

# Rethinking early childhood pedagogy, curriculum and co-creators of knowledge: Insights from participatory community-driven research in multidimensionally deprived rural communities

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## BACKGROUND

- Efforts to strengthen evidence-informed policy and decisions in ECE contexts require a critical rethinking of what counts as education.
- Across rural Africa, what usually count as education leads to critical issues:
  - Epistemic marginalisation and injustice (e.g., exclusion of indigenous knowledge)
  - Absence of inclusive education
  - minimal parental involvement especially in rural areas
  - Infrastructural challenges (McCoy et al., 2018; Raikes et al., 2023).
- Learning becomes inaccessible, unresponsive to and disconnected from the local realities and the needs of children and families (*see* Ejuu, 2019, Ejuu et al., 2022; Kavuma & Ejuu, 2024).
  - Thus, requiring the identification of appropriate and suitable community-based alternatives and complementarities.

## BACKGROUND Cont'd

- In Ghana, the dominant formal education system and ECE pedagogies often fail rural, marginalised children.
  - 50%+ of children in SSA LMICs unlikely to access quality pre-primary education by 2030.
  - Deficit perspectives dominate discourse on early learning in deprived contexts.

- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) centres learners' cultures and experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
  - Indigenous knowledge systems in Ghanaian rural communities are untapped, sophisticated educational resources.
  - Yet, parents in deprived communities demonstrate intentional, holistic pedagogical practices that are rarely documented.

## The Research at a Glance: Study Methods

**2 Districts**

Nanton (North) & Ekumfi  
(South)

**12**

Rural  
Communities

**3–6 years**

Parents with children

**173**

In-depth  
Interviews

**32**

Focus Group  
Discussions

**4 Languages**

Dagbani · Fante · Twi · Ewe

**Inductive**

Thematic Analysis (NVivo-  
12)

*“How do parents, through indigenous pedagogies, address formal early learning deficits in multidimensionally deprived rural communities?”*

## Findings:



### Culture-embedded & -mediated pedagogies

“When I learn with them, I make sure to teach them about our cultural practices.” (female, Southern Ghana).

“As we roof our rooms with grass, how we weave the grass to transform it into roofing material is displayed in the full glare of the children. We bring them closer to observe so they can understand the process and learn how to do it.” (Male, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“In my house, we make them [children] watch traditional programmes on the television, called ‘Bangsim chugu’ [‘calabash full of knowledge’]. They talk about and portray our culture so we gather them when its time to watch.” (female, Northern Ghana)



### Ecology-based & physical education

“...The boys are involved in the harvest of termites for our fowls...These are used as learning opportunities for the children about our traditional knowledge. Taking them through how to trap the termites are all ways for them to learn our traditional knowledge”. (Male, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“In order for them to learn, I send them [children] to the farm where they observe plants, insects and animals to learn about the environment.” (TL, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“...I walk with them around the community for them to observe nature and things. I then ask them questions concerning what they have observed during the walk.” (Male, Northern Ghana)

# Findings:

## *Social pedagogies*

“We make them eat from the same bowl as we observe them and guide those who do not want to eat with their colleagues to develop the habit of accepting to eat with them.” (Male, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“We support them to carry out tasks in groups, so they learn how to work together and interact with each other.” (female, Southern Ghana)

“I teach them to establish friendship with people who have good characters so that they can copy and also live a good life...” (Male, Northern Ghana)

## *Life skills*

“...During their plays also, they do offend each other and we advise them to seek forgiveness from those they have offended and for them to also quickly forgive them. They learn those values from that.” (female, Northern Ghana)

“I teach them to show respect to all persons, be trustworthy and be ready to help and sympathize with people in the community when the need for it arises...and also how to manage their expectations in life.” (Male, Northern Ghana)

“When you keep encouraging them and telling them positive words like “You are brave, you did well”—that is how they learn to believe in themselves...Some of them are timid” (female, Southern Ghana)

# Findings:



## *Cognitive pedagogies*

“As parents, sometimes when we have ground nuts to crack, we often gather the children and fetch some quantities of the ground nuts for them. While engaged with them in the cracking process, you ask them to tell stories. As they sit together and engage in the story telling, it enhances their creative thinking, and they gain a lot of learning from those stories. Our fathers and grandparents used to train us the same way.” (Male, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“For me to enhance my children thinking ability I give them some tasks to perform. When they are done with the task, I ask them how they went about it.” (TL, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“...In the house sometimes, I see a particular animal and pronounce the name wrongly to see the child’s reaction. For instance, I see a goat and intentionally say it is a sheep, and the child will disagree and tell me it is a sheep, or the child wrongly says then I correct him or her.” (Male, Southern Ghana)



## *Emotion-focused learning*

“Here [in this community], elders gather children in the and tell them stories regarding emotions and how these should be controlled and managed.” (Male, Northern Ghana)

“Sometimes, they gather to crack groundnuts, and the old women give them stories that help their emotional development. The stories are told to children as to how they should control their emotions” (Male, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“Their emotional development is promoted during their gatherings. When they do things collaboratively...they sing songs, and they play together that helps them to promote better emotional development.” (female, Southern Ghana)

# Findings:

12  
34

## Numeracy

“As for me, at their age I teach them [my children] how to buy and sell goods with money. I intentionally give them money to go and buy something and sometimes I ask them to sell something to a neighbour for me to see.” (female, Southern Ghana)

“...and I also teach them [my child] how to sell so they can learn buying and selling. But it is not only about the buying and selling alone, it helps them to learn counting as well” (female, FGD, Northern Ghana)

“Sometimes, ...when we send them to buy things we engage them to learn calculations by asking them how many items they bought, the cost and the balance left. All these activities help them to also think critically, and they learn a lot from that...” (female, Northern Ghana)



## Literacy

“As for this house, we have those that have gone to school small, mostly they sit the little ones down and assist them to learn. I have bought them my first copy book, so they use it to learn writing and pronounce the English alphabets... (Female, Northern Ghana)

“We sometimes name an item or object and ask them to pick it from among other items and they learn through that process.” (Male, Northern Ghana)

## Key message

### Intentional Holistic Integration (IHI) ECE Model



#### Intentional

- Parents do not stumble into pedagogy.
- They deliberately engineer cultural, cognitive, social and physical learning opportunities with conscious purpose and developmental awareness.



#### Holistic

- No domain is isolated.
- Culture, cognition, emotion, physical development, numeracy and literacy are woven into single activities — a child eating from a shared bowl learns mathematics, empathy and identity simultaneously.



#### Integrated

- Learning is inseparable from living.
- The home, compound, farm, market, and community gathering are unified pedagogical spaces — culture is both the medium and the message.

Challenges deficit narratives of early learning in deprived contexts — revealing a resilient, community-owned educational system

# Scaling Inclusive Home-based Early Learning Initiative (SIHELI) Model in Northern Ghana

A community-driven approach to early childhood education ECE



Trained community volunteers teach literacy and numeracy



Economic empowerment activities for parents

Parents transmit indigenous knowledge to children through play

Community provides learning spaces, food and play equipment for children

## IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

### What this means for Policy & Practice:

#### **Policy**

ECE curricula in LMICs should formally recognise and integrate indigenous pedagogical practices rather than supplanting them with imported Western frameworks.

#### **Practice**

Teacher training programmes should equip educators to identify, validate and scaffold the cultural knowledge children bring from home communities.

#### **Research**

Future studies should document indigenous pedagogies across diverse SSA contexts using participatory methods that centre community expertise.

#### **Community**

Parents and elders should be positioned as co-educators and pedagogical partners in formal ECE systems — not as deficient subjects of intervention.

# THANK YOU!

