



HOW TO LEARN THROUGH PLAY

Reflections from the Zambia study trip

The **LEGO** Foundation 

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INTRODUCTION:

In 2021, VVOB started implementing IT'S Play (Improving Teaching Skills on Playful Learning for Africa's Youngest) a regional project covering Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia. The project aims to foster Learning Through Play (LtP) in early childhood education (ECE) with the main objectives being integrating LtP in the ECE system with emergent literacy and numeracy as entry points; integrating LtP into government policy instruments; strengthening the capacity of in-service Teacher Professional Development (TPD) providers to train and coach ECE teachers on LtP; and building awareness of key stakeholders.

In February 2022, a 5-day regional study visit was organised in Zambia to promote inter-country learning comprising of interactive sessions (in Lusaka and Siavonga) and field visits to early childhood centres of good practice (supported by the USAID Let's Read Project in Siavonga).

Present were ministries of education officers from Zambia and Uganda, tutors of teacher training colleges, and VVOB officers from Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Belgium. The visit was attended by 54 participants of which five were from Uganda:


1. Elizabeth Mbatudde – Assistant Commissioner, Pre-primary, MoES Basic Education Department
2. Elizabeth Kisakye – Principal Education Officer, MoES Teacher Education and Training Department
3. Paschal Afedra – Deputy Principal Preservice, Gulu Core PTC
4. Margaret Obwona – ECD Tutor, Gulu Core PTC
5. Lyn Loy Apiyo - Education Advisor, ITS PLAY, VVOB Uganda



Emergent literacy lesson in progress (story telling using pictures) at an ECE center in Siavonga. The learner in the middle is telling a story about the car he is seeing in the picture. After his turn, another child volunteers or is chosen at random by the teacher especially those who may not volunteer and shy to participate

IN THIS REPORT

This report presents reflections of the Ugandan Ministry officials after participating in the visit to Zambia, and makes recommendations for consideration by the MoES, VVOB and other ECCE partners in Uganda.



Study Visit Objectives:

- a) To promote regional learning over the three IT'S PLAY countries and from the different initiatives that are being implemented in each country
- b) To develop a shared vision on Early Childhood Education and Learning through Play (LtP).

Methodology:

1. Visit to the Ministry of Education Zambia

The study trip began with a courtesy visit to the Ministry of Education in Lusaka. The Ugandan delegation was represented by Ms. Elizabeth Kisakye, Principal Education Officer in the Teacher Education and Training Department (MoES-TETD) who met and interacted with various Ministry Officials.

2. Panel discussion: Early Childhood Education in Zambia, Rwanda, and Uganda – an introduction

Each country delegation gave an overview of the ECE sector in their country. Uganda was represented in the panel by Ms. Elizabeth Kisakye of MoES-TETD. Zambia was represented by Ms. Evelyn Simfukwe – Principal Education Officer, Early Childhood Education, Directorate of Early Childhood Education. Rwanda was represented by Ms. Solange Mukayiranga – Education Advisor, VVOB Rwanda. The table below summarises the ECE situation in the three countries:

Summary of ECE issues in Uganda, Zambia and Rwanda

ECE issues	Uganda	Zambia	Rwanda
ECE context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE is fully run in and by the private sector, teachers are not on the government payroll. • The national development plan prioritises ECE, so changes are to be expected, especially in the teacher training, more government run options • The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) developed a national curriculum for ECE. • There is no syllabus, but there is a learning Framework with five learning areas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relating with others in an acceptable way ○ Interacting, exploring, knowing, and using my environment ○ Taking Care of Myself for Proper Growth and Development ○ Developing and using mathematical concepts in my day-to-day experiences ○ Developing and using my Language Appropriately • There is no timetable but the daily routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before 2012, there was no standardization of ECE. Most ECE was part of the private sector. • In 2012: a directive was given to establish ECE centres annexed to primary schools • In 2013, 1000 teachers were recruited and placed on government payroll. The rest of the staff came in as caregivers • The Education policy and strategic planning has integrated ECE. The 2013 curriculum framework includes ECE: development and availability of syllabus, five learning areas (learners' books and teachers' guide) • To support implementation: teachers' guide, how to develop materials using local resources, children should be able to manipulate materials • Early learning development standards, what are the norms, measure progress, assessment tools for different domains • Access still limited to at least 5 ECE centres in each district (advice is 20); 37.4% of children entering grade 1 (P1) had ECE experience in 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE is a priority of government – Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2018 – 2024 • The competence-based curriculum for ECE developed in 2015 and implementation in 2016 • Syllabus as part of ECE per grade, 6 learning areas • 3 levels of ECE: Grade 1 (3 – 4 years), grade 2 (4 – 5 years) and grade 3 (5 – 6 years) • Since 2012, ECE is being established within the compound of primary government schools, while before it was mostly under the private sector. • There are more than 8000 ECE teachers with around 3000 currently on payroll. The target is for all teachers to be on payroll progressively • ECD policy, minimum standards are in place • Government structure: ECE specialist at MINEDUC, ECE staff at Rwanda Education Board (REB), District Education Officer in charge of ECE at the district level

Summary of ECE issues in Uganda, Zambia and Rwanda

ECE issues	Uganda	Zambia	Rwanda
Pre-service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is ran by the private sector The teachers for 6 – 8-year-olds are trained in Primary Teachers' Institutions (PTCs). They must affiliate to university, which leads to more quality education 	There exists a standardized teacher training curriculum: all colleges must follow the curriculum (all 10 TTCs offer at diploma level (post-secondary) or degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 teacher training colleges offering ECLPED (Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education): Secondary level, 3 years, S.4 – S.6. Prepare teachers for ECE and lower primary Faculty of ECE at College of Education/ University of Rwanda: Bachelor's Degree (Teachers for Teacher Training Colleges – TTCs) There is a master's program in Early Childhood Education
In- service/ CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a framework for offering CPDs Many CPDs are run by the development partners 	Lots of CPDs for ECE teachers and caregivers as most are not qualified	There is a close cooperation with government partners, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and development partners
Language of instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should be the local language; but since it is in the private hands, English is mostly used 	The language of instruction is the local language up to grade/primary 3. Then there is transition to English	Kinyarwanda is the language of instruction. English is taught as a subject
Inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies are in place, and caters for all but practices are different in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies and curriculum cater/ integrate inclusion but many children with special needs are still 'hidden', not always coming to ECE centres. There is deliberate 'hunt' for these children) ECE generally is not valued by all parents. Challenge of denial in case of special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies, standards, etc. on inclusive education are in place but not all schools are meeting the standards
Feeding programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a feeding programme, but all ECE provisions were closed for almost 2 years (March 2020 to February 2022) due to COVID-19 	Feeding programme exists in primary schools and ECE is annexed to this. Implementation is still under development	Done in close collaboration with parents and community
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE in the hands of the private sector leading to no regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few qualified teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low access to ECE Few qualified teachers



Emergent Literacy play activity using locally available material at an ECE Center in Siavonga District

3. Visits to ECE centres in Siavonga District (Southern Province)

The team visited several ECE centers in Siavonga district which is in the southern province of Zambia. All the ECE centres visited have had their teachers undergo LtP CPD under the USAID LET'S READ project that the IT'S PLAY project gained so much inspiration from.

Two key observations were made in the ECE classrooms visited:

- The availability of an assistant teacher in the ECE classroom offered opportunities for effective classroom management, provided for one-on-one interaction between learners and teachers; and the assistant teacher acted as an instructional assistant who would time and again chip in to support the teacher with instruction.
- The CPDs and guidelines on Learning through play have helped teachers to come up with activities that are more fun for children to do and that include the use of locally available materials. It was observed that teachers made materials and prepared well for their lessons with the learners.



Ministry of Education & Sports officials from Uganda, with their counterparts of Zambia during the field visit to Siavonga district

4. Discussion on Curriculum, syllabi, and policies

Participants also had a chance to share and discuss the curriculum, syllabi and policies relating to ECE in each of the countries.

- All countries have developed ECE curricula based on education policies and strategic plans.
- Rwanda has a competency-based curriculum.
- The curriculum of Zambia is more knowledge based. All materials availed to teachers are explained through CPDs: how to use, how it links, etc. There is no guidance on multigrade teaching in ECE. Schools are guided (via standards) to work with parents and community, e.g., via open days and parents' meetings.

5. Teacher professional development - Zambia experience

a) Pre-service:

Zambia is the only country of the three that offers pre-service training for ECE teachers at diploma level (tertiary, after secondary) and degree level. ECE teachers are paid the same salary as primary school teachers and based on their qualification (Diploma or Degree).



b) In-service/CPD:

The CPD structure is from national, to provincial, to district and then to zone level (e.g., there is a zone in-service CPD coordinator).

One school in the zone functions as a model school for the zone (with approximately 8 schools) taking responsibility towards CPD delivery and peer learning.

Teachers have a license to teach with the teacher's council and this is renewed every 3 years upon collecting CPD points.

Monitoring and evaluation

In addition to VVOB country offices presenting their monitoring tools for this project, the participants also had a learning session on monitoring and evaluation presented by the VVOB Global Strategic Education Advisor, Hans De Greve. The session covered three types of monitoring tools used in education interventions:

1. Compliance monitoring (inputs). This tool monitors:
 - Standards and norms
 - Textbooks, materials
 - Infrastructure
2. Diagnostic monitoring (inside/process classroom) which is often a gap. This tool monitors:
 - Instructional processes
 - Student learning (are they learning, not the same as getting good test results)
 - Quality of education in classroom

3. Performance monitoring (output). This tool monitors:

- Testing (e.g., school readiness)
- Achievements of learning
- Results of investment

4. A comparison of the Zambia and Uganda ECE sectors

As shown in this table, participants compared the ECE sector in Uganda with that of Zambia acknowledging that these comparisons can inspire systems change in Uganda through ECE policy.

Zambia	Uganda
1. In Zambia, there is full ownership of the government in ECD in terms of coding, deployment and well established ECD structures right from national to grass root.	1. ECD is privately owned, some are community, faith based, and it is individualized for commercial purposes and recruitment is locally done by private owners.
2. Zambia has a well-designed and unified curriculum and syllabus	2. There is no fully fledged and harmonized curriculum
3. Zambia has well designed and unified ECE support monitoring tools used nationally	3. In Uganda tool are designed by private sector
4. All primary schools in Zambia have ECD centers attached and managed by the same school administration.	4. ECD centers are operated by interested owners.
5. Zambian Education system has initiated free education programs; provided free feeding programs in all ECD centers while	5. Parents pay for their children's meals
6. Parents engagement in school activities, such as material production, made them gain knowledge and skills to understand why LTP is an important approach	6.
7. Teachers regard themselves equal in Zambia due to unified levels recommended by the government	7. Teachers tend to underrate each other due to un-unified standards of qualification.
8. Equal distribution of resources in both primary and ECD attached as they operate under the same administration	8.
9. Fully pledged directorate for ECE with closed linkages of ECD coordinator from national province, zonal and to grass root level in terms of administration and management.	9.
10. High level of team spirit exhibited in Zambia between the Ministry of Education and the implementing partners in the Education Sector	10.
11. LtP makes teaching and learning practical and is being used to capture learners' attention. It also promotes creativity among teachers.	11.



Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Sports and partners in Uganda

The participants, upon return to Uganda make the following recommendations to the MoES and partners regarding improvement of the ECE sector. These recommendations are anchored on having an ECE policy that can drive such changes at systems level:

For MoEs and its agencies;

- Ensuring that all ECD centers are attached to government primary schools and have a different management.
- Integrating LtP in the PTC curriculum and this curriculum must be standardized, and all training institutions mandated to follow
- Setting up a fully-fledged ECE directorate with close linkage of ECD coordinators right from national level to grassroots in terms of administration and management.
- Developing a national curriculum and syllabus for ECD programmes as well as provision of relevant learning materials
- Developing harmonized monitoring and evaluation instruments for ECE to be used nationally.
- Gradual government ownership of ECD centers in terms of establishment and management.
- Setting up free education and free feeding programs for ECD centers.
- Professionalizing ECE teacher training and career paths through CPDs