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A Round-Table Conversation: Designing and Evaluating an Evidence-Backed Kindergarten Teacher Training Manual in Ghana

Although Ghana has one of the highest kindergarten enrollment rates on the continent, research estimates that 32 percent of young children in Ghana do not meet basic developmental milestones. To address these challenges, the government of Ghana has updated the national early childhood education (ECE) policy based on rigorous evidence.

The policy has the ability to reach over 61,000 kindergarten teachers and 1.8 million children across more than 25,000 public and private schools. In developing the ECE policy, the [Ghana Education Service](#) (GES), MoE's agency responsible for the implementation of educational policies, and its stakeholders identified teacher training as one of the priority action areas. Officials in the MoE and GES realized that successfully implementing the evidence-based policy meant improving kindergarten teacher training. The MoE and GES therefore solicited support from three NGOs, [Right To Play](#), [Sabre Education](#), and [Innovations for Poverty Action](#) (IPA), to develop a new in-service teacher training manual and evaluate its effectiveness to ensure it is evidence-based.

The MoE and GES have highlighted that the training and development of teachers is critical to improving both students' foundational skills development and learning outcomes. The MoE and GES have prioritized this area for urgent action, as a way to improve school readiness and learning for kindergarten students.

In this group conversation, Tony Dogbe, executive director of Sabre Education; Josephine Mukakalisa, country director of Right to Play; Cynthia Bosumtwi-Sam, policy advisor at IPA Ghana; and Tracy Li, former senior M&E associate at IPA Ghana talk to Celine Hylton-Dei, senior policy associate at IPA, and discuss the lessons learned from the process of piloting and evaluating the training manual. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How did teacher training arrive as a critical focus for this partnership?

Dogbe: Sabre Education has always focused on teachers in the early childhood space as a key input for improved school quality. Following the release of the 2008 ECE policy, Sabre supported the government in drafting an Operational Plan in 2012, where teacher training was identified as the number one priority. We then signed an MoU with the government to pilot a play-based teachers training manual .

Mukakalisa: Right to Play (RTP) has been investing in play-based learning and focusing on teachers who would administer this teaching methodology. Naturally, RTP was drawn to collaborate with Sabre when they began working on teacher training using this play-based method.

Dogbe: We thought to pull IPA into this work from previous experiences working with IPA on the Quality Preschool for Ghana program.

Bosumtwi-Sam: It made sense to leverage these existing relationships to support Sabre and RTP in piloting the new kindergarten in-service teacher training (INSET) manual. IPA has been collaborating with the Ministry of Education on evaluating ECE programs since 2016 with the [Quality Preschool for Ghana](#) project. We've continued to use research results from several IPA-affiliated ECE evaluations, including the [Fast Track Transformational Teacher Training \(FTTT\)](#) program and the [Lively Minds Program](#), to inform parts of the MoE's national ECE policy aimed at strengthening pre-service and in-service teacher education and training, play-based learning, and parental engagement.



Teachers participate in a five-day training for national trainers on the national kindergarten In-Service Education and Training manual from February 27th to March 3rd 2023 hosted by Sabre Education, Right To Play, and Innovations for Poverty Action (Photo: Sabre Education / 2023).

What has the process of developing the manual been? How was the pilot designed to answer key learning questions to improve the content and implementation of the manual?

Mukakalisa: The need to develop the manual came up when RTP and Sabre started collaborating in November 2020 following an In-Service Education and Training (INSET) planning workshop organized by the GES. At this workshop, it appeared that, though the ECE policy was finalized, there were no materials and resources available to support training kindergarten teachers, and the GES Director of the ECE Unit requested RTP's support.

Dogbe: “The process of developing the manual has been a collaborative effort between the three organizations, working closely with the National Early Childhood Education Unit of the GES.”

Mukakalisa: Before finalizing the kindergarten manual, we wanted to make sure it could improve teacher competence in delivering the curriculum and was aligned with the proposed duration for the INSET strategy. From October through December 2021, IPA, Sabre, and RTP piloted the training manual with 30 teachers selected from primary schools. The results of

the pilot and subsequent discussions within the three organizations helped us finalize the training content.

Bosumtwi-Sam: We co-generated learning questions and approaches for the pilot over a series of virtual and in-person meetings, including a week-long cross-organizational training on the kindergarten manual. Key questions include whether: teachers remember the key points from the content and are able to implement what they learn in practice; the training is rolled out in the right cadence; and there are implementation challenges. We used pre- and post-tests assessing teachers' understanding of key concepts and daily assessments, qualitative observations from the learning team and facilitators throughout the workshop, and tracked time spent per training session.

What are the lessons learned from the pilot to inform the updates for the kindergarten INSET manual to ensure that its delivery is evidence-backed?

Mukakalisa: We learned that the content was overloaded and could not be delivered effectively within the proposed five days. Participants reported that some of the presentations felt rushed and that they needed more time to grasp the content. Based on this, we divided the manual into two deliverable packages to allow for more time for the training.

Dogbe: We also learned that most teachers needed more clarity on some concepts such as play-based learning. We suggested trainers provide practical examples or case studies to deepen their understanding of the concepts. We also recommended that trainers unpack key concepts using role plays or activities, rather than overusing theory.

Bosumtwi-Sam: The results from this pilot informed adjustments to the INSET framework before its rollout in 55 districts.

Government engagement is essential to rolling out the INSET manual at scale. What are the lessons learned about supporting the MoE and GES in program implementation?

Mukakalisa: Working with the government on program implementation requires alignment with the government's priorities and plans. This ECE teacher training package came at the right time when the GES needed a strong team of stakeholders to support the implementation process of the policy and resources for training teachers were most needed.

Dogbe: There will always be competing priorities. Ensuring collaboration and ownership is key to stakeholder engagement. By going behind the scenes and working in small committees to push forward the work, we kept the conversation going.

Li: To influence MEL strategies, it was important to be an "all-around" partner, including regularly checking in with government and NGO partners and providing support where they may need it.

What have been the biggest challenges of rolling out the INSET manual to date?

Mukakalisa: Since we have established the new draft manual, we are training teachers on it and running refresher training for teachers previously trained. In some schools, the RTP training team directly trains teachers and district officials. In other districts, we train district officials who train the trainers in their respective districts. It's challenging to assure quality when the training takes place in districts where RTP is absent. We are putting quality assurance measures in place by producing videos, printing training manuals, and making these resources available online. But we can't ensure quality until we start monitoring this year.

Dogbe: Currently in our districts, we train the GES District Teacher Support Teams who then train the teacher and head teachers. We provide coaching and monitoring support to the trainers. Scaling up nationwide will be a challenge when relying on the 'training the trainers' model. We are beginning to discuss these issues, including how to use videos to train teachers and support a coaching component.

What is next for the national rollout of the INSET manual and for this partnership?

Dogbe: The next steps involve implementing the pilot's training manual and videos in other districts we are currently working in. We want to develop a host of teacher training videos with other key partners. We have discussed how training alone is insufficient, so we are considering harmonizing our coaching content so head teachers and district officers can support the teachers continuously post-training. We have also discussed the monitoring framework that the government can use to monitor teachers at the national, regional, and district levels - and this is where IPA comes in.

Mukakalisa: Our next steps include discussing strategies to scale the training nationally. We will work with the GES to ensure all teachers are trained on the new manual. We will rely on IPA's monitoring and evaluation support to continue learning and help teachers implement appropriate strategies.

Bosumtwi-Sam: The monitoring and evaluation support is an opportunity to observe how teachers translate the knowledge gained into practice and collect open-ended feedback from teachers on additional resources they need to implement key practices from the updated manual. Going forward, public and private providers of kindergarten in Ghana will use the INSET manual as part of a nationwide standardization effort. This is an exciting shift towards implementing an evidence-based policy. We recognize that the drive to scale up the roll-out is a national effort and will require active collaboration of key actors. We will focus on building a coalition of like-minded partners to support the government in rolling out the training of all KG teachers, headteachers, and ECE coordinators across the country.