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Ghana

Bridging Access with Quality: Empowering Kindergarten Teachers with Practical Training to Support Child-Centered Learning

Country Brief Snapshot

In 2004, Ghana launched its *National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy*, which promotes the survival, growth, and development of children 0-8 years of age. The new policy, which emphasized the importance of kindergarten, signalled the adoption of a holistic approach to supporting young children and their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. In realizing the promise of this policy, Ghana became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to expand Free Universal and Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) to kindergarten (KG), and has achieved the highest pre-primary enrolment rate in the region.¹ Since expanding access, government officials and development partners have worked to address quality challenges in KG programs by improving teaching practice and its alignment with the national curriculum through a number of programs, including the Fast Track Transformational Teaching (FTTT) Program which began in partnership with 2 of the 7 Colleges of Education which offer a track in early childhood education in the Central and Western regions of the country. This brief highlights the FTTT's approach to enhancing pre- and in-service training to improve KG teachers' practical skills and ability to implement the national play-based KG curriculum, noting the enabling conditions and barriers to implementation, as well as policy lessons for other countries looking to support the early childhood workforce working in the education sector.

Introduction: Ghana's Focus on Pre-Primary Education²

In recent years, Ghana has formulated a number of policies focused on improving and expanding its national education system. In 2004, the country adopted the *National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy*, which officially recognized access to quality kindergarten (KG) as an essential component of early childhood development (ECD). This ECCD policy also established a new curriculum that prioritizes play-based pedagogy over techniques that emphasize rote memorization. This teaching methodology encourages the enhancement of children's foundational communication skills, curiosity for learning, ability to think creatively, and capacity to build relationships.³

In order to realize the promise of the ECCD Policy, in 2007-2008, Ghana became the first in sub-Saharan Africa to expand Free Universal and Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) to kindergarten, specifically two years of KG classes for children ages 4-5.⁴ The Ghana Education Service (GES), an implementing organization under the Ministry of Education (MoE), has led the rollout of this policy. As a result of this policy, pre-primary education access has increased dramatically – the gross enrollment rate moved from just over 60 percent in 2005 to 117 percent in 2016⁵ – and by 2017, there were over 14,400 public and 8,000 private kindergartens.⁶

Policy Challenges

With greatly expanded KG opportunities, Ghana is now grappling with the issue of quality, a common challenge in systems which rapidly scale access. At the heart of this quality issue is teaching practice at the KG level, which relies heavily on approaches such as rote memorization which inhibit learning and development particularly among the youngest children. For example, a 2012 *Government Kindergarten Situational Report* confirmed

Policy Responses

In light of the above challenges, GES released its 2012 *Program to Scale-Up Quality Kindergarten Education in Ghana* (GES operational plan), a five-year operational plan that solidified teacher training as a top national priority.⁸ In partnership with civil society, the government has focused on training teachers, district

that while the 2004 play-based curriculum was still aligned with leading research on effective KG pedagogy, teachers were not embracing or utilizing these methodologies in their classrooms.⁷ One of the primary factors contributing to the misalignment between the curriculum and teaching practice is the lack of training opportunities for KG teachers which facilitate practice of play-based approaches.

education staff, and other relevant personnel, as well as on raising awareness among parents about the importance of a child-centered curriculum and high quality pre-primary services through a series of initiatives including the Fast Track Transformational Teaching (FTTT) program.

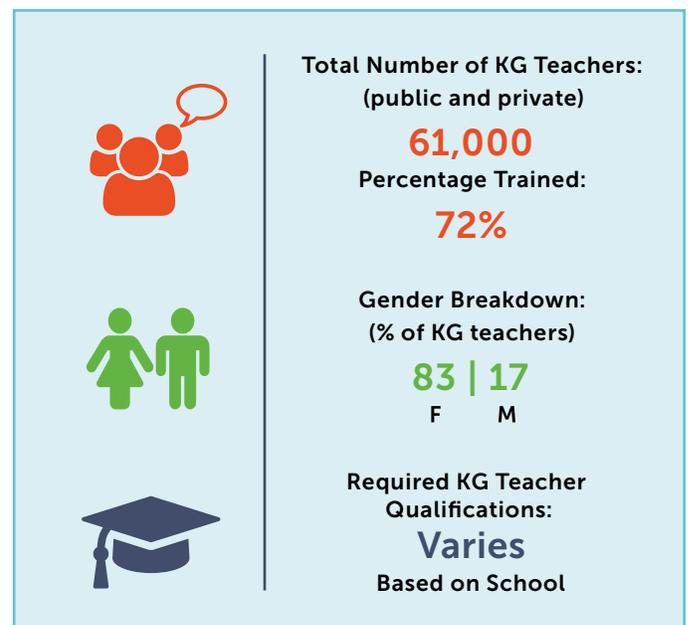
The Kindergarten Workforce

The kindergarten workforce has expanded significantly as pre-primary enrollment has increased. In 2018, there are close to 61,000 KG teachers,⁹ with the majority female (83 percent).¹⁰ With typically one KG teacher per class in public schools, the pupil to teacher ratio is 30:1.¹¹ KG teachers fit within a larger school ecosystem that includes Head teachers, Circuit Supervisors, and KG Coordinators.¹²

- **Head Teachers** serve as educational leaders with mainly administrative and supervisory duties such as overseeing instructional development, selecting and monitoring teachers, and providing guidance to students.
- **Circuit Supervisors** are non-teaching personnel who play a key role in supervision by visiting and monitoring public schools and providing guidance on teacher and head teacher lesson plans.
- **KG Coordinators** represent GES and usually work at the district-level to oversee the quality of KG.¹³

About 72 percent of these KG teachers have received some training in early childhood education.¹⁴ Despite government attempts to support training efforts in recent years, about 17,000 KG teachers from public

and private KGs remain untrained according to government estimates.¹⁵



With regards to compensation, 2010 salary reforms for public sector employees equalized pay for teachers with the same qualifications such that KG and basic education teachers receive the same salary if they have the same qualifications.¹⁶

Training and Professional Development

Pre-service Training: There are 40 public Colleges of Education that provide pre-service training for prospective teachers. Ghana's MoE is currently attempting to align pre-service coursework across all Colleges of Education and develop student practicums through the Transforming Teaching, Transforming Learning (T-TEL) initiative, which specifically focuses on the pre-service period.¹⁷ Seven of these Colleges offer a diploma in early childhood education (ECE)¹⁸ which requires students to spend two years of study at the College and a third year in a school placement as a student teacher. There is concern that many classrooms, venues for placements, do not utilize the pedagogy outlined in the national curriculum, which can make it challenging to provide students with useful student teaching experiences in nearby schools.¹⁹

In-service Training: The National Teaching Council oversees in-service education and training to strengthen KG workforce knowledge and skills primarily through two models – school-based and cluster-based.²⁰ In the school-based model, teachers at a particular school organize to fill observed skill gaps and limitations, while under a cluster-based model, teachers at a number of schools come together to share ideas on good practices. Under both models, Head Teachers nominate teachers to serve as Curriculum Leaders who facilitate these trainings in collaboration with other staff.²¹ One concern is that existing in-service training programs do not incorporate the coaching, mentoring, and reflection elements that are recognized as being beneficial for KG teachers.²²

A Promising Approach: Aligning Pre- and In-Service Training to Enhance Practical Skills

Background

In order to address recommendations included in the GES operational plan and challenges around the misalignment between the national curriculum and KG teaching practice, the FTTT program was developed as a partnership between GES, two Colleges in the Central and Western Regions of Ghana, and Sabre Education (a non-profit organization). The aim of this initiative is to improve student teachers' experiences in the placement year during ECE diploma programs, and to establish a sustainable network of model classrooms where placements take place for students enrolled in Colleges of Education.²³

To address the barriers to implementing the child-centered curriculum outlined in the GES operational plan, the program incorporates access to

1) a combination of pre- and in-service training,

2) in-classroom coaching and mentoring, and
3) resources such as lesson plans and assessment tools for both practicing and student teachers.²⁴ Through in-service training, practicing teachers learn how to support, encourage, and mentor student teachers.²⁵ College Tutors and some GES officers serve in both training and coaching capacities, facilitating FTTT training workshops and monitoring student and practicing teachers' classroom practice.²⁶ These programmatic elements coalesce in FTTT Model Practice Classrooms (MPCs) where student teachers receive guidance on applying the curriculum from FTTT-trained practicing teachers, College Tutors, and involved GES officers.²⁷

Figure 1 provides a timeline for the relevant policies and development of the training approach while Figure 2 details components of the program and areas of focus.

Figure 1: Policy & Training Approach Timeline

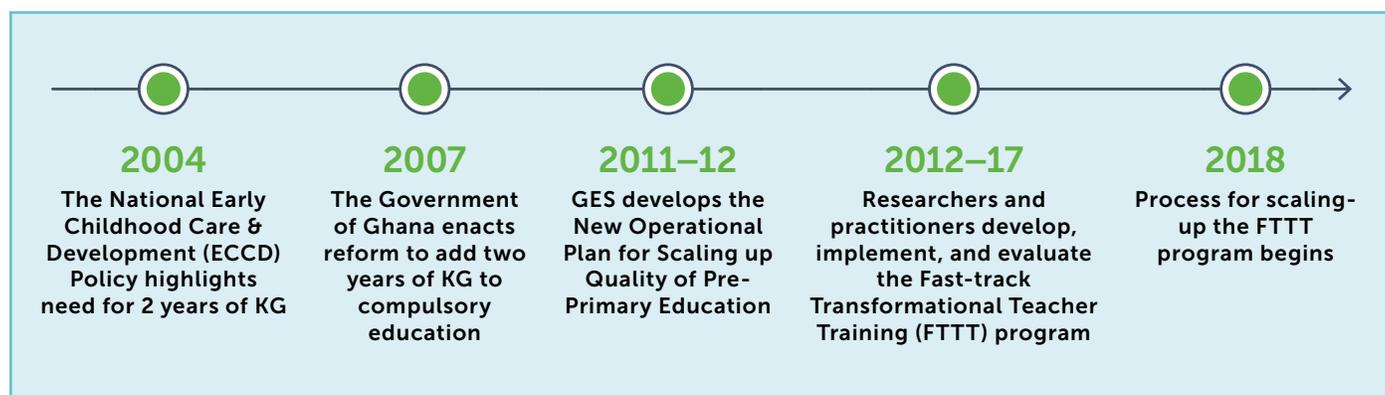
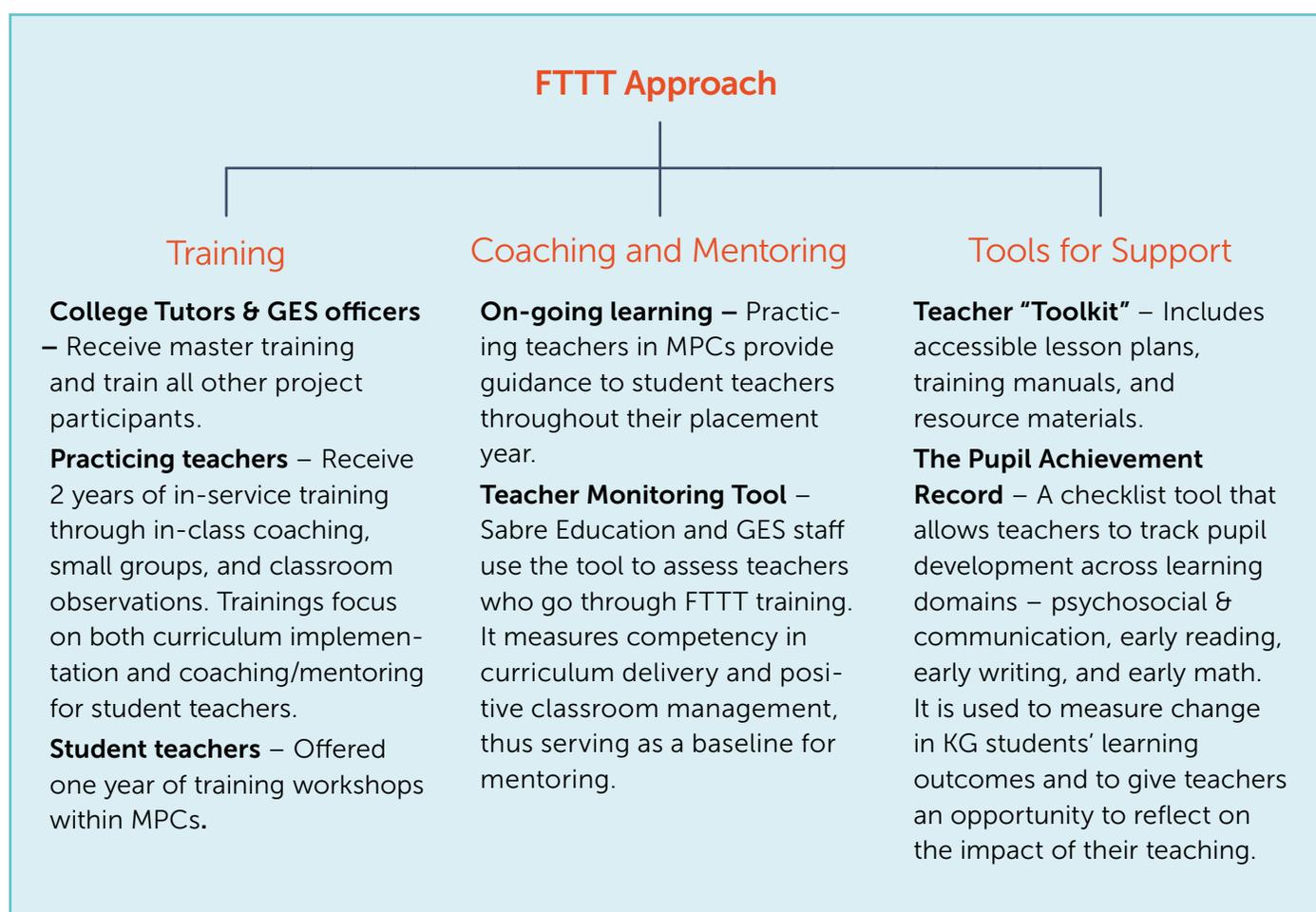


Figure 2: Key Components of the FTTT Approach



Program Implementation and Scaling

Despite some limitations and areas for learning within the approach, FTTT has achieved success. Between 2013 and 2017, across Ghana’s Central and Western regions, the program established 124 MPCs, in which teacher attendance drastically improved, with average teacher

attendance in MPCs increasing from 49 percent to 93 percent. Contributing factors to this increase include teachers’ motivation by their pupils’ achievements, the greater profile of being a mentor, and increased supervision by GES.²⁸ Over 473 student teachers participated

in the one-year FTTT along with 34 trainers, 57 Head teachers, and 50 GES officers who have received training on FTTT as well.^{29, 30}

Surveys revealed that by the end of their placement year, the vast majority of student teachers in both project regions were “confident” in implementing

the new pedagogy. Furthermore, children’s performance measured by the Pupil Achievement Record, a tool that Head teachers, College Tutors, and practicing teachers use to measure change in KG students’ learning outcomes when exposed to child-centered teaching methodologies, improved during this time period as well.

Evaluation Results

From 2016-2017, researchers from Innovations for Poverty Action worked alongside Sabre Education and GES to conduct an external randomized evaluation of the FTTT approach. The evaluation revealed that the FTTT program increased student teachers’ knowledge of early childhood education and development and improved their implementation of the curriculum. FTTT teachers also reported higher levels of motivation and feelings of personal accomplishment.³¹

However, once placed as new teachers, the same group had lower levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, student teachers experienced difficulty implementing what they learned during pre-service training in their new, full-time classrooms. While newly qualified teachers did continue to implement key elements of the curriculum in their first year, the size of the programs’ effects declined with time. This highlights the need for more efficient streamlining between KG pre-service training and on-going, in-service support in order to adequately account for workforce realities and pressures.³²

Replicating and strengthening the FTTT approach

Future plans for the FTTT include piloting on-going, in-service support for FTTT trained newly qualified teachers and applying the approach to the other five Colleges of Education that offer the ECE Diploma. FTTT’s in-service training component has already been replicated in a condensed format through *The Quality Preschool for Ghana* program, which was introduced in 2015 to address some of the challenges encountered in the FTTT approach, particularly the fade out of effects during the post-student teaching year. The program largely focuses on building teachers’ skills and knowledge of the play-based components of the KG curriculum through in-service training and coaching. A five-day in-service training, and refresher trainings four and eight months later have already been offered to KG and Head Teachers. KG teachers also received on-going mentoring and support, and the program integrated parental awareness meetings to orient parents to new play-based teaching methodologies.

An impact evaluation found that in-service teacher training and coaching improved teachers’ use of the play-based KG pedagogy specified in the country’s national curriculum, with positive effects remaining a year after the program began. Training also improved children’s school readiness on all measures in the first year, with impacts on socio-emotional development persisting through to the next. However, efforts to involve parents in their child’s education were ineffective, which researchers hypothesized to result from parents’ lack of belief in the value of play-based approaches and teachers adjusting classroom practices based on parents’ requests for non-play-based approaches.³³

Elements of FTTT have also been integrated into 2018 reforms to offer a new degree program for teacher candidates from kindergarten 1 through grade 3 (KG1-P3).³⁴

Reflections on Implementation: Enablers and Barriers

The following section reflects on the enabling environment in Ghana for supporting the early childhood workforce and the experience of applying a new approach to support these personnel. It highlights factors which have facilitated the introduction of new training efforts, as well as those that have created barriers to implementation.

Enabling Conditions



- **Sustained support for KG expansion** – Since 2008, expansion of KG opportunities has been a priority in Ghana which has been furthered by added resources in the system as well as data on needs and a strategic plan. This has allowed for experimentation of approaches to strengthen teacher quality in the system.
- **Existing infrastructure** – The FTTT approach has enabled buy-in from teachers and leaders in part because it has utilized existing infrastructure (e.g., colleges of education), and staff (e.g., practicing teachers and GES officers) to implement the approach.
- **Efforts to improve the status of the teaching profession** – While there are still barriers to ensuring that teachers have adequate support and working conditions, there have been efforts to improve the status of teachers more broadly including through reforms to the salary structure. These efforts have provided a foundation for approaches to improve pre- and in-service training opportunities.

Barriers to Implementation



- **High prevalence of under and over-age children in KG classrooms** – It has been difficult for KG teachers to deliver age-appropriate support, particularly for those children who are older than four and five. This issue demands specific policy attention beyond the scope of FTTT; however, it should be taken into account when designing training sessions, building the curriculum, and assessing child outcomes.
- **New pedagogical approach counters long-standing norms** – Ghana's new play-based curriculum differs significantly from the traditional methods of rote memorization and classroom discipline that have been used for generations. This has created tension between teachers, their colleagues, and parents, and generated impediments to integration of the national curriculum. Building shared understandings of effective pedagogy, especially in a child's early years, should be prioritized within training programs.
- **Lack of training capacity** – While College Tutors can be effective teacher trainers, their time is fairly constrained due to ongoing reforms and their roll out. Engaging more GES officers for training and in a more intensive manner may strengthen training capacity to reach more KG teachers, and more efficiently prepare for the transfer of program management from NGO staff to existing government entities.

Policy Lessons

As policymakers look to support the early childhood workforce in improving the quality of pre-primary programs, the following are lessons to consider from Ghana's experience.



Pre-service training should place a heavy emphasis on hands-on practice opportunities.

Through placements in Model Practice Classrooms during pre-service training, student teachers in Ghana are able to practice implementing different approaches, including play-based pedagogies. Systems should consider incorporating opportunities like this in pre-service programs which integrate practical tools, tips, and recommendations for improving kindergarten teachers' daily interactions with children in a way that promotes uptake of lessons. These opportunities should also include scenarios that allow teachers to practice navigating situations they are likely to encounter in the classroom (e.g. overcrowding, supporting children with special needs) so that they are not experiencing them for the first time when they complete their training.



Pre-service training should always be aligned with methods of ongoing support, including in-service training and mentoring and coaching.

After evaluation of the FTTT initiative indicated a fade-out of effects after the student teaching year, efforts were made to build teachers' knowledge and skills through in-service training and coaching. These types of opportunities ensure that curricula, pedagogical approaches, and teaching techniques that student teachers learn during pre-service training are continuously reinforced. Policy reforms should simultaneously strengthen pre- and in-service training, as continued, consistent guidance in the classroom builds practicing, newly qualified, and student teachers' confidence with curriculum implementation by reinforcing training content.



Reaching out to pre-primary stakeholders and sensitizing them to the benefits of child-centered approaches is essential for system-level change.

New pedagogies, like the play-based methodology in Ghana, may elicit pushback from stakeholders such as parents, Head teachers, and school administrators and as a result, deter KG teachers from applying newly learned teaching techniques. Opportunities for these stakeholders to gain insight on the long-term benefits of play-based pedagogy through trainings, awareness meetings, and dissemination of literature may help garner support for teachers on a day-to-day basis as well as broader system-level early education reforms.

Endnotes

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EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE INITIATIVE

The Early Childhood Workforce Initiative is a global, multi-sectoral effort to mobilize countries and international partners to support and empower those who work with families and children under age 8. This initiative is jointly led by Results for Development (R4D) and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), and supported by a consortium of funders including Bernard van Leer Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and ELMA Foundation.

