



# **BUILDING TEACHERS' CAPACITY TO ENHANCE EARLY LEARNING - THROUGH CHILD FOCUSED AND PLAY-BASED APPROACHES IN GHANA AND SIERRA LEONE**

## **STUDY OVERVIEW / PRELIMINARY FINDINGS – Ghana and Sierra Leone**

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# Study Context/Challenges

- The implementation of play-based approaches in Ghana and Sierra Leone has been challenging, due to factors such as inadequate teacher training at scale of play-based learning pedagogies inadequate classroom spaces for ECE and limited Teaching Learning materials.
- There is inequality in enrolment in ECE across gender and spatial locations in Ghana and Sierra Leone
  - According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for Ghana (2020), ECE enrolment is far lower in the Northern Region (46.2%) compared with Central region (85.6%) and Greater Accra (86.1%).
  - There are education innovations which are assisting governments to integrate, explore and scale ECE play based approaches and teacher training including: (Right to Play, Sabre Education in Ghana and Teach Sierra Leone)
  - Lack of coordination and sustained ECE intervention at scale by government and innovators.



# Objectives of the Early Learning Study

**Main objective KIX Scaling research:**

**Build teachers' capacity to enhance early learning -through child focused and play based approaches in Ghana and Sierra Leone**

Generate evidence of what works to improve classroom practice of play-based learning in early childhood (ECE) education in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

Explore how the selected education innovations can help close the trained teacher gap at ECE levels and within community-based learning centers in rural and extreme poverty zones across Ghana and Sierra Leone.

# IDRC Early Learning Study Research Questions in Ghana and Sierra Leone

1. How is the new early learning curriculum with play-based approaches integrated into the pre-service and in-service teacher training programs?
2. How is the educational system adapting to the changes in the new early learning curriculum?
3. What innovations in play-based learning exist to support teacher capacity to implement play-based learning and **what added value** are these making (e.g., volunteer teacher models and right to play models)?
4. How are **education innovators in the early learning space** influencing the early childhood education quality and uptake in Ghana and Sierra Leone?
5. What is the value addition of play-based learning methods compared to schools which do not implement these, particularly in relation to **early grade reading outcomes**?

# Key implementors, researchers and education innovators



- Education research organizations
  - University of Ghana (ISSER)
  - University of Sierra Leone (Division of Educational Studies)
  - Associates for Change
- Ministry of Education, Basic education division, ECE units and teacher education service
- Education innovators
  - Right to Play (Ghana)
  - Sabre Education (Ghana)
  - Teach for Sierra Leone
- District Education Early Childhood officers
- Teacher Training Colleges and Universities
- Research fellows in ECE
- Civil society organizations and coalitions (UNICEF, Ghana Education Campaign Coalition)

# Phases of the ECE Study

## Phase 1

Systematic review of high-quality literature and a meta-analysis on early childhood education with best practices in Africa and Asia.

## Phase 2

A qualitative exploratory study involving both school-based and classroom observations of intervention and non-intervention schools in the same context.

## Phase 3

Findings from phase 2 used to develop survey instruments and hypotheses for a quasi-experimental test in both countries

## Phase 4

Integration of findings obtained from both the qualitative and the quantitative surveys

- Project report
- Working papers
- Presentations for knowledge-sharing



# Methodology for Phase 3 qualitative research

## Research Design:

- Exploratory sequential design (Qualitative Studies followed by Quantitative survey)

## Sampling: Regional, District, School and Colleges of Education

- Purposive sampling
- Regional and District selection (varied contexts)
- School/community selection (intervention and non-intervention)
- Divided sample into Urban,/peri urban/ rural / extremely deprived areas (2 schools in each category)—48 schools in total

## Target population: Head teachers, Teachers and Students

## Teacher training college level (4 in total; 2 north 2 eastern)

- College principals and/or vice principals
- College tutors
- Third year college of education student teachers

# Overall Findings for Sierra Leone

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Better performance observed in the intervention (play based) compared to the non-intervention schools based on:

- Teach SL has a instructional leadership model (for Univ Graduates) which has a significant impact on improving the conditions of learning at ECE school level
- Lesson delivery (activity and play based approaches were better integrated in lesson, sensitivity to gender and child needs)
- Increased community involvement in ECE in intervention districts studied compared to nonintervention
- Higher level of understanding and practice of GESI responsiveness by Teachers in intervention compared to nonintervention schools—higher confidence levels of students;
- There are challenges with ECD in Sierra Leone some of which are TLM and ECD equipment related
- Teacher capacity development in ECD needs much more improvement and scaled support through mainstreaming PBL in the ECE curriculum and teacher training as a first step
- To be cost effective and easy to scale nationwide--- requires School Based inset with Head teachers and lead teachers fully supporting



# Overall Findings for Ghana

## Overall Findings for Ghana

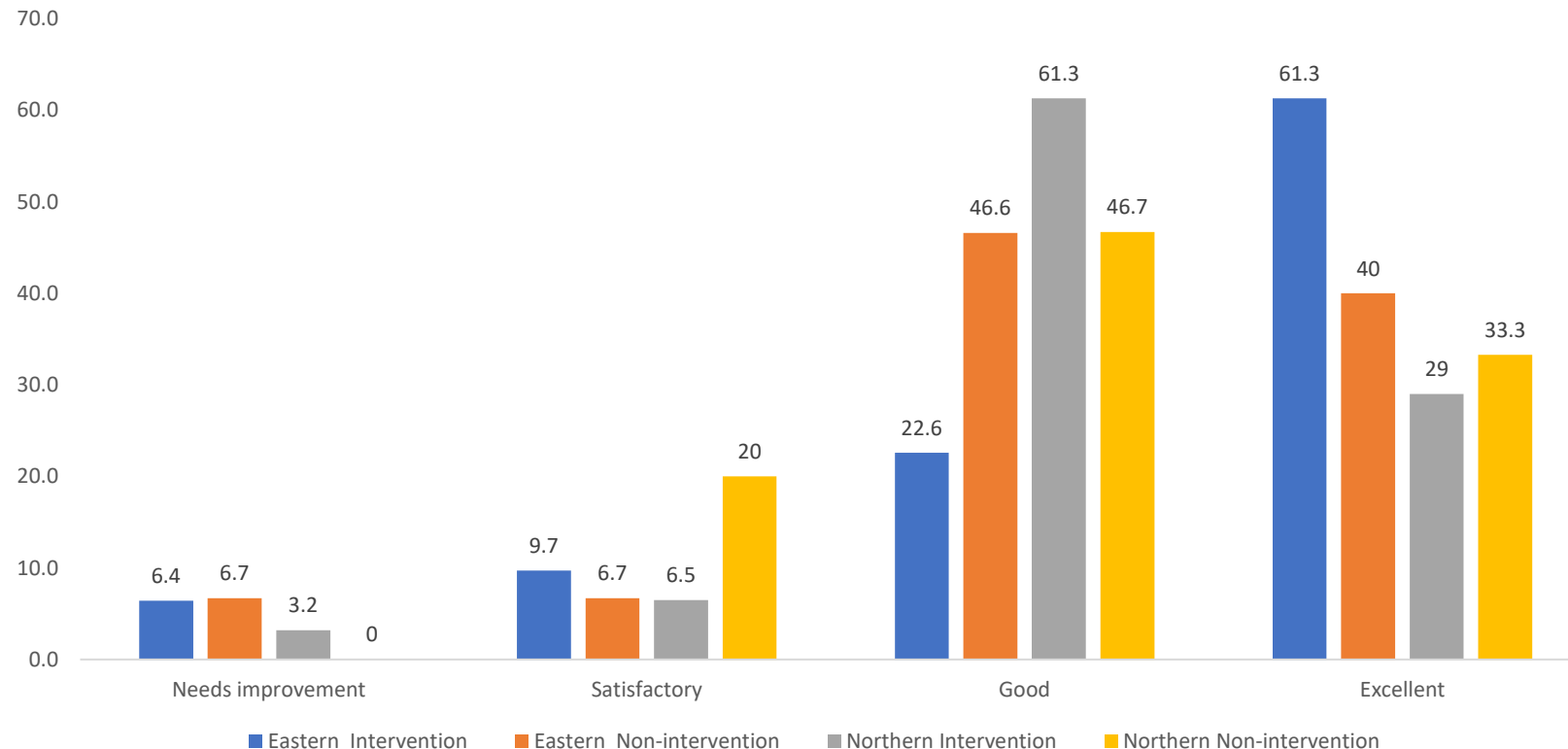
Better performance observed in the intervention (play based) compared to the non-intervention schools based on:

- Head teachers interviewed had **deeper knowledge** of the importance and outcomes of play-based learning and could assist/support their teachers in PBL;
- Teachers were far better resourced/capacitated in enabling children to explore, develop their skills (creativity) and competencies with indoor and in some cases with outdoor equipment
- Lesson delivery (activity and play based approaches were better integrated in lesson, sensitivity to gender and child needs)
- Teacher observations: understand the importance of positive feedback/encouragement for child confidence and able to create their own teaching learning materials
- More teaching learning materials displayed in the classrooms to create reading rich classrooms;
- Children were observed as more confident /inquisitive --in asking and answering questions with their teachers
- Higher rating for appropriate language of instruction matched to their learning needs;

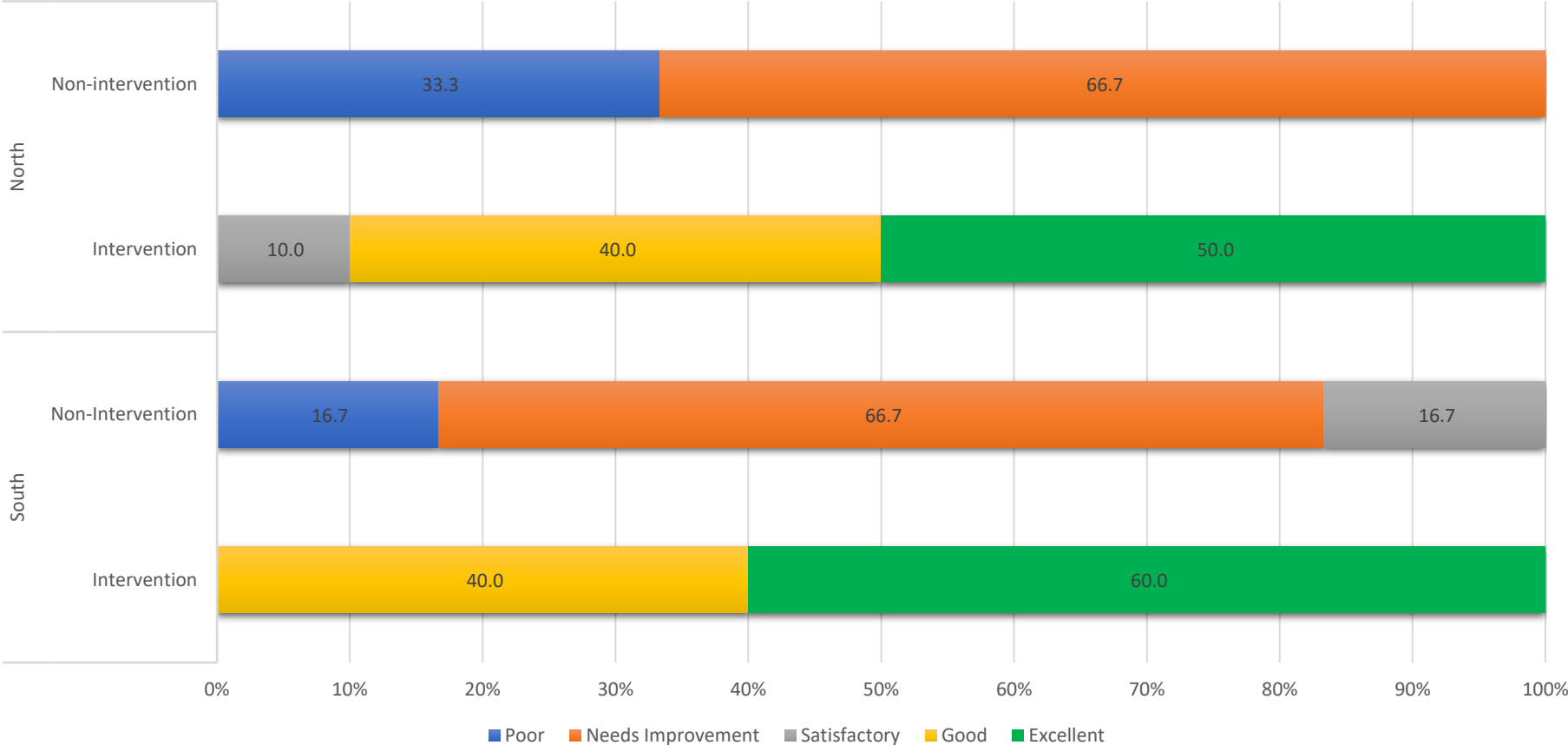
# Language of instruction in classrooms in Ghana

In the Eastern region, 61% of teachers in the intervention schools were rated excellent because they selected and used appropriate language (L1/first language of learner) compared with only 29% of teachers in the Northern region.

In the non-intervention schools across the two regions, there was a good rating (46.7/46.6) of teachers, suggesting that teachers ensure their explanations are geared towards the language needs of different pupils.



# Teacher's use of Teaching Learning Materials in Sierra Leone



# Key Gender and Social inclusion findings

- Both countries have shown tremendous improvement /integration of Gender and Social Inclusion through teacher instruction/pedagogy and classroom practice /conditions of learning
- Development and usage of gender sensitive and locally produced TLMs
- Evidence of boys and girls (KG to P2) have increased confidence, communication skill and participation in activities compared to nonintervention classrooms
- Growing evidence that appropriate language of instruction for early grade is being used (L1) through play based;
- Developing capacity for GESI among female and male teachers through Teacher professional development in service but still early days at pre- service levels.

Gender sensitive and  
Child friendly teaching  
approaches observed  
in **intervention** schools  
in Sierra Leone and  
Ghana

The teachers distribute questions evenly in the classroom to cater for every learner.

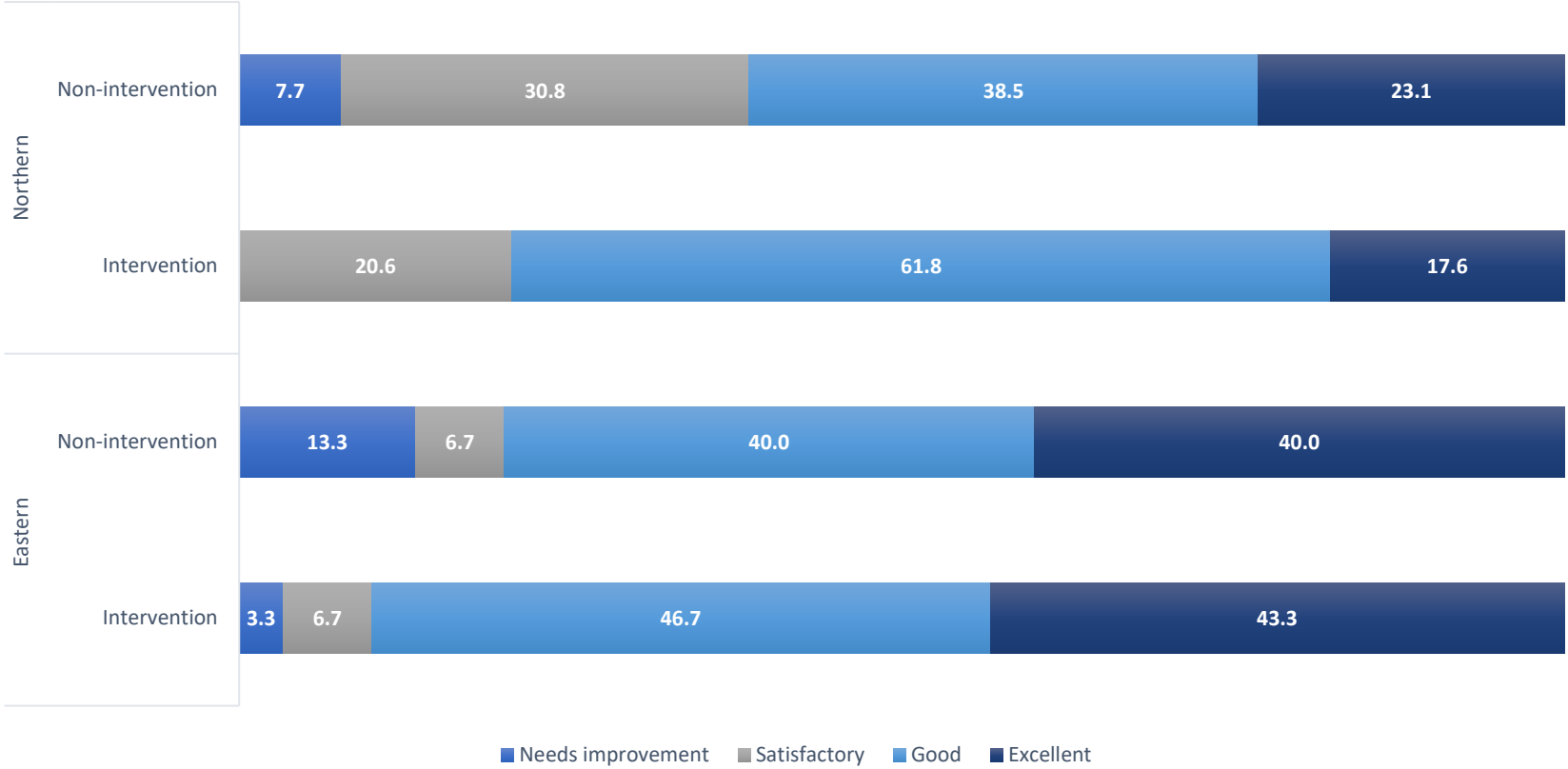
Girls and boys are given equal access to all learning materials.

The Learning Corners provided in these classrooms give the opportunity to both boys and girls to choose their area of interest.

Play-based materials (like toys and games) are not categorised as 'boys play toys' and 'girls play toys'

Teachers use gender neutral language to teach and interact with the kids

# Gender sensitivity in Ghanaian Classrooms



Northern region: 61.8% of teachers in intervention schools asked questions to boys and girls equally and encouraged both to answer/ succeed compared to the non-intervention schools (38.5%).

Eastern region: 43.3% of teachers in both intervention and non intervention schools are highly gender sensitive in terms of use of TLMs, lesson content and teacher’s language; differentiated learning adapted to learner needs

# Sensitivity to Diverse Learner Needs

Based on lesson observations and Interviews with teachers this indicator measured by teachers' ability to pay attention to the needs of learners with special learning needs either physical or intellectual to ensure they are included in lessons.

## Ghana

**Northern region:** 61% of Teachers across non-intervention and intervention schools provided activities that are suited to the level of all students including those with SEN. There were 7.7% of teachers rated “poor” in non intervention schools.

**Eastern region:** 63% of teachers in intervention schools were “excellent” and “good” in using activities that are suited to the level of all students, compared to only 15.4% of teachers in the non-intervention schools

## Sierra Leone

**Intervention:** With regards sensitivity to learners needs, the teachers in the intervention schools in both the South and the North were rated as either “good or excellent”.

**Non-Intervention:** 66.67% of teachers in the North and 50% in the South had satisfactory ratings in their sensitivity to learners needs



# Impact of play based approach on children observed in Ghanaian ECE Classes

Indicator	Schools in Intervention Districts	Schools in Non-intervention Districts
<p><b>Confidence levels of children</b></p>	<p>In some instances, <b>children took initiative, high participation levels and volunteered</b> to be part of this activity, -learners were confident enough to volunteer without knowing what the task was.</p> <p>When asking questions to the children the children <b>were able to easily able to answer and eager</b> to respond (<i>what do you enjoy about the lessons, what play activities do you know with actions— they were asked to demonstrate</i>)</p> <p>observed that learners in the intervention district were confident when answering questions and performing tasks/ guided play.</p>	<p>Children in non intervention schools were <b>often timid and afraid to respond</b> to questions/answers and perform activities (songs, dance and poems/rhymes).</p> <p>Learners observed being timid and afraid to respond to questions</p> <p>Researchers spent time to build rapport before children could participate in the discussion, questions and activities</p>

# Value addition of Education Innovators in early learning (Ghana and Sierra Leone)

## ***Value Addition made by play based innovations and education providers (Sabre Education and Right to Play Ghana and Teach Sierra Leone)***

- ✓ Training and coaching teachers on how to use and integrate PBAs in instructional practices; develop TLRs using locally available materials---transforming classroom environments, activating children's creativity and confidence levels and improving conditions of learning;
- ✓ child centered pedagogy has positively impacted on the holistic (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) development of children.
- ✓ Training also strengthens the gender sensitive approaches and social inclusion
- ✓ They have linked training content to MOE standard based curriculum and reinforced the objectives of the curriculum---(Training Manual for early grade teachers—endorsed by MOE/GES)
- ✓ Supporting head teachers and district ECE officers with techniques to better monitor/coach and supervise—capacity build

# Lessons from Ghana and Sierra Leone

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- Mainstreaming play-based approaches within the government curriculum are enhanced and deepened through support from non state actors / education innovators (Right to Play, Sabre Education and Teach SL)—interventions are transforming classrooms, teaching pedagogy and improving the quality and conditions for early learning in Ghana and Sierra Leone for ECE and primary education.
- Still more work is needed at Preservice levels particularly in Sierra Leone curriculum and teacher training college levels
- The training provided by innovators also has a significant impact on gender and inclusive education competencies of teachers—creating child friendly classrooms
- The content by all three providers should be further explored by Colleges of Education in the training of ECE Preservice teachers
- The training content provided to volunteer graduates placed in rural areas of Sierra Leone should be accessible by the MOE in Ghana; particularly in relation to the orientation and placement of National Service Volunteers in the school system;--
- Education Innovators in both countries are making contribution in helping teachers create a culture of learning in the classroom; helping teachers create a positive learning atmosphere and enhanced use of locally produced teaching learning materials.
- Several innovators in the Ghana education ECE space require that government put in place language of instruction policies for ECE to improve literacy and learning outcomes—this will also require teacher deployment and TPD;
- Scaling up these ECE innovations and content should be considered by both the National Teaching Council (Ghana) and National Teaching Commission (SL) through their Teacher professional development portals

# Outputs and outcomes to date

- Study team has shared the preliminary evidence with the Ministry of Education (Deputy Minister for Ghana and Chief Education Officer and Minister of Sierra Leone)... considering approaches for School based INSET and Teacher training.
- Right to Play workshop in Ghana (Feb 2023) was excellent sharing platform between Ghana and Sierra Leone ---has positioned both countries to learn and scale up...could have a ripple in West Africa if other innovators get involved.
- Request from Government of Zambia and the Southern African Network for Education Early Childhood Development and the Zambia and Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN) has invited our research team to present findings at the first Africa Regional ECD Early Childhood conference in southern Africa (Zambia, 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023)
- Sierra Leone Government will have to make more efforts at mainstreaming play based approaches in the ECE curriculum and ensure localized Teacher learning materials;
- Ghana will have to scale up more ECE classrooms to keep pace with demand/ entry; need to explore cost effective training options/capacity building efforts with National Volunteers and across pre-service ECE focused colleges.
- Both countries have to explore learning outcomes, coordination/leverage on scaled programming and costed solutions (next phase of research)

# Thank You

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