwhile due to the positive field results achieved by the partner.

RTP was also involved in **capacity-building activities** with its implementation and government partners, focusing on aspects like reporting and financial management. Both implementation partners acknowledged that the training provided by RTP significantly improved their performance by equipping them with tools aligned with the objectives of their activities. While one partner reported that more training is necessary to further enhance their ability to support CWD, the other emphasized the need for refresher training. The support extended to government partners was primarily in the area of supervision, with one RTP staff member noting considerable improvements in the capabilities of both implementation and government partners.

In terms of future perspectives, one implementation partner expressed the desire to be involved in the budgeting process for the subsequent phases of the project.

### 3.4 Sustainability

*This criterion assesses whether the project shows promise for continuation after its end, focusing on activities that have an intrinsic sustainability component and on risk factors for long-term sustainability.*

While project activities were seen as valuable and important by both implementation and government partners, likely barriers to sustainability remain. Especially for materials-intensive interventions, such as specific resources for CWD, additional funding would be needed to continue this type of activity. Other components of the project, such as inclusion committees and inclusion of PBL in existing teacher training initiatives, were deemed lower-resource and more likely to continue independently. The evaluation did not find evidence of government or implementing partners' concrete funding or programming commitments to continue EQIE interventions.

### 3.4.1 Prospects for Sustainability

The project has shown considerable potential for sustainability, with various components showing promise for continuation after its end, including reading clubs and centers, CoPs, PBL manuals for teachers, and inclusion committees. However, concerns about funding limit the sustainability prospects of several other components.

Project activities were regarded as interesting and valuable by **implementing partners**. While a RTP staff assessed their institutional capacity as sufficient to carry on the project independently, there was no mention of any specific plans to do so to date. There has been an interest from government partners in continuing and expanding the project's activities, given its strategic importance for the government. Despite this, the lack of funding is a significant issue, as reported by a member of RTP team (see below).

Several components of the project were regarded as likely to be sustainable. The sustainable nature of **reading clubs and centers** is due, according to a few RTP staff members, to the participation of volunteers, although there is likely to be a need for additional materials and incentives to maintain this component. Another RTP staff member suggested that **CoPs**, which could potentially be coupled with local education authority events such as community days, could offer a sustainable way to continue training teachers and extending project reach.

RTP is also in the final phases of working towards integrating **Learning Through Play manuals** into teacher training institutes, which is expected to broaden national adoption of this method. The University of Licungo is also interested in incorporating play-based activities into their teacher training programs, as per a memorandum of understanding with RTP.

The importance of **inclusion committees** as a foundational element of the project was highlighted by one implementation partner. These committees, established by RTP but operating independently, are crucial for the ongoing success of the project's initiatives. They play a vital role in bringing CWD and other OOS children into education, and, according to a member of the RTP staff, they have the competencies to continue their activities even in the absence of the project. As these committees were specifically formed for the project (since they do not rely on pre-existing structures), there is a risk they might not continue after its

end. It should, however, be noted that schools showed interest in maintaining this component due to its effectiveness in reaching a broader student base.

#### 3.4.1.1 Continuation of Positive Effects for Project Stakeholders

Some components of the project were recognized as potentially having an impact beyond its lifespan, regardless of the continuation of its activities.

Both RTP staff and partners recognized the inherent sustainability of the **PBL approach**, which retains its effectiveness even when teachers are transferred to other schools.<sup>141</sup> To increase the probability that the PBL approach spreads beyond the EQIE project, it would be necessary to provide further training to teachers, as well as more materials, ongoing mentorship and support, and incentive mechanisms (such as supportive school leadership) (see [Section 4.2](#)). Thanks to the training of trainers conducted in schools and at the Pedagogical Influence Zone (ZIP<sup>142</sup>) level, additional teachers could continue to be trained. Furthermore, several stakeholders mentioned that the project successfully instilled a love of reading in children. This was supported by the creation of books from local materials — a skill taught to both teachers and caregivers.

Data suggests that another component that might continue to have a positive impact is the **capacity training** provided to implementation and government partners, which could continue to improve their operational efficiency.

#### 3.4.2 Risk Factors for Long-Term Sustainability

Despite the project's potential for long-term impact, some challenges could impact its sustainability after its end. The main concern is **funding**, which is crucial to implement some of the components of the project, including activities with CWD and OOS girls, as well as those in reading centers.<sup>143</sup> It does not seem that government partners have the financial capacity to sustain the project without funding from RTP. The same applies to implementation partners, even considering only the inclusion activities on which they focus.

One government partner shared concerns about maintaining **teacher motivation**, suggesting routine monitoring as a possible mitigating strategy. In a logic of sustainability, monitoring should be done by school structures and/or local education authorities. There is also an ongoing need for **awareness-raising**. One partner emphasized the importance of financially supporting families to continue their children's education beyond the fourth grade. Another concern is the potential lack of **supervision** in communities, which might lead to the

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<sup>141</sup> According to a RTP staff member, this is not infrequent.

<sup>142</sup> For further information on ZIPs, please see [Section 3.1.1](#).

<sup>143</sup> Reading centers might need funding to provide some compensation for volunteers (see [Section 3.2.5](#)).

interruption of inclusion committees' activities. This risk might be mitigated by integrating members of school councils into the **inclusion committees**, ensuring a direct link with the schools – a recommendation also made by RTP staff. There is also an issue with the limited involvement of some committee members. One RTP staff member suggested entrusting the responsibility for inclusion committees to school boards to enhance engagement.

RTP staff expressed concerns about the risk of partners discontinuing their work due to **financial constraints**. Another possible challenge is turnover at the district level, which might result in the involvement of individuals unfamiliar with the project's approach. Material costs and the financial burden of community-level outputs were also seen as significant challenges. In particular, activities such as the provision of materials to CWD might be discontinued if there is a lack of funding, a concern that was raised by government partners as well. One RTP staff member also expressed concerns about the continuation of support to CWD.

## 4 Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

The findings from this evaluation show that EQIE in Mozambique **has been carefully designed and is contextually relevant**. Activities were tailored to the needs of its stakeholders and were designed based on previous experience in the country, as well as extensive research carried out at baseline. While partners at the community level and in government institutions are supportive of the intervention, to date there are no clear financial commitments to continue activities past the end of project implementation.

Quantitative and qualitative data highlighted **improvements compared to baseline in the reading and the socio-emotional skills of children** reached by the project, although a causal attribution to EQIE activities is not possible due to the lack of a control group. The results indicate an important improvement, especially given the very low baseline reading skills and the fact that most students were not native Portuguese speakers. Importantly, the **gender gap in reading skills found at baseline appears to have closed**. The project had important successes in the enrolment of OOS CWD and girls, with progress in community awareness of the importance of education for these two groups. CWD continue to face difficulties in school, mainly due to limited teacher training and lack of adequate materials and infrastructure.

**Evidence about teachers' practices in the classroom is mixed**. Teachers generally showcase limited theoretical knowledge about PBL and its application to teaching literacy skills, and reported having received **limited support** during implementation. Limited data on classroom practices does not allow us to assess whether actual teaching practices have changed. Data suggest that there may have been some **improvements in the gender-responsiveness** of teaching practices, which might have contributed to closing the gender gap in reading skills. There were also improvements in the **home and community learning environment**, with increased community awareness about the importance of education for all children, including girls and CWD, as well as tangible improvements in learning support provided to children by their caregivers, including in reading. At the same time, while there are reports of a slight worsening in bullying, this could be due to increased awareness and willingness to report, in turn showcasing improved life skills. Overall, the improvements in children's reading and life skills do not contradict findings about teaching practices and the learning environment.

## 4.2 Lessons Learned

This evaluation identified three sets of lessons learned and recommendations, which refer to, respectively, EQIE's design, its implementation, and the research process. Lessons learned, and their corresponding recommendations, are outlined in this and the following section.

### *Design*

**LL 1:** The EQIE project is trying to implement many activities with limited resources. It would be advisable to make a strategic decision on whether the core focus in the last year of implementation should be inclusion (enrollment and retention of CWD and/or OOS girls) or reading skills. While important results have been achieved in both areas, the final year of implementation could benefit from further targeted efforts in the priority area for the project.

**LL 2:** Findings highlighted the important need for learning materials in the communities involved in the project. The reported frustrations regarding the distribution of materials point to the need for a clear and transparent system that can manage the expectations and requirements of stakeholders.

### *Implementation*

**LL 3:** EQIE has correctly identified the needs of target communities, and its approach has proven promising in terms of effectiveness and operational efficiency, although it could benefit from targeted efforts in one of the main areas of implementation (see **LL 1**). Activities and outputs are consistent with the overall project outcomes and objectives. There have been considerable improvements compared to baseline in almost all domains, indicating that the project is on the right path to achieving its goals, although not all targets have been reached.

**LL 4:** The positive changes reported in the school and community environment may have played a role in enhancing the overall learning experience, confirming the importance of context for learning and socio-emotional outcomes. There is also evidence of promising results in gender-responsive teaching practices. This indicates the potential for similar interventions to make substantial progress in addressing gender disparities in educational outcomes. On the other hand, the limited provision of coaching and mentoring may have hindered implementation.

**LL 5:** Due to the linguistic and educational context of Mozambique, it is not surprising that Portuguese native speakers progress more and/or faster than non-native ones when target teaching practices are introduced in an environment where Portuguese is the language of instruction. This points to the need to consider this additional source of inequality.

**LL 6:** Forming inclusion committees proved to be a pivotal element for the inclusion of OOS CWD and girls. This points to the importance of dedicated groups to focus on inclusivity and the need to cooperate with and empower local communities.

**LL 7:** Partnerships were instrumental to the project's success. Working with local partners with strong community presence enabled RTP to work on a relatively new area – inclusive education – and run successful awareness-raising campaigns. At the same time, local partners reported their strong appreciation for the capacity-building activities provided by RTP. These initiatives have led to significant improvements in their performances. However, RTP faced some challenges related to mismanagement and to the limited organizational capacity of one of the implementation partners.

### *Research Process*

**LL 8:** The limited amount of data available on CWD and OOS girls due to the evaluation design prevented a more comprehensive assessment of their learning experience once enrolled in school. Although the focus of the project is on enrolment and retention of these children, understanding their experience in school would be important to inform future interventions.

**LL 9:** The ambiguity in the formulation of some questions in the baseline tools posed difficulties in data analysis, pointing to the importance of clear and precise questionnaires. Survey designs that included an "other" option sometimes failed to capture the full spectrum of experiences or practices, leading to incomplete data. The reliance on self-reported data by teachers and headteachers also emerged as a challenge, as it could misrepresent reality. There is instead a need for more objective measures of the project's outcomes on teacher behaviours, which can then be used to analyze mechanisms behind observed results.

**LL 10:** The high threshold set for asking a sufficient number of reading comprehension questions at baseline resulted in limited insights into students' reading skills. This highlighted the need for progress indicators tailored to the context where each intervention takes place.

**LL 11:** The ISELA tool did not capture all of children's improvements in SEL skills, as highlighted by qualitative data. This confirms the importance of triangulating quantitative and qualitative data to provide the most comprehensive possible picture of progress made. It also points to the need of carefully tailoring quantitative data collection tools to measure domains that may be affected by the intervention.

## 4.3 Recommendations

### *Design*

#### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** If the project is aiming to focus on further strengthening reading outcomes in its final phases, teachers will require more support.<sup>144</sup> This can include refresher training, coaching and mentoring and regular CoPs. Areas where teachers require additional support include: i) classroom management; ii) playful lesson planning and alignment of games to the curriculum objectives; iii) using PBL for behavioural management; and iv) inclusive learning. Evidence from classroom observation and EGRA tests also points to the need for a particular focus on playful reading methods. An investment in these key areas in the remaining year of implementation is advised to foster improvements in reading comprehension not yet observed in the evaluation. Focusing on reading outcomes could also prove beneficial for increasing evidence on the benefits of PBL towards reading – an area that the final evaluation could further explore.

**Recommendation 2:** For the remaining part of the EQIE project, it is recommended to enhance communication strategies around the distribution of materials, if this is planned. This involves providing clear information on the recipients, the criteria for distribution, and the process involved. Stakeholders should be informed about further distributions and if there is a plan to include others in the future. Providing further information can help manage expectations and foster a sense of transparency and fairness. Moreover, since this is an expensive activity, it should be considered whether it would be preferable to focus on teacher training instead, particularly in light of **Recommendation 1**.

### *Implementation*

**Recommendation 3:** For the final year of implementation, we recommend focusing on the targets that have not yet been reached, working closely with partners to achieve gains in those areas which are further behind, such as support provided to teachers and supplemental reading activities. It is also fundamental that indicators and targets for future projects are contextualized and set taking into account the initial conditions in the areas of implementation, so that they are both realistic and achievable.

**Recommendation 4:** For refresher training and future interventions, we recommend continuing to include gender-sensitivity training in the packages offered to teachers, and to assess whether this kind of training can be included in other projects or contexts where gender differences represent a significant challenge. In doing so, it is fundamental to maintain a focus on gender balance, and to frequently assess gender dynamics and gender differences in learning, adjusting activities to new emerging trends and needs.

**Recommendation 5:** To prevent further widening the gap between native and non-native speakers of Portuguese, and to avoid creating one in future projects, it would be

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<sup>144</sup> This includes teachers in both urban/suburban and rural areas.

recommendable to design literacy instruction activities tailored to the needs of second-language learners, aiming to maximize their exposure to the Portuguese language. For the final year of the project, we recommend considering if it would be feasible to tweak existing materials and provide additional support to learners who do not speak Portuguese in the home.

**Recommendation 6:** To continue delivering on the inclusion component of the program in the last year of implementation and beyond, we recommend strengthening community engagement and inclusion committees. These supported the delivery of important results for both CWD and OOS girls, and it would be advisable to plan ahead to strengthen their prospects for sustainability. This could include discussions with partners on potential incentive mechanisms for committee members, as well as increasing linkages with more established school structures, such as School Councils.

**Recommendation 7:** To enhance collaboration with local partners, we suggest continuing capacity-building activities for the remaining part of EQIE. Focus areas for improvement include additional training on CWD support and refresher sessions. Implementing a regular needs assessment and feedback collection process from partners can help tailor training and enhance effectiveness. For future interventions, we recommend that RTP thoroughly assess potential partners' capacities and systems, prioritizing capacity building at the project's outset. This proactive approach will help mitigate challenges during implementation.

#### *Research Process*

**Recommendation 8:** If the project aims to strengthen its inclusion component, then the endline evaluation should focus on collecting data on CWD and OOS girls in a more systematic manner. In this case, we would recommend a qualitative study design with a focus on CWD, due to limited evidence to date (see [Annex 2](#)).

**Recommendation 9.1:** To strengthen the validity of the data on teaching practices, it is essential to rely more on classroom observations in the final stages of the project, to collect more objective insights than self-reported measures. Including a larger sample of classroom observations, in more diversified locations, would be advisable. A sufficiently large sample, coupled with a targeted classroom observation tool, would allow to investigate the effectiveness of the teacher training and of specific practices, highlighting areas for improvement. To do so, it is also essential that data can be triangulated with those from teacher surveys.

**Recommendation 9.2:** When surveys include an "other" response option, it is critical to allow respondents to specify their answers. However, this should be applied selectively to avoid excessively lengthening the survey. Determining which questions require this level of detail is important for gathering comprehensive data without burdening respondents.

**Recommendation 10:** Future evaluations employing EGRA assessments should contextualize the thresholds set for reading skills assessments. These benchmarks should be tailored to the specific literacy levels and language proficiencies of the student population to ensure that they yield meaningful and actionable insights.

**Recommendation 11:** We recommend continuing to include in-depth qualitative data collection into the evaluation of projects that directly target or might have an impact on socio-emotional skills. For the endline evaluation of EQIE, we suggest including a few additional items in the learner assessment that allow to quantitatively measure skills not currently included in the ISELA, such as communication skills and self-confidence.

# 1. Annex 1: Detailed Methodology

## 1.1 Evaluation Design

### 1.1.1 Changes to the Evaluation Design

The original plan was to conduct a longitudinal evaluation by collecting data from a subset of children who had already been assessed at baseline while they were in Grade 1. This approach envisioned the re-sampling of 300 out of the 400 students (or 15 out of the 20 children sampled per school) included at baseline. In practice, this was not fully feasible. First, the RTP team in Mozambique was able to trace 342 students who had been assessed at baseline (85% of the original sample), when they were attending Grade 1. Among these students, 244 students were in Grade 3 at the time of data collection, while 98 were in Grade 2. Second, during quantitative data collection the majority (60%) of the tracked students were absent<sup>145</sup>, and the research team had to randomly select Grade 3 students in the same schools, resulting in a cross-sectional study, rather than a longitudinal one.

The main limitation of the approach lies in the fact that students who were in Grade 3 when midline data was collected (or in Grade 2 if they repeated a year) could only be compared to the Grade 4 students assessed at baseline, rather than to themselves over time. It's important to note, however, that the latter approach would not have led to any meaningful conclusions, as it would have not been possible to determine whether any changes in reading and socio-emotional skills could be attributed to the project or to the natural improvement that takes place as children grow older.

The approach of comparing current Grade 3 students to baseline Grade 4 students relies on the assumption that Grade 4 students assessed at baseline were:

- i) Coming from a full year of school closures due to Covid-19<sup>146</sup>;
- ii) Being assessed at the start of the school year.

This would make them comparable to students completing Grade 3 at the time of data collection.<sup>147</sup> Overall, this is a quite strong assumption, and results should accordingly be interpreted with caution.

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<sup>145</sup> Due to the tight data collection schedule, only one attempt to reach the children was made (each school was visited on a specific day). We do not know whether absent children dropped out, moved, or were simply absent from school on the day of data collection.

<sup>146</sup> For further details on school closures due to Covid-19 and their consequences, see [Section 3.1.1](#).

<sup>147</sup> Moreover, as Grade 4 students had missed a full year of school, EGRA stimuli were chosen at baseline to be at the Grade 3 level. This makes midline results more comparable to baseline ones.

On the one hand, this approach allowed us to assess those students reached most intensively by project activities and who might not be too different from their Grade 4 counterparts from the point of view of exposure to formal education. On the other hand, the baseline and midline cohorts assessed are from different grades and may be different for a variety of unobservable factors that may significantly diminish the robustness of the results (for example, changes due to the natural growth process of children).

## 1.2 Sample Design and Data Collection Tools

Table 13 displays the sampling approach used to collect data, as well as any changes made to the original data collection plans, and tools used. Below are further details about the collected data and qualitative tools used. Quantitative data collection tools are described in [Section 2.1.2](#).

Table 13: Sampling approach and changes to the original plan

| Group           | Sampling approach                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Changes to the original plans                                                                                                                                           | Tool <sup>148</sup>                                                                                       |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Children</b> | <p><i>Quantitative:</i> 298 G3 and G2 students already assessed a baseline, to be randomly chosen among those that were tracked. For each student not present at school on the day of the assessment, another G3 student was randomly selected to maintain the baseline number of 15 children per school.</p> <p><i>Qualitative:</i> One group of girls and one group of boys (eight participants each) in three schools selected by RTP based on logistical and representativeness considerations. Boys and girls were selected randomly among those who had not participated in the quantitative data collection.<sup>149</sup></p> | In two schools, we were able to reach only 14 children, thus the final quantitative sample comprises 298 children instead of the 300 that were planned <sup>150</sup> . | <p><i>Quantitative:</i> Learner assessment (including EGRA and ISELA)</p> <p><i>Qualitative:</i> FGDs</p> |
| <b>Teachers</b> | <p><i>Quantitative:</i> Two teachers for each of the 20 sampled schools. We surveyed teachers of the sampled G3 children wherever possible. Where this was not feasible, we randomly sampled teachers reached by the project. In total, ten surveyed teachers did not have any students in the sample.</p> <p><i>Qualitative:</i> FGDs with one mixed group of eight teachers in three schools, selected by RTP based on logistical and representativeness considerations. Teachers were selected based on their participation in the project. If the number was not</p>                                                              | We were able to reach only 20 out of the 24 teachers originally foreseen to take part in the FGDs, due to their limited availability.                                   | <p><i>Quantitative:</i> Teacher survey</p> <p><i>Qualitative:</i> FGDs, classroom observations</p>        |

<sup>148</sup> Data collection tools can be found in the following section.

<sup>149</sup> We decided to include different children in the quantitative and qualitative data collection to reduce distractions from school activities and to provide a sample that comprises different points of view and experiences.

<sup>150</sup> As confirmed by the Consultancy's Assessment Specialist, the fact that the sample includes two fewer children than originally planned and that there is a slight difference in the distribution of the children across the 20 schools does not affect the results of the evaluation.

| Group                                        | Sampling approach                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Changes to the original plans                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Tool <sup>148</sup>                     |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
|                                              | <p>sufficient, they were chosen randomly among G3 teachers. If the number was still not sufficient, they were chosen randomly in G1 and G4.</p> <p><i>Qualitative:</i> Ten observed classes in five schools, selected by RTP based on logistical considerations.</p>                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                         |
| <b>Headteachers</b>                          | <i>Quantitative:</i> One headteacher for each of the 20 sampled schools.                                                                                                                                                                                                              | No change.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>Quantitative:</i> Headteacher survey |
| <b>Caregivers</b>                            | <p><i>Qualitative:</i> One group of men and one group of women in three schools selected by RTP based on logistical considerations. Caregivers were randomly selected among those who were available and had a child who participated in either the learner assessment or an FGD.</p> | We were able to reach only 41 out of the 48 caregivers originally foreseen to take part in the FGDs, due to their limited availability. For this reason, FGDs were conducted in six different schools (one per school) and comprised both men and women in the same group. | <i>Qualitative:</i> FGDs                |
| <b>CSO partner representatives</b>           | <i>Qualitative:</i> Two partner representatives identified by RTP.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | No changes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>Qualitative:</i> Interviews          |
| <b>RTP CO and HQ staff</b>                   | <i>Qualitative:</i> Six RTP staff members.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | No changes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>Qualitative:</i> Interviews          |
| <b>District-level education stakeholders</b> | <i>Qualitative:</i> Two district-education stakeholders, the Namacurra Provincial Directorate of Education Focal Point and the Namacurra District Education Services Director.                                                                                                        | No changes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i>Qualitative:</i> Interviews          |

### 1.2.1 Desk Review

Secondary data was collected through a desk review which included:

- + The national Strategic Education Plan for 2020-2029;
- + Education statistics in Mozambique and Zambezia, such as census data published by the Mozambican Institute of Statistics or the Ministry of Education and statistics published by various United Nations (UN) organizations, as well as aggregate statistics for Sub-Saharan African and low-income countries;
- + Academic and grey literature on the education context in Mozambique, such as on literacy assessments and on the inclusion of girls and CWD in education;
- + Academic and grey literature on PBL, focusing on its application to early reading;
- + Program Theory of Change (ToC), baseline and progress reports.<sup>151</sup>

### 1.2.2 Qualitative Data Collection: Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews, Classroom Observations

Qualitative data was important to contextualize and deepen findings emerging from quantitative data, as well as for answering process evaluation questions. FGD and KII transcripts and notes were analyzed using Dedoose, while classroom observation data were analyzed using STATA.

#### 1.2.2.1 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions with children were led by the Consultancy's enumerators and gamified to increase participants' engagement. Discussions included icebreaker games and interactive activities such as drawing, while remaining closely linked to the Evaluation Questions. Focus group discussions with adult participants were also led by the Consultancy enumerators, to reduce potential issues of positive response bias. Focus group discussions for children were separated by gender and conducted by enumerators of the same gender of the participants.<sup>152</sup>

All data collectors were fluent in Portuguese and other local languages and were able to carry out research activities in the language that participants felt most comfortable in. Each session lasted up to one hour (with research sessions with children being shorter) and included between five and eight participants.

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<sup>151</sup> Please note that progress report data are limited to 2021 and 2022, as the 2023 report was not yet available at the time of reporting.

<sup>152</sup> As explained in [Section 1.2](#) above, it was not possible to conduct FGDs with caregivers segregated by gender due to their limited availability.

#### 1.2.2.2 Key Informant Interviews

A semi-structured interview format allowed for more targeted discussions toward the objectives of the research, leaving sufficient flexibility to redirect or steer the interviewee towards relevant research questions. These interviews enabled us to assess a variety of criteria outlined in the Evaluation and Research Framework, ranging from Relevance to Sustainability. Each interview lasted up to an hour. The interviews were conducted both virtually (with RTP HQ and Country Office staff) and in person (by enumerators in Mozambique). [Annex 5](#) outlines the list of individuals who took part in interviews, as discussed during the inception stage with RTP team members.

#### 1.2.2.3 Classroom Observations

As part of the analysis, we included classroom observations carried out by RTP's government partners, to observe the classroom behavior of teachers trained as part of the EQIE project. Observations also allowed a deeper understanding of the environment in which classes take place, together with the ability of teachers to lead play-based activities in the classroom, to create a positive and child-centered learning environment, and their methodology for teaching reading. The tool used to collect classroom observation data was provided by RTP. Data was initially collected on paper by government officials and then transcribed digitally by enumerators.

All qualitative tools were revised and approved by the RTP team. They are available in English and Portuguese and included in [Annex 6](#) of the [Inception Report](#).

### 1.3 Limitations

#### 1.3.1 Limitations of the Sampling Approach

The midline sampling approach presents a few limitations, outlined below.

First, the fact that CWD, their caregivers and teachers have not been purposely sampled in either the quantitative or the qualitative data collection limits information on their condition to secondary accounts by other stakeholders and to the few primary data that have been collected by chance. Only four CWD were assessed as part of the quantitative data collection, and only 24 and five of surveyed and observed teachers, respectively, had a CWD in their class.

Second, while the original three schools where qualitative data collection was conducted were chosen by RTP based on both logistical and representativeness considerations, the additional three schools where we conducted FGDs with caregivers and the five schools where classroom observations were carried out are not representative of the sample they were chosen from. The

former are all urban schools and the latter are all urban and suburban schools, while the sample comprises mostly (60%) rural schools. Furthermore, the sample is not balanced between schools where classrooms were observed (one school accounted for four of the ten observations, and three schools accounted for eight), further limiting representativeness (see [Section 3.1.1](#) for an overview of the sample characteristics). Although the reasons for such choices are understandable in the short timeframe of the data collection process, this strongly limits the generalizability of results.

Third, classroom observations, which were entirely organized and managed by RTP due to government requirements<sup>153</sup>, are limited in number, affecting the availability of objective data on teachers' practices. Moreover, the teachers who were observed do not fully correspond to the teachers who were interviewed<sup>154</sup>, preventing, in part, data triangulation.

### 1.3.2 Limitations of the Indicators in the Analysis and Research Framework

Indicators included in the Analysis and Research Framework and their values, as well as the targets set for midline, are reported in [Annex 4](#). However, it should be noted that these indicators present several limitations.

First, some of these indicators are based on self-reported measures, which limits their reliability. Second, the computation of some of these indicators does not accurately reflect the changes they are supposed to measure. For example, indicator 1310.1 is supposed to measure the percentage of *school community members that exhibit knowledge in creation and maintenance of safe and inclusive learning environments* but relies on asking teachers whether they know how to deal with safety concerns. Lastly, the limitation in the classroom observation sample detailed in [Section 1.3.1](#) above further decreases the already small sample size used to calculate the indicators where both teacher survey and classroom observation data are needed.

## 1.4 Ethical Considerations

We are committed to applying the following ethical principles in all stages of the research process, as championed by the UN Ethics Office<sup>155</sup>:

- + Independence – research team members shall maintain their independence.

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<sup>153</sup> See the [Fieldwork Completion Report](#) for further details.

<sup>154</sup> It was possible to match survey and classroom observation data only for five of the ten observed teachers. For baseline data, this was possible only for 13 of 34 observed teachers.

<sup>155</sup> Adapted from [here](#).

- + Impartiality – research team members, in the performance of their duties, shall always act with impartiality, objectivity, and professionalism. They shall not act in a way that unjustifiably could lead to actual or perceived preferential treatment for or against individuals, groups, or interests.
- + Integrity – research team members shall maintain the highest standards of integrity, including honesty, truthfulness, fairness, and incorruptibility in all matters affecting their official duties.
- + Accountability – research team members shall be accountable for the proper discharge of their functions and their decisions and actions. In fulfilling their official duties, they shall submit themselves to scrutiny as required by their position.
- + Respect for human rights – research team members shall fully respect the human rights, dignity and worth of all persons and shall act with understanding, tolerance, sensitivity, and respect for diversity and without discrimination of any kind.

We applied safeguarding principles when conducting research with vulnerable people or categories of people. This means the team was responsible to ensure everybody working with and for the Consultancy commits to respecting Do No Harm principles. Vulnerable people or categories of people in research terms are defined as:

- + Infants and children under the age of eighteen.
- + People with learning or communication difficulties or serious mental health problems.
- + Patients in hospital.
- + Individuals under the care of social services.
- + People in custody or on probation.
- + Individuals engaged in illegal activities such as drug abuse.
- + Persons with a condition or illness which is directly being investigated in the evaluation.
- + Refugees and social minority groups.

In particular, enumerators received extensive training on child safeguarding principles and policies, including how to escalate safeguarding concerns with Right To Play (see the [Inception Report](#) and the [Data Collector Training Report](#) for further details). Fortunately, no safeguarding concerns were raised during the data collection.

We respected the standards set by Learn More in its Data Protection and Security Policy, Information Security Policy, and Quality Policy and guaranteed all personal and sensitive data was treated according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). See next section for further details.

Moreover, we followed RTP's Code of Conduct, which establishes that:

- + The Consultancy's staff and contractors must avoid developing personal relationships with vulnerable people involved in our projects (beneficiaries or users).
- + The Consultancy's staff and contractors must avoid disclosing personal information
- + If the Consultancy suspects abuse by any member of the staff, it will be reported to the relevant authority.

Whenever data collection involved children, informed consents signed by headteachers were collected before the children's involvement in the data collection process. Moreover, each child's informed assent was obtained before the beginning of the assessment or FGD.

Informed assent was sought from all adult research participants as well, following an explanation of the research process and its aims, as well as how data will be used.

Together with all the above-mentioned principles, we complied with all the obligations, policies and codes of conduct to which RTP adheres.

#### **1.4.1 Data Protection**

All data collected were transcribed and analyzed only for the purposes of the evaluation, and will be stored only for the minimum amount of time necessary for verification purposes. After that, data will be deleted according to the procedures defined in our Data Protection Policy. Its goal is to protect the organization, clients, and users to the maximum extent possible against data security threats that could jeopardize their integrity, privacy, reputation, and business outcomes. Our policy ensures that:

- + Everyone managing and handling personal information understands that they are contractually responsible for following good data protection practices.
- + Procedures for handling personal information are clearly described and available to all staff.
- + Everyone managing and handling personal information is appropriately trained to do so.
- + Everyone managing and handling personal information is appropriately supervised.
- + Anyone needing to make enquiries, or respond to queries, about handling personal information knows where to seek advice.
- + Queries about handling personal information are promptly and courteously dealt with and logged when appropriate.

When collecting data from research participants, we ensured it was in the public interest, as RTP and this evaluation are ultimately publicly funded. Any data gathered are being processed in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR). Under GDPR, a data controller is responsible for handling personally identifiable data. They decide how and why the data is processed. The Evaluation Lead acts as data controller for this evaluation, ensuring that only the relevant research team has access to personal data.

Under GDPR, research participants have the right of access to any information we hold. Research participants can ask for it to be corrected, erased and object to how it is processed. However, this might be restricted in some circumstances. These include compliance with legal obligations. Restrictions might also be applied for scientific research purposes. For example, this might be if the deletion of this data was seriously detrimental to the research.

In such circumstances, we may need to keep the information about research participants that we have already collected. However, the research team is required, under GDPR, to explain why

these restrictions might be necessary before any respondents agree to take part in the evaluation. This is part of the informed consent process.

## 2. Annex 2: Thematic Insights on Gender and Disability

### 2.1 Disability

#### 2.1.1 Objectives of EQIE and Activities

The project supported 96 CWD in 2021 and 245 in 2022 to enroll in school, among whom 67% were girls. Out of the 341 children supported, 10% had difficulty seeing, 21% had difficulty hearing, 15% had difficulty walking or climbing steps, 15% had difficulty remembering or concentrating, 13% had difficulty with self-care, and 26% had difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood. They were supported mostly with back-to-school kits (87%).<sup>156</sup> Some of them also received disability-specific support, including hearing aids (seven children), wheelchairs (three children), crutches (one child), and white canes (three children). Moreover, 100 teachers were trained in inclusive education practices.

#### 2.1.2 Changes and Challenges Reported

Overall, inclusion has shown to be complex to address, requiring significant resources and effort, which have perhaps not always been taken into account in project design.

Caregivers highlighted that CWD enrolled in school face specific challenges, namely fully participating in the classes. For example, following the lessons is challenging for children with hearing or sight problems. Among surveyed teachers who had at least one CWD in their class, more than half reported that they participated actively to the lessons most of the time (25%) or always (29%), while 17% said that they participated sometimes. Headteachers, instead, reported that CWD participated most of the time (25%) or always (55%) to the classes, while 15% said that they participated sometimes. Among the five observed classrooms where at least a CWD was present, CWD were actively involved in activities and/ or had a role of leadership in 80% of cases.

Caregivers, teachers, and implementation partners alike also qualitatively reported that CWD were involved in the classroom activities, with teachers striving to favour this involvement. In particular, there are a few reports of teachers encouraging students to involve CWD in their games. Implementation partners also highlighted that teachers were more aware of the children's conditions and needs, and knew how to address them (for example, having children with sight and hearing problems sit at the front of the class, and making gestures to enhance their understanding) thanks to the training received by RTP. One caregiver remarked that a lot depends on the teacher, as there were some who did not try to include CWD at all. Among

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<sup>156</sup> Other forms of support included scholarships (9%) and other mechanisms (9%) such as accompaniment to and from school, and basic services (health and home visits).

teachers of CWD, only half reported to be able to adapt their lessons to include them (with several saying that they did so by dedicating special attention to them), while 33% refused to answer the question or did not know, which could indicate either limited awareness about the topic (possibly due to insufficient training) or embarrassment in discussing topics about which they were not comfortable in terms of competence. Headteachers, instead, reported mostly (80%) that teachers were able to adapt their teaching to accommodate the needs of CWD.<sup>157</sup>

*“Example: break time. They are leaving, sometimes they leave that one[...]. They would close the door, but the teacher would say: “No. Slow down, let your friend out or wait for him to leave and then you start to leave”. Long time ago he was left alone. The teacher would say: “No, children! Get together and play”. So, they play together. At the entrance time, as the teacher says. They stop. Sometimes when there is someone in the wheelchair, they push it into the classroom. And that's the difference we noticed, that they're getting on well.”*

*Caregiver, EPC 22 de Abril*

*“One of the things that I noted was the involvement of the children: the union of disabled and non-disabled children. On a day when I was doing PE, the teacher took a ball to play with, but there were two disabled pupils there. So, the students, knowing their physical condition, withdrew. But the teacher insisted: “No, you'll have to play with the others [...]”. So, the children went there afraid, but then they got involved. They left happy.”*

*Implementation partner*

Some teachers also highlighted that the general lack of adequate materials and infrastructure was a significant challenge for the involvement of CWD in the classroom, for example when classes are held under trees or where there are no desks. Furthermore, almost all teachers in FGDs and in the survey, along with headteachers, reported the lack of specific materials needed to support CWD at school.<sup>158</sup> Lastly, two RTP staff members noted that the training provided to teachers was not sufficient<sup>159</sup> (due to a lack of resources), as it did not provide teachers with specialized technical tools for all kinds of disabilities (for example, sign language for students with hearing difficulties or the Braille alphabet for visually impaired students), and that teachers may thus not be able to offer individualized support. This is likely compounded by the lack of resources and the large class sizes mentioned above. These findings are echoed by survey results, whereby teachers reported that to better accommodate the needs of CWD they

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<sup>157</sup> Evidence from classrooms observations is not entirely clear. On one hand, none of the teachers who had at least a CWD in their class were reported to have modified their class or any activity to include CWD. On the other hand, none of them were reported to have ignored CWD or not included them in the activities. It could be that the CWD in the observed classes had a type of disability that does not require specific adaptations from the teacher, or that the activities class did not require adaptation.

<sup>158</sup> This was confirmed by teachers in the classroom observation sample, among whom only two reported to have equipment for CWD in the class.

<sup>159</sup> Similarly, one implementation partner reported the need for additional training for teachers of CWD.

would need more training from RTP for themselves, supervisors, and headteachers (81%), which could also organize inclusive play-days (50%) and awareness sessions or campaigns (31%).<sup>160</sup> Similarly, headteachers reported the need for training (85%), awareness campaigns for enrolment (60%), referral and support services (35%), and trained support personnel (30%). Teachers and headteachers also shared the need for educational materials such as books with letters and short texts, posters, and more support materials, including glasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs, special desks, and sport equipment for CWD.

Despite these challenges, positive feedback emerged from all stakeholders involved in the project. First, one implementation partner and a teacher reported positive feedback from the caregivers of some CWD, highlighting that school attendance improved their children's condition.

*"We had several children, some of them with disabilities, who made us realise that going to school is a powerful remedy. [One] parent told us: "She didn't develop at home. She couldn't do what she's doing today. But since she started school, she speaks a little better than before. She's a happier child"."*

*Implementation partner*

*"For example, I have a student who has a speech impediment. You can ask him a question and he takes a long time to answer. But these days he's changed a bit, even, for example, the parent stopped me in the middle of the road the other day and said: "My son has changed these days, even at home, I used to talk to him, he cried, he didn't answer. But now you can ask. He takes a long time to answer, but then he answers. I said we had training, so as he has speech problems, I have to pay more attention to him too. I have to ask questions, give him time to answer, when he's at the board he has to go, the others are laughing, I advise at that moment. He's now a normal pupil."*

*Teacher, EPC 22 de Abril*

Bullying is frequently mentioned as an issue in project schools. A small number of respondents reported that bullying against CWD has decreased, while a few teachers and headteachers remarked that it is still a barrier to education for CWD (which could indicate greater awareness of bullying).

*"Bullying is increasingly overcome. Because there's a lot of difficulty in the classroom. People [...] are welcoming people with disabilities. [...] There used to be so much bullying in schools, but now it's not happening at all."*

*Caregiver, EPC 22 de Abril*

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<sup>160</sup> A few teachers also mentioned the need for referral options (13%), resource rooms for CWD and children who have weak academic achievements (6%), and physical therapy (6%), and others (13%).

Due to the small number of CWD included in the EGRA sample (four out of 298 children), it is not possible to offer relevant insights on CWD's learning outcomes. No insights emerged from qualitative data, either.

### 2.1.3 Potential Focus of Endline

To gather additional information on CWD and their experience at school, sampling them purposely would help gather detailed insights on both their learning outcomes and socio-emotional skills. This targeted approach would allow for a nuanced understanding of the educational progress and emotional well-being of CWD, enabling the identification of specific support needs and areas for improvement. Additionally, conducting FGDs with teachers and caregivers of CWD can provide more nuanced perspectives on the effectiveness of teaching strategies, the inclusivity of the learning environment, and the overall project impact on CWD.

## 2.2 Gender

### 2.2.1 Objectives of EQIE and Activities

Besides focusing on learning outcomes and the inclusion of CWD, the project also has some components related to gender. These include mainly the (re)enrollment of OOS girls through the work of inclusion committees, girls' clubs, training on gender-related topics for teachers, and sensitization events on gender-related topics with the local community. After OOS girls were identified by school inclusion committees, they were integrated into the community reading centres, and went through preparatory steps for going back to school and becoming familiar with the school setup. In addition, one of the implementation partners, together with the school inclusion committees, met with parents and caregivers to assess the basic needs of girls returning to school. In 2022, 46% of the identified girls were supported with back-to-school kits, while the remaining 54% were supported with birth registration certificates and identity documents. A significant part of the work related to gender (other than teachers' training) is being conducted by one of RTP's partners, AMME, with collaboration from Okuluvela. Although not being the main focus of the EQIE project, as reported by few members of the RTP staff, the gender component was included both because of the internal coherence with RTP's broader strategy and its relevance to the context.

*"For us, it didn't make sense that we were [...] recognizing the context that girls especially have in Mozambique and not [intervening] to stop it, minimizing the disadvantages they already have in the community [...]. So we started [...] working with parents [...]. They are being sensitized to take children to school or to work with them. So we were going to take advantage of these spaces [...] to include the issue of girls' rights, girls' education, returning children to school."*

*RTP staff member*

Regarding teacher training, RTP staff explained that PBL is not in itself gender sensitive, and that it was necessary to include a gender-sensitivity component in the training. This confirms our findings that teachers are more egalitarian/inclusive in the classroom but not necessarily more aware of gender dynamics.

### **2.2.2 Changes and Challenges Reported**

An important result related to gender was the involvement of community members in sensitization initiatives. Implementation partners reported that most of the participants in sensitization initiatives and other project-related activities such as private talks with caregivers were women. Participation of men to sensitization initiatives increased throughout EQIE's implementation, and an improvement was registered in women's confidence. Women were described as being able to express how they feel and to talk about gender-related issues.

During the course of the project, a greater weight has been given to children's clubs, with respect to girls' clubs. This is related to reporting requirements, which mainly focus on outputs and outcomes related to the former. A few RTP staff members reported that the priority shift toward the disability component, rather than the gender one, may be related to the high effort required to the implementation of the former.

## 3. Annex 3: Theory of Change

### 3.1 Overview of the Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) of the EQIE project (see the visualization in [Figure 22](#)) focuses on improving holistic learning outcomes of children in Mozambican schools, including boys, girls, and CWD. The project aims to reach a minimum proficiency level in reading and to increase life skills. To do so, it proposes to use play as an inclusive and child-centred pedagogical approach. In terms of intermediate outcomes and outputs, which are often linked to SDGs, the ToC is structured into four workstreams. The first one focuses on teacher professional development, aiming to promote an increased integration of PBL by teachers to enhance reading skills, mainly through the provision of targeted training to teachers. The second workstream focuses on building a culture of reading by increasing the supplemental reading practice of children in the home, school, and community environments. The third workstream aims to create safe and inclusive learning environments, targeting CP mechanisms, school infrastructure, and several school committees. The fourth workstream focuses on “leaving no one behind”, working on the school enrolment of OOS girls and CWD.

We assess in the next section whether the ToC still holds and the validity of its assumptions, based on findings of [Sections 3.1](#) and [3.2](#).

### 3.2 Review of the Theory of Change

The ToC’s structure is logically sound, in that the relationships between outputs, outcomes, and impact are plausible and evidence-based. However, the link between the impact (ending poverty) and outputs/outcomes is not explicitly stated. Moreover, the ToC accurately reflects the project’s underlying assumptions and its implementation context.

Consistently with the complexity of the project, the ToC assumptions are numerous, and can be categorized into different groups. The complete list of categorized assumptions is reported in Table 14. The first group – which is also the most numerous one – includes assumptions that are logically sound, but for which there is no specific evidence emerging from the evaluation. We assume that these assumptions are still valid. For example, it is reasonable to assume that good teaching practice is beneficial for every child, regardless of ability,<sup>161</sup> and that increased knowledge and understanding of inclusion by teachers would help facilitate progress toward inclusive education for CWD (assumption of output 1111), although no specific evidence on this emerged from the evaluation data. We have, however, found that teachers lack this knowledge

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<sup>161</sup> The implicit assumption here is that “good” teaching practices are those that ensure the inclusivity of all students, not only of those who are better equipped to benefit from them.

to date. Therefore, more support is needed for the logical pathway to hold. While the assumption may be correct, the teacher support provided is likely insufficient.

There is then a group of assumptions which are not necessarily true, but about which there is no evidence that either proves or disproves them. For example, our evaluation did not find any evidence on whether school leaders are able to gain the trust and respect of teachers, other school staff and students, and whether there is openness to their support and mentorship (assumption of output 1111). Another group includes assumptions that are not necessarily true, but for which there is evidence proving them. For example, evidence from this Midline Evaluation shows that the lack of adequate infrastructure is a major barrier to education for girls and CWD, indicating that construction and rehabilitation of school infrastructure do indeed have the potential to increase enrolment for these two categories (assumption of output 1311).

Lastly, only one assumption has been disproven, namely the assumption that headteachers are regularly physically present in school (assumption of output 1111). As highlighted in [Section 3.1.1](#), teacher absenteeism is a serious concern in Mozambique, including in project schools. This has been a long-standing issue in the country, and should be taken into account in the project's ToC.

Overall, in light of the findings reported in the previous sections, there are two aspects of the ToC that could be improved.

The first one is a stronger focus on infrastructural barriers to girls' education, and specifically WASH facilities. While the ToC explains thoroughly the impact of these barriers on the education of CWD and its consequences, barriers that affect girls are not explored in depth. The inclusion of OOS girls was a specific focus of EQIE in Mozambique, more than in other project countries, but outputs were related more to the removal of individual-level barriers for girls, whereas the contextual analysis revealed that infrastructural barriers, and specifically the lack of adequate WASH facilities, are also a major factor preventing school enrolment and attendance of girls. The limited focus on this aspect may have impacted the choice of activities/outputs in this area.

Secondly, there is an important implicit assumption underlying the entire ToC, which has not been explicitly mentioned, and which has proven not to hold, creating important challenges (in addition to those caused by teacher absenteeism, mentioned above). It is the assumption that all children attend school regularly. This is not the case in Mozambique, and specifically in project schools. This is a twofold issue (see [Section 3.1.1](#)). First, the normal school calendar is interrupted by natural events, such as the rainy season or the more destructive cyclones. Second, many children do not attend school regularly even in non-emergency circumstances, which is related to both social and cultural norms and to the situation of poverty in which many families live.

Figure 22: Visualization of the project's ToC

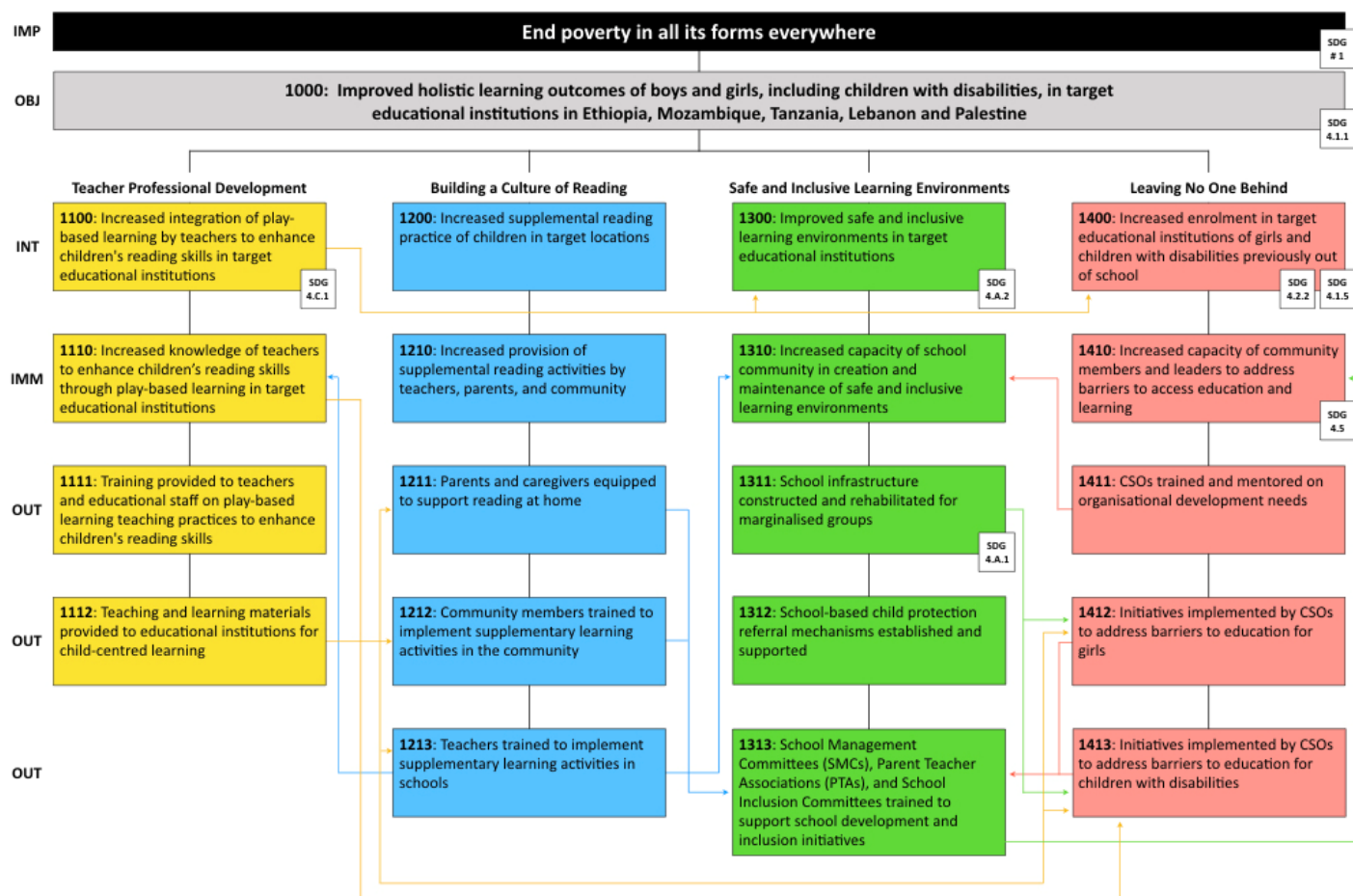


Table 14: ToC assumptions and their validity

| Assumption # | Assumption                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Category                                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| -            | The increased integration of the play-based learning approach in the classroom, at home, and as part of national education and teacher-training systems will contribute significantly to advancing quality and inclusive primary education in project countries. This includes reducing disparities in education access of marginalised children and ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments.                        | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| INT 1100     | By increasing teacher's knowledge on the practice of teaching reading skills alongside the integration of play-based learning, it will result in a better and more conducive environment for learning as children engage in a variety of child-centred activities, games and methodologies that both motivate and stimulate learning.                                                                                          | Not necessarily true – there is evidence supporting this      |
| OUT 1111     | With continuous training and support, teachers will both develop and master the necessary skills to integrate play-based learning approaches into their daily teaching practice. In doing so, they will also create a better and more conducive environment for learning, as they engage children in a variety of child-centred activities, games and methodologies that both motivate and stimulate learning and development. | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| OUT 1111     | Good teaching practice is good for every child, regardless of ability, and that increased knowledge and understanding of inclusion by teachers, will help facilitate progress towards inclusive education for children with disabilities.                                                                                                                                                                                      | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| OUT 1111     | Teacher training is most relevant in countries where both reading skills and teacher qualification level is assessed as poor.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| OUT 1111     | Training will lead to positive behaviour change among school leaders, school leaders are able to gain the trust and respect of teachers, other school staff and students, and there is openness to their support and mentorship.                                                                                                                                                                                               | Not necessarily true – no evidence in support or against this |
| OUT 1111     | Principals and head teachers are regularly physically present in their schools and support the implementation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Disproven.                                                    |
| OUT 1111     | With the appropriate support, Communities of Practice will generate valuable learning and sharing of well-established and innovative ideas, as well as contextually-specific knowledge and experience on what works, serving as dynamic and useful forums for support, guidance and the encouragement of reflective practice.                                                                                                  | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| OUT 1112     | Target educational institutions do not have sufficient reading materials, and that the materials they have are worn-down, not suitable for the appropriate Grade level, and ultimately create a barrier to children's reading skill development.                                                                                                                                                                               | Not necessarily true – there is evidence supporting this      |

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                               |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| OUT 1112 | Curricula can encourage children to question stereotypes about disability and promote equitable behaviour. Conversely, discriminatory norms conveyed in textbooks can damage CWD's self-esteem, lower their engagement and limit their expectations.                                                                                             | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| INT 1200 | The amount of time children spend reading in school is far below the amount of time recommended and for all of them to achieve the level of proficiency.                                                                                                                                                                                         | Not necessarily true – there is evidence supporting this      |
| OUT 1211 | When parents are provided with play-based strategies to support their children's reading, they are also more likely to place an increased value on their education and be motivated to provide reading opportunities for their children.                                                                                                         | Not necessarily true – no evidence in support or against this |
| OUT 1212 | With increased opportunities to read, children will start to feel a sense of achievement which again will spark their motivation and enjoyment for reading.                                                                                                                                                                                      | Not necessarily true – no evidence in support or against this |
| OUT 1213 | When teachers and students work together to increase the entire school's opportunities to read – using activities that are fun, inclusive and engaging – observable improvements in performance will further build the relationship between students and teachers, and motivate teachers to continue providing supplementary reading activities. | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| INT 1300 | A safe and inclusive learning environment, free from discrimination, harassment and physical abuse, has a significant positive impact on children's association with school, attendance and learning outcomes.                                                                                                                                   | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| OUT 1311 | By ensuring construction and/or rehabilitation work is designed to ensure safe and easy accessibility for girls and children with disabilities, a prominent barrier to education will be removed so more out-of-school girls and children with disabilities will enrol in target educational institutions.                                       | Not necessarily true – there is evidence supporting this      |
| OUT 1312 | The strengthening of children's institutions within target schools, will lead to increased child participation and action on issues affecting them and their learning environment.                                                                                                                                                               | Not necessarily true – no evidence in support or against this |
| OUT 1313 | SMCs and PTAs, with training and support, will contribute to safe and inclusive learning environments and address barriers to education for girls and children with disabilities, by establishing and adhering to a vision for the school as a place that everyone can access and be accepted.                                                   | Not necessarily true – no evidence in support or against this |
| OUT 1313 | With training and support SICs can help out-of-school children with disabilities access and stay in school by tapping into existing resources within the broader community, and identify ways community members can support and add value to the school through inclusion related-activities.                                                    | Not necessarily true – there is evidence supporting this      |

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                               |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| INT 1400             | When community members and leaders are engaged in school inclusion committees to discuss issues related to barriers to education for girls and children with disabilities, they discover the existing capacity and innovation that exists within the broader community and the role it can play in increasing access to education and community awareness around girls and disability. | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| INT 1400             | If all children have access to interact and learn from each other through play, more children, including girls and children with disabilities previously out of school, will remain in school for a longer period of time                                                                                                                                                              | Not necessarily true – no evidence in support or against this |
| OUT 1411             | Training and mentoring CSO partners to build their capacity on areas they themselves have identified as necessary to grow and strengthen, will also affect how they implement and manage their projects and ultimately lead to greater results and more effective programming.                                                                                                         | Logically sound – no specific evidence                        |
| OUT 1412<br>OUT 1413 | By supporting CSO partners in their organizational development, they will also improve their effectiveness on program implementation and produce better results, ultimately strengthening their legitimacy in the communities they serve as well as their ability to access new funds from other sources.                                                                              | Not necessarily true – there is evidence supporting this      |

## 4. Annex 4: Evaluation and Analysis and Research Frameworks

The Evaluation Framework includes all the evaluation questions, as well as data sources used to answer each of them. The Analysis and Research Framework reports all the project indicators of the measurement framework, including definitions, data sources, calculation methods, targets, and values.



Evaluation  
Framework.xlsx



Analysis and  
Research Framework.xlsx

## 5. Annex 5: Respondent List

Key informant Interviews respondents included:

- + **Right To Play HQ staff**
  - **Thomas Breistein** – Program Development Manager
  - **Eric Opoku** – Senior Global MEL Manager
- + **Right To Play CO staff**
  - **Inocencia Patia** – Project Officer
  - **Nelson Mutsando** – Education Specialist
  - **Eduardo Intsamuele** – Education Officer
  - **Amina Issa** – Acting Program Manager
- + **Implementation partners**
  - **Zé Julio Bilale** – District Officer of AMME
  - **Fernando Domingoa Portugal** – District Officer of Okuluvela
- + **Government partners**
  - **Zuria Rajabo** – Namacurra Provincial Directorate of Education Focal Point
  - **Esvaldo Luis Roque** – Namacurra District Education Services Director

Focus group discussions included the following schools:

- + **EPC 22 de Abril**
  - one FGD with teachers
  - one FGD with caregivers
  - one FGD with boys, one FGD with girls
- + **EPC Maulate**
  - one FGD with teachers
  - one FGD with caregivers
  - one FGD with boys, one FGD with girls
- + **EPC Malinguine**
  - one FGD with teachers
  - one FGD with parents
  - one FGD with boys, one FGD with girls
- + **EPC 1 de Junho**
  - one FGD with caregivers
- + **EPC Sede Namacurra**
  - one FGD with caregivers
- + **EPC Coroa**
  - one FGD with caregivers

## 6. Annex 6: Bibliography

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