

SCALING INCLUSIVE HOME-BASED EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE: BASELINE STUDY– GHANA

Associates for Change: (September 2025)

CONTEXT AND SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

For decades, children aged 3-6 years, in many rural areas in Ghana including the Ekumfi and Nanton Districts do not have access to early childhood education. Children with limited options, daily travel 2 km or more to access education in communities where schools are available. This affects their participation in school, leading to dropouts and negative effects on their health and wellbeing. The inability of caregivers to carry them to school due to financial constraints also contributes to the situation. The status quo implies that most children are left at home in the care of neighbors, and extended family relations which often expose them to risky behaviors and brawls thereby compromising their safety and their progress across all dimensions (e.g., cognitive, socioemotional, economic). Yet, existing evidence (see [Nafungo & Ejuu, 2022](#))¹ shows that inclusive home-based early learning models (e.g., IHELP) could address early learning access challenges, encourage regular attendance and provide contextually relevant education to children especially CWDs and families, particularly in remote and underserved areas. The IHELP model has been scaled to Ghana (as SIHEL)² and currently implemented in five (5) rural communities in the Nanton District. Prior to implementation, a baseline study was conducted in the Ekumfi and Nanton districts and the following key issues emerged:

KEY ISSUES

Indigenous pedagogical approaches

In the absence of formal school systems in deprived communities, parents adopt a multidimensional approach that is indigenous in nature—embedding learning in cultural practices such as festivals, traditional dance, craftwork, oral narratives (e.g., cultural stories, songs, pretend plays); socioemotional pedagogies such as ‘shared bowls’³, collaborative task performance, and scaffolding (lead and facilitate) peer-to-peer play-based learning to develop values such as unity, cooperation and positive social preference behaviours. It was observed that play-based learning was done with locally available materials (e.g., plastic bottles, bottle lids, water sachets, etc.) while numeracy and literacy training are embedded in daily activities of cooking, buying and selling, to develop children’s critical thinking skills. These insightful practices are done using both multiple approaches—guided observation, participation and ‘apprenticeship’ to foster holistic benefits such including cultural identity, socioemotional skills, cognitive development and physical wellness.

Instructional Language preference

The study showed that parents and community members prefer younger children aged 3–6 years to be taught in the mother-tongue. They perceive the mother-tongue to facilitate the acquisition of L2(English), faster learning and cognitive ease (understanding of concepts), due to the child’s fluency in the mother-tongue, smooth transitioning from home to school and cultural preservation. This preference however coexists with the need to complement with English Language based on perceived benefits of facilitating academic and socioeconomic opportunities and prospects of preventing exploitation by ‘outsiders.’

Community attitude towards home-based early learning

It was further observed that although parents had limited knowledge of home and community-based approach to teaching children, they welcomed the idea of having home-based or community early learning centres. Community members and parents expressed willingness to contribute and sustain such centres through personal and community resources, e.g., labour, local materials, volunteering, meal provision, constant monitoring and provision of non-cash incentives to volunteer teachers and facilitators.

¹ Inclusive Home-based Early Learning Project (IHELP) was piloted in Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe

² Scaling Inclusive Home-based Early Learning Initiative (SIHEL). This project aims to scale the benefits associated with IHELP to the West African sub-region including Ghana, to address early learning challenges facing rural, remote and underserved areas.

³ A practice where children are taught to eat together in a single plate or bowl. This practice is used to foster social cohesion and reduce social isolation and individuality mindset among children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations align with, and reinforce existing government policies as follows:

- The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES) should scale up promising, proven home-based early learning, community and context-relevant best practices, particularly in rural areas where there are no KGs. Fifteen percent (15%) of the ECE budget should be allocated to the establishment of home-based or community-based early learning centers. This recommendation aligns with government Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2030 which prioritizes the expansion and equitable access to quality ECE. This further aligns with National commitment under MOE/GES to expand pre-primary access towards the attainment of SDG 4.2.
- Backed by robust legal frameworks, policy actors and curriculum experts (NaCCA) should engage community stakeholders (families and communities) to explore, document and integrate indigenous and cultural relevant pedagogies into the National ECE Curriculum and PRESET/INSET training programmes. Teachers should be trained bi-annually on how to incorporate play-based pedagogies particularly culturally informed pedagogies, multilingual instruction, disability inclusion and how to integrate indigenous knowledge systems into the classroom. This recommendation aligns with the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy 2004 which aims at improving the core competencies of ECE teachers. This further reinforces calls for teacher training (PRESET/INSET) to be enriched with requisite cultural and indigenous ECE pedagogical knowledge and skills especially play-based learning in line with the National Teachers' Standard (2007).
- Identify and incentivize parents and community members capable of using established indigenous and culturally relevant pedagogies to teach. This aligns with the Government's 'Bright Beginnings Initiative' which promotes the integration of indigenous knowledge, local languages, child centered pedagogy and languages into ECE. It further reinforces ECCD Policy 2004 which seeks to promote community participation in ECE delivery.
- Operationalise, with legal backing, a national language policy that mandates the use of children's first language (L1) as the medium of instruction in the first three years while systematically introducing English language as a second language (L2). This aligns with the language strategy under the Early childhood Care and Development Policy 2004 which supports literacy and multilingual education as a foundation for learning for children.
- Develop and implement a state-community partnership to ECE infrastructure development. A hybrid model where communities establish their learning centers and the government post ECE teachers to learning centers, pay salaries, and provide technical monitoring and supervision. This aligns with the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018–2030 which seeks to construct child-friendly, safe and modern KG infrastructure to ensure universal access to ECE. This could enhance access, ownership and sustainability in underserved and remote areas where ECE infrastructure deficits are greater.
- For effective monitoring and best practices, communities should be actively consulted in determining what is valued as relevant standards for quality ECE to serve as national benchmarks for monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Communities should also be engaged as monitors of early learning centres. Policy and programme design and implementation in the ECE sector should be informed by ethnographic and community consultations and participation. This recommendation reinforces existing government KG curriculum framework which emphasises play-based, community-informed curriculum. It also reinforces ECCD Policy 2004 which highlights the role of communities in monitoring quality education delivery. The recommendation also reinforces the Education Sector Plan (2018 – 2030) which promotes participatory governance and community engagement.