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Ghana Education Service kindergarten in-service training: Implementation review

Briefing

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Key messages

The Ghana Education Service (GES) developed an effective national scale-up plan that has been piloted in Assin South, using district teacher support teams to provide training, coaching, monitoring and oversight of kindergarten in-service training (KG-INSET).

The introduction of technology-based monitoring has improved systems for reporting on the KG-INSET programme, with regional and district teams having access to KG-INSET data. However, to deliver KG-INSET at national level, further systematic training is needed to support GES staff to fully integrate technology-based monitoring tools, including the effective use of data collected from the KG-INSET programme to respond to programmatic challenges, while emphasising the importance of accurate data reporting for scaling KG-INSET.

GES recognises that other agencies within the Ministry of Education (National Teaching Council, National Council for Curriculum, and Assessment and National Schools Inspectorate Authority) have a role to play during the wider scale-up of the KG-INSET programme. However, there was little contact between these agencies during the pilot programme in Assin South. Consequently, the role of some of these agencies is unclear during the wider scale-up, which may hinder the effective implementation of the programme at scale.

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About this briefing

This briefing provides the findings of a final review of the trialled KG-INSET national implementation in Assin South, prior to the implementation model being finalised for national scale-up.

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Introduction

The Ghana Education Service (GES) kindergarten in-service training (KG-INSET) programme was implemented in Assin South District (Central Region) during 2023–24, for an opportunity to refine the model prior to national scale-up.

This briefing provides the findings of a small-scale study on some aspects of implementation. The study took place between January and August 2024. It is based on interviews with officials from the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education (MoE), as well as Sabre Education LBG – which, together with NGOs Right To Play and Innovations for Poverty Action, has supported GES to develop the KG-INSET for national scale-up.

Context

The Government of Ghana's early childhood education (ECE) policy shows a commitment to free and compulsory universal basic education. It acknowledges the benefits of access to ECE and the investments made in the last two decades in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which mandates that 'all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education'.[1]

The KG-INSET programme supports teachers to transform their teaching practice towards the play-based learning approach advocated by Ghana's ECE policy, and to fully implement the kindergarten curriculum. It takes a system- strengthening approach by training and building the capacity of teachers through in-service training for every teacher in play-based pedagogy, positive behaviour management, and encouraging further engagement with parents and the wider community. The programme furthermore builds the capacity of headteachers and district GES officials to carry out teacher training, alongside monitoring of teachers in delivering play-based learning.

The KG-INSET programme is supported by empirical evidence on the value of in-service teacher training and coaching in improving the socio-emotional skills of Ghanaian kindergarten children, alongside their wider learning outcomes.[2] Academic research has demonstrated that although pre-service teacher training in play-based learning has a positive effect on such approaches – and subsequently kindergarten children's learning and development – sustained in-

[1] Ministry of Education [Ghana]. (2016). *Early childhood education policy: Indicator framework for monitoring access, equity, quality and management in Ghana's childhood education*. https://www.ece-accelerator.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/1.%20ECE%20Policy%20Framework.pdf

[2] Wolf, S. (2018). Impacts of pre-service training and coaching on kindergarten quality and student learning outcomes in Ghana. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 59 112–123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.05.001

service training improves the longevity of these effects.[3] Quasi-experimental studies examining the district-level KG-INSET programme have demonstrated improvements in key metrics of teacher performance at kindergarten level.[4] These include developing the knowledge and use of play-based learning techniques for kindergarten teachers, the increased ability for teachers to create their own teaching and learning materials, and improvements in teacher lesson plan preparation that integrated play-based learning approaches.[5]

In light of these results, GES designed the ECE KG-INSET programme for national scale-up (referred to here as 'KG-INSET national'), developed in collaboration with Sabre Education, Right To Play and Innovations for Poverty Action.

The KG-INSET national model differs from the earlier district implementation of the model in several ways. For one, KG-INSET national emphasises more hands-on implementation by GES at district level, with less technical support from Sabre Education. District officials are given training by master trainers selected by GES and Sabre Education to provide coaching for teachers, alongside support in monitoring, using a cascade training approach. Regional GES staff play an oversight role, supporting the district teams by ensuring quality in the delivery of teaching and support, and providing spot checks within schools implementing the programme.

Importantly, the KG-INSET programme, both in the scale version and its previous iterations, is delivered through existing government systems, working to strengthen existing processes and frameworks. The in-service teacher training and support works to improve the ability of teachers to work with the play-based learning approach, while the cascade training approach dovetails with existing approaches to cascade training used in existing teacher training practices.

At the time of writing, Sabre Education and Right To Play have supported GES to implement the model in ten districts and eight districts respectively. One of the ten districts supported by Sabre – Assin South – was selected as the district to trial KG-INSET national. Primarily, Assin South and Central Region were chosen to trial KG-INSET national due to the pre-existing knowledge key members of the regional GES team had of the programme. Several other districts within Central Region had already been supported to develop the district-level model of KG-INSET, and so engaging a nearby district that already had experience in the programme at regional level was vital.

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[3] Wolf, S. (2019). Year 3 follow-up of the 'Quality Preschool for Ghana' interventions on child development. *Developmental Psychology* 55 (12), pp. 2587–2. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000843

[4] Associates for Change. (2022). *Building teachers' capacity to enhance early learning through play-based approaches in Ghana and Sierra Leone*. International Development Research Centre (IDRC). https://www.associatesforchange.org/IDRC-PROG/EARLY-LEARNING/Literature%20Review%20on%20IDRC2%20Early%20Learning%20Project.pdf

[5] JMK Consulting. (2023). *Transformational teacher training in the Eastern Region*. *End of project evaluation.* Sabre Education. https://sabre.education/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Final-Evaluation-Report_Sabre-ER-TTT-Project.pdf ; Right to Play. (2021) *Right to Play in Ghana: Going to scale with learning through play.* https://apppack-app-righttoplay-publics3bucket-veclfraq9ykl.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Right_To_Play_Ghana_Country_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Findings

KG-INSET implementation process

GES has utilised existing governance structures, such as the District Teacher Support Team (DTST), to implement KG-INSET national. In Assin South, the DTST comprised school improvement support officers (SISOs), the early childhood education coordinator and kindergarten teachers.

As the DTST was selected from the existing pool of district staff, the team is experienced in using the established GES monitoring and supervision systems. During KG-INSET, the DTST are trained in play-based learning and the kindergarten curriculum and then play an important role in delivering the teacher training to all kindergarten teachers in the district, the headteacher training, and subsequent teacher monitoring and support.

- **The DTST reinforced programme ownership** within the district GES team and catalysed the necessary drive for effective implementation.
- **The DTST undertook weekly and monthly oversight tasks to ensure effective implementation of KG-INSET national in Assin South**, alongside facilitating the adoption of play-based approaches in kindergarten classes. GES officials in Central Region found the DTST highly useful as it provided a clear organisational structure for implementation.
- **KG-INSET national implementation was streamlined using WhatsApp for communication between regional and national GES staff.** This streamlined decision-making and helped to reduce delays in responding to challenges and issues.

GES could consider adopting a similar DTST model in other regions and districts for scale-up of KG-INSET national.

Technology-based data monitoring systems

In Assin South, the use of technology in KG-INSET national monitoring and oversight was highly valuable for supporting the assessment of teacher performance, including whether they use the skills targeted in the KG-INSET training programme, and, if not, to identify areas for improvement. GES and Sabre Education have collaboratively worked on developing a national dashboard to streamline tech-based data collection that can be used by district and regional GES staff, while district teams have utilised tech-based monitoring systems to record and collate monitoring forms completed by SISOs.

However, more training is needed for GES staff on the new forms of tech-based monitoring used for KG-INSET national. Current approaches to tech-based monitoring training are ad hoc and insufficient in reinforcing the importance of accurate and regular monitoring and oversight. Furthermore, district GES staff are still utilising both paper-based and tech-based monitoring tools, with little synchronisation between these. This has created some confusion within the

district team about how data should be collected and what data is transmitted to regional and national levels.

During KG-INSET national scale-up, GES might consider more systematic training on tech-based monitoring equipment and use to acclimatise staff on the new tech-based monitoring systems and dashboard, and to reinforce the importance of regular and accurate monitoring and oversight of the programme.

GES might also consider the provision of additional support for district teams to promote a smooth transition away from paper-based tools, and the more complete adoption of tech-based monitoring systems in anticipation of the scale-up of KG-INSET national.

Inter-agency partnerships

Initial onboarding of the different agencies supporting KG-INSET national were both helpful and valuable. Workshops run by GES and Sabre Education outlined clearly the roles each agency had to play in the implementation of the programme, making it clear that the implementation of KG-INSET was a collaborative effort undertaken by several Ministry of Education agencies, namely National Teaching Council (NTC), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) and National Schools Inspectorate Authority (NaSIA) and GES.

However, during the implementation of KG-INSET national in Assin South, some agencies highlighted that their specific roles in the scaled-up programme should be clearer. For example, NTC and NaSIA officials said that they are no longer clear on their roles in the KG-INSET and felt that GES should more clearly communicate how each agency should support the programme.

Each agency also uses its own monitoring tools, standards and processes, which have not yet been aligned with those of GES. Of particular concern was a lack of coordination between NaSIA and GES on their monitoring practices. There is an overlap of monitoring activities between the district SISOs and NaSIA's inspectorate, and a lack of clarity over how NaSIA's activities may complement or problematise GES' mandated monitoring activities.

GES could consider further engagements with NTC, NaCCA, and NaSIA to clearly establish roles for each agency during the KG-INSET national scale-up, alongside exploring how to better integrate the different processes and tools used by each agency.

Broader findings

Regional GES officials felt that the role of the regional team in KG-INSET national should be clearer

They emphasised that the role they played in the trialled KG-INSET national in Assin South often involved costly and time-consuming in-person school monitoring visits.

Several stakeholders expressed concern that they currently lack sufficient human resources to effectively implement KG-INSET national

In particular, the national ECE Unit noted that it only has three full-time staff members, whilst NaSIA indicated that it may struggle to support the scale-up of the programme due to resource constraints. This would need to be addressed during full scale-up.

There were also concerns about the need for additional teachers who are adequately trained on play-based learning, as there are currently not enough KG teachers for each school.

Regional and district GES teams emphasised that teacher recruitment is not within their responsibilities, which presents a challenge for quickly recruiting kindergarten teachers where they are needed.

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Thrive is a multi-country research programme that aims to support countries to turn what we know about positive early childhood development into practical, scalable, low-cost programmes, able to transform societies over multiple generations. Working closely with policymakers and other stakeholders, Thrive aims to build understanding of early childhood development service delivery models and how they can be provided cost effectively and at scale, and how these systems can innovate, improve, and better serve children and communities in low- and middle-income countries.

Our five focus countries are Bangladesh, Ghana, Kiribati, Sierra Leone and Tanzania.

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