

Teacher Professional Development & Play-based Learning in East Africa

Strengthening Research, Policy, and Practice in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda



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Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EiE	Education in Emergencies
FBO	Faith-based Organization
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
LCP	Learner-centered Pedagogy
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
QAO	Quality Assurance Officer
SMC	School Management Committee
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TLC	Teacher Learning Circle
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
TTC	Teacher Training College
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

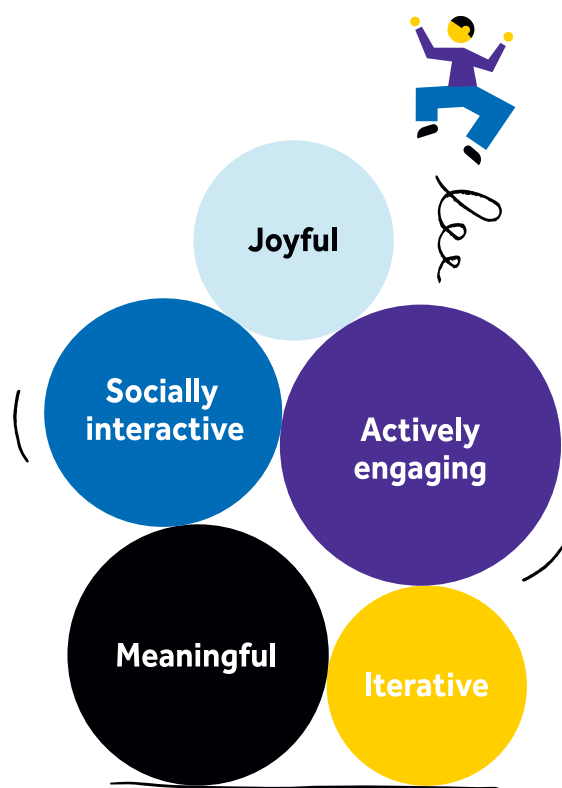
Introduction & Study Objectives

Across a range of contexts, research has identified both the myriad benefits of play for children’s development and the crucial role of teachers in delivering quality education. This is especially true in crisis contexts where quality education, which includes innovative pedagogical approaches such as play-based learning, can provide comprehensive protection for children and youth affected by conflict and displacement. Teachers are at the center of these efforts; however, to deliver quality education, teachers urgently need more and better support specific to the contextual and material realities in which they work. Recognizing the value of play-based learning and the central role of teachers, The LEGO Foundation commissioned a research team from Teachers College, Columbia University co-led by Dr. Mary Mendenhall and Dr. Vidur Chopra to examine the challenges and opportunities for integrating play-based learning into teacher professional development approaches in refugee and host communities in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Guided by The LEGO Foundation’s documented approach to learning through play, we (the research team) understood play-based learning to entail active learning, collaborative and cooperative learning, experiential learning, guided discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and Montessori education (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). We also understood play-based learning to encompass “joyful, socially interactive, actively engaging, iterative, and meaningful” experiences (Ibid, 2019).

The overarching research questions informing our study included the following:

1. What are the leading **evidence-based practices and promising innovations for Teacher Professional Development (TPD)** from various pedagogies that can support the uptake of play-based learning by both governments and



Source: The LEGO Foundation

humanitarian service providers in both formal education settings, and non-formal settings as relevant?

2. What are the leading **evidence-based practices and promising innovations in school leadership models** that can support teachers to deliver high-quality educational experiences that include play-based learning?
3. What are the leading **evidence-based practices and promising innovations for host country governments and humanitarian service providers** to prioritize, adopt, and implement teacher focused frameworks and policies that promote play-based learning?

4. What are the **priority knowledge, practice, and policy gaps and opportunities** within the TPD landscape in East Africa?
5. What are **top-line specific and actionable recommendations** for how donors, governments, and humanitarian service providers can effectively contribute to TPD in East Africa?

To answer these questions, we built on the current evidence base about play-based learning¹ and TPD by incorporating findings from 189 academic and grey literature resources specific to low- and middle-income countries and refugee settings. Our analysis also included findings from 30 interviews with 37 humanitarian and education sector practitioners, each of whom had significant experience and expertise working in humanitarian and development settings in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda, as well as at regional- and global-levels.²



...multiple key informants noted evidence gaps regarding the effectiveness of play-based learning and the urgent need to generate contextualized evidence about its applicability and efficacy in East Africa, prior to efforts to widely implement and scale up this approach.

By centering the professional development needs of teachers, our study contributes to the existing evidence base on both TPD in low- and middle-income country contexts and in host and refugee contexts. Our work proposes system-wide recommendations for donors and other actors who are working on play-based learning initiatives in pre-primary and primary education in East Africa and beyond. Our study also allowed us to identify critical evidence, policy and practice gaps, and propose future research, advocacy, and program priorities related to teachers' professional development as they experiment with and integrate play-based learning in their classrooms and schools.

For example, multiple key informants noted evidence gaps regarding the effectiveness of play-based learning and the urgent need to generate contextualized evidence about its applicability and efficacy in East Africa, prior to efforts to widely implement and scale up this approach.

- 1 We use "play-based learning" and "play-based approaches to learning" interchangeably in this study.
- 2 To protect the confidentiality of our key informants, we have avoided using their names or identifiable details. Instead, whenever we reference data from a key informant in this study, we list the organization type (e.g. government, NGO, UN organization, independent consultant), and country/region (e.g. Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Regional, Global) where they are situated. Since we interviewed multiple I/NGO representatives within each of the same countries, we have also assigned them a random number to ensure their perspective is counted uniquely (e.g. NGO1, NGO2).

Specifically, they called for evidence generation guided by the following two questions:

1. How does play-based learning contribute to holistic student development and learning outcomes in overcrowded and under-resourced refugee and/or host community learning environments in East Africa?; and
2. How can teachers be better supported to learn and apply play-based learning in overcrowded and under-resourced refugee and/or host community learning environments in East Africa?

This White Paper provides an overview of our study's main findings and recommendations, which are based on an in-depth analysis of TPD practices, and identifies both obstacles and entry points for incorporating play-based

learning into TPD initiatives in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda. Building on the call above to generate evidence about the efficacy of play-based learning that is firmly situated in East Africa, we also propose a research and learning agenda to further inform future research studies on related topics.

While this study focused specifically on play-based learning, the findings about how to provide quality TPD may also resonate with existing and/or new teaching and learning methodologies. These findings and related recommendations further align with broader efforts in the education in emergencies field to strengthen research, policies, and practices for teachers in crisis contexts (see the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies' Teachers in Crisis Contexts Collaborative³).



³ <https://inee.org/collaboratives/ticc>

The Potential for Play-based Learning in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda

Understanding the context in which educational interventions and reforms occur is crucial for designing and implementing conflict-sensitive, inclusive, relevant, and sustainable programs. This includes **paying careful attention to the sociocultural, structural, and material conditions in which TPD for play-based learning will be implemented.** Our study therefore outlines the conceptualizations and cultural foundations of play in different settings in Sub-Saharan Africa, including teachers' engagement with play-based learning, and community and parents/guardians' beliefs about play.

We also situate our research within the broader sociocultural understandings of play in the region. Recognizing and understanding the cultural characterizations within and across societies help us examine the potential influence of different types of play on children's development and well-being in the classroom. These sociocultural examinations are particularly relevant in conflict and crisis-affected contexts where opportunities to play might have been impeded, or where educators and communities engaging in localized and indigenous conceptions of play can offer new insights into the design of play-based learning programs in these contexts. The extent to

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which these activities are conceptualized as play equally depends on the cultural organization of children's communities (Brooker & Woodhead, 2013; Greenfield, 2009, 2016; Lancy, 2014), which determines the kind of play children experience, where they play, with whom, and how play is conceptualized, valued, and accommodated or encouraged by adults. To this end, such conceptualizations might influence or undermine the extent to which different actors, like teachers, school leaders, or parents/guardians, are open to play as a vital component of children's learning and development, and the extent to which it is considered worthy of time both during classroom instruction and teacher professional development activities.

Varied perspectives exist about the concepts and interactions of childhood, child development, learning, and the role of play. In some Sub-Saharan settings, indigenous concepts of play are extensive, albeit complex in their implementation. For example, as play was applied in community settings in Nigeria, Salami and Oyaremi (2012) found that while teachers had a strong understanding of the role that riddles, rhymes, folk-tales, and games play in children's development, teachers' actual transfer of play from the community to the classroom was reportedly low. In Malawi, Croft (2012) demonstrated how local songs were commonly used in the classroom, but more as a classroom management practice than a learning strategy. In Kenya, Freshwater et al. (2008) illustrated how music and physical play successfully promoted linguistic diversity and even mathematics skills as they incorporated mathematical concepts into the rhythm and lyrics.

It is imperative that the language and practices that different organizations use to introduce and describe play-based learning build upon existing cultural frameworks as opposed to introducing

entirely new terms and concepts. Key informants offered several examples emphasizing that efforts to expand and strengthen play-based learning must recognize and build upon existing local practices in ways that are culturally relevant to learners and their teachers and parents/guardians. Teachers and learners alike may feel reluctant to engage in activities introduced from outside their country/community; therefore, **key informants recommend working with communities to identify and include traditional games and existing play-based approaches** in school and revise and integrate culturally relevant play into pedagogy in an effort to promote contextually-rooted play-based learning.

Key informants also reported that teachers are open and receptive to the ideas of teaching and learning within more constructivist and play-based approaches. However, as Vavrus (2009) pointed out in her research on teacher education reform in Tanzania, there was still a lack of understanding as to whether or not teachers' enthusiasm for play-based learning and the extent to which it translates into practice was the result of novel personal learning opportunities or the actual virtues of a new pedagogical approach. In settings where play-based learning has experienced greater traction, such as Uganda, Altinyelken (2010) noted that teachers' receptivity was the result of public campaigns and workshops provided by the government, where teachers were introduced to the concepts and rationale underpinning reforms.

Regarding parents/guardians' roles in play-based learning, Gaskins et al. (2007) and our key informants acknowledge that **depending on the particular cultural beliefs of a society, parents/guardians can accept, promote, or limit the use of play-based approaches to learning.** One key informant stated, "if some parents/guardians support an idea, they are vocal in their support to make implementation happen." As Brooker and Woodhead (2013) state, the value of play is reflected in "the meaning that caregivers ascribe to it, their beliefs about children's development and learning, and their role in everyday life" (p. 6). Too often, as Tabulawa (2013) shows, new pedagogies are grafted onto curricula and communities with markedly different worldviews, social relations, and means of knowledge

production. It is not our intention to construct an artificial hierarchy of worldviews; nevertheless, we do acknowledge and recognize that what passes as normative in one cultural setting may be considered incompatible in another (Tabulawa, 2013).

The literature and key informant interviews also emphasize structural and material barriers that limit teachers' abilities to implement play-based learning. A number of studies attribute large class sizes and inadequate classroom infrastructure as hindering teachers' uptake of play-based learning. Moland (2017) showed how teachers in Nigeria reverted to didactic teaching methods due to large class sizes, inadequate space for play-based learning in the classroom, and rigid scheduling. Similarly, in Barrett's (2007) Tanzania study, teachers were observed trying to individualize learning for learners' needs, but struggling due to overwhelming class sizes. In crisis-affected contexts (e.g. refugee camps and informal tented settlements), class sizes can reach as many as 200 learners with one teacher, and many key informants described the large class sizes as a barrier to implementing play-based learning.

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Compounding the above challenges is the fact that classrooms in many refugee settings are also characterized by student populations with diverse nationalities, ages, languages, abilities, and psychological needs. Teachers in Uganda struggled with the application of play-based learning due to learners' varying levels of knowledge, maturity, and abilities in the same class (Altinyelken, 2010). Like other studies, teachers were open to play-based learning, but their efforts to leverage learner diversity as an asset were more complex and less effective than traditional modes of teaching. Conversely, the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) initiative in Africa

is finding promising results by grouping children by learning needs, rather than age or grade, but longitudinal evidence regarding the efficacy of the model as well as its ability to serve learners with visible and invisible disabilities remains to be seen.

It is important to note that the challenges outlined above are not unique to play-based learning. We also document lessons learned from previous regional reform efforts in learner-centered pedagogy (LCP), detailing practices that organizations engaging in play-based learning should be mindful of as they promote this approach. Throughout low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), there has been a gradual shift in policy away from prevailing instruction-based and teacher-centered pedagogical traditions toward learner-centered approaches (Vavrus et al., 2011) and, like play-based learning, there have been cognitive and political rationales for the introduction of new approaches to learning. Cognitive reasons include improvements in learners' metacognitive abilities, motivational, and affective characteristics, while political motivations are premised on the contribution that LCP makes to the strengthening of democracy and economies through participatory approaches to learning.

In terms of the lessons learned, we offer a cautionary tale not to deter donors and other actors, but rather to guide an evidence-informed strategy for the implementation and sustainability of play-based learning. This includes cultural and political perceptions and conflict-sensitive nuances to be aware of and carefully navigate. For example, Brinkmann (2015) warns of the coloniality that pedagogical reforms can represent for local populations. Similarly, Tabulawa (2003, 2013) cautions that learner-centered pedagogy is symbolic of the international aid sector's political orientation and can be interpreted as central to processes of Westernization, packaged as quality and effective education, and as a contingency to economic development and peacebuilding objectives.

Research on LCP also highlighted teachers' broad receptivity to new pedagogies, but with serious issues in the transfer of teachers' new learning to classroom practice. Examples from Pakistan (Mohammed & Harlech-Jones, 2008), Cambodia (Song,

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2015), and Namibia (O'Sullivan, 2004) illustrated a mismatch between policy intentions, teachers' interpretations, and learners' experiences. Along with fragmentary professional development support, superficial understanding of the principles underpinning LCP, and constraining school and classroom realities, such as textbook dependent curricula and rigid examination systems, are shown to impede the success of LCP focused reforms.

Schweisfurth (2015) warned that if teachers' needs and capacities do not determine approaches to TPD and pedagogical change, then attempts at reform will lead to disappointing outcomes. **Echoing the recommendations for play-based learning above, numerous authors advocated for a more contextually compatible and nuanced approach to pedagogical reform.** Vavrus (2009) contended that new pedagogies should not be promoted in isolation, suggesting instead "a contingent pedagogy that adapts to the material conditions of teaching, the local traditions of teaching, and the cultural politics of teaching" (p. 310). Vavrus (2009) also acknowledged the value of effective formalistic, teacher-centered approaches in low-resource settings, as is supported by Tabulawa (2013) who agrees that to avoid "tissue rejection," reforms need to leverage respective education systems' most stable elements, which might entail direct instruction-based approaches to learning (p. 116). To that end, teachers need to be supported to learn and apply different pedagogical approaches, including play-based learning, pending learning objectives and classroom realities.

Quality Teacher Professional Development in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda

Recent literature on teacher professional development (TPD) on the African continent suggests that governments as well as development and humanitarian actors are failing to provide quality support for teachers (Martin, 2018; Popova et al., 2019; Sayed & Bulgrin, 2020). This is particularly true in contexts affected by conflict and forced displacement, where TPD is sporadic, uncoordinated, and of varied quality (Burns & Lawrie, 2015; Mendenhall et al., 2018). While there are promising teacher management and education policies and initiatives, there is much work to be done in order to provide comprehensive, contextually relevant, and continuous support to teachers in refugee and host communities that enables their uptake of play-based learning in their classrooms.

Drawing on our review of the literature and key informant interviews, our study presents evidence-based approaches, practices, and challenges for implementing quality TPD in refugee and host communities in East Africa. We also provide an overview of the diverse profiles of teachers working in crisis contexts and introduce a range of TPD activities typically provided in these settings, highlighting examples of potential entry points for introducing and/or expanding evidence-based approaches to play-based learning. This includes the structural and procedural considerations that have been shown to positively or negatively influence teachers' engagement and outcomes in TPD.

Quality TPD recognizes and responds to the pedagogical, and personal needs of teachers. **Therefore, understanding teachers' profiles is foundational to**

designing and delivering quality TPD. In contexts affected by conflict and forced displacement, teachers may be refugees with little-to-no formal preparation or training, who have been nominated to the profession by their community due to their educational attainment (Kirk & Winthrop, 2013), or national teachers from the host community or from other parts of the country who have been deployed to work in refugee settlements or camps (Mendenhall et al., 2018; Sesnan et al., 2013).⁴ Regardless of their profiles, teachers receive insufficient professional development to meet the distinct needs of their learners and limited support for their own well-being (Burns & Lawrie, 2015; Falk et al., 2019; Nicolai et al., 2015).

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Key informants described teachers' profiles in the region as both impeding and enabling their uptake of play-based learning in their classrooms. In particular, they spoke of refugee teachers' lack of formal preparation

⁴ These are the predominant teacher profiles worth noting, but there may be other configurations in the region to consider, such as teachers who are internally displaced within their countries of origin.

and training and described the de-professionalization of teachers, particularly those working at early grade-levels, as a concerning challenge, with implications for teacher motivation, well-being, and retention. Key informants explained that refugee and host community teachers often feel “demoralized” due to their low salaries and may take on additional work to support themselves and their families, which can prevent teachers from properly preparing for their lessons or staying focused in their classes as well as unmotivated to implement play-based learning or try new pedagogies in their classroom due to the lack of recognition they receive. In many cases, Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers are women and primary school-leavers, posing additional challenges to the value and respect attached to teachers within communities. It is also noteworthy that the stress of living and working amidst conflict and forced displacement negatively influences teachers’ well-being (Falk et al., 2019), which inhibits their ability and willingness to integrate new teaching approaches (Kruijer, 2010). While key informants spoke about the myriad challenges of introducing play-based learning based on teachers’ profiles, a few key informants also described the opportunity to work with un- and under-qualified refugee or novice host community teachers who were highly motivated to learn new teaching methodologies, including play-based learning.

For teachers to implement play-based learning, all key informants described the importance of integrating play through a variety of inter-related TPD practices, including pre-service teacher education, in-service teacher education, continuous professional development, and communities of practice. First and foremost, play-based approaches need to be “part and parcel” of pre-service teacher education to ensure teachers are familiar with and feel comfortable applying play-based learning when they enter their classrooms. In-service teacher education, which upgrades teachers’ skills and qualifications, must continue to integrate play-based approaches to enhance teachers’ knowledge, skills, and ultimately, their uptake of play-based learning in their classrooms. **In both pre- and in-service teacher education, TPD must integrate time for teachers to practice and reflect on the methodologies they are learning** (Burns & Lawrie, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017b;

Key informants described quality pre- and in-service teacher education as providing opportunities for teachers to observe modeling and engage in experiential, applied, and reflective practice.

Mendenhall et al., 2020), particularly new strategies such as play-based learning or learner-centered pedagogy (Gardner et al., 2019; Kruijer, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2011; van As & Excell, 2018).

Key informants described quality pre- and in-service teacher education as providing opportunities for teachers to observe modeling and engage in experiential, applied, and reflective practice. Further, they emphasized that training needs to be contextually relevant for the teaching and learning environments in which teachers work, which are often incredibly overcrowded, under-resourced, and insufficiently supported (NGO2, Tanzania; UNI, Ethiopia; UNI, Uganda). **Recognizing that change in teaching practice takes time, key informants also promoted the benefit of and need for continuous professional development through consistent multi-year training, supportive coaching and mentoring, and communities of practice.** They also described the value of individual “champion teachers” and serendipitous opportunities to leverage their interests and energies for supporting other teachers.

Alongside their descriptions of quality TPD, key informants presented the interconnected challenges they faced in advocating for, designing, and implementing quality TPD that integrates play-based learning. They lamented the **dearth of practice-oriented, experiential teacher education and the overall lack of continuous, and contextually relevant professional development that supports teachers’ overall professionalization and well-**

being, challenges reinforced in the literature on TPD in Sub-Saharan Africa and in crisis contexts (Gardner et al., 2019; van As & Excell, 2018). Additionally, while many basic education curricula in Sub-Saharan Africa include play-based learning and LCP, there is often insufficient integration of these concepts in teacher education curricula (Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004; Sayed & Bulgrin, 2020). Too frequently pre- and in-service teacher education is theory-heavy and delivered through lecture style, leaving little time for teachers to experience the new pedagogies they are learning or to practice these new approaches themselves (NGO1, Regional; NGO2, Uganda; NGO4, Tanzania; TTCI, Uganda).

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These interconnected challenges stem from and are exacerbated by under-resourced national education systems, which face significant capacity and funding gaps (Mendenhall et al., 2018; Sayed & Bulgin, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2019). In the case of ECD particularly, in some instances, different stakeholders, such as private institutions as well as faith-based organizations and NGOs, step in to provide and fund ECD services (where play-based learning is more commonly promoted), including professional development for ECD teachers (Gerde et al., 2019; Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010). However, this can pose challenges in coordination, standardization, and equitable quality of services (Univ1, Tanzania; NGO1, Uganda; NGO3, Regional; NGO4, Regional; NGO5, Regional). With a plethora of fragmentary initiatives, teachers are

continually required to learn new approaches, assume additional responsibilities, and be assessed by different standards. **Key informants therefore spoke of the importance of ongoing collaboration and coordination amongst multiple stakeholders, including national governments, donors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).** Key informants spoke about the delivery of in-service training delivered by either Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) or humanitarian organizations, or some combination of the two, and how these initiatives missed opportunities to strengthen national education systems and/or to include refugee teachers in TPD provided by TTCs.

When humanitarian and development actors are able to come together to support and strengthen TTCs, it is important for all teachers in these contexts, regardless of their nationality, to be able to leverage these opportunities. In these instances, it is pivotal to provide refugee teachers with the same kinds of professional development opportunities as their national counterparts.

To begin to address these challenges and improve teachers' practices, including their uptake of innovative pedagogical techniques such as play-based learning, **we strongly encourage donors to invest in initiatives that provide teachers with equitable opportunities to participate in high quality TPD** that recognizes their inherent strengths and advocates for their professionalization through career progression and fair compensation structures. Initiatives must therefore work through existing systems, accounting for how policies and everyday sociocultural realities interact to influence teacher motivation, practice, and well-being.

We cannot expect teachers alone to effectively and sustainably implement play-based learning. Our research confirms that teachers' uptake and use of play-based learning are strongly influenced by a wide and diverse constellation of individuals and institutions. These stakeholders include school leaders, education officials responsible for quality assurance and continuing professional development, teacher educators, and parents/guardians as well as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management

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Committees (SMCs). Even if teachers believe in the goals and efficacy of play-based learning, misalignments between these stakeholders' perceptions, beliefs, and practices are likely to hinder teachers' motivations and abilities to test and take on new pedagogical approaches in their classrooms. Alternatively, their support can enable teachers' meaningful and sustainable uptake of play-based learning even amidst extraordinarily challenging circumstances.

We note that school leaders exert significant influence on teachers' work through the creation of a school-wide vision and culture for teaching and learning, and often determine the extent to which teachers see themselves as capable professionals with a sense of agency. Our study finds that school leaders are key to prioritizing continuous professional development, and supporting teacher motivation, morale, and well-being. Several key informants also described school leaders as "gatekeepers" who have a say in what and how teachers teach. Or as another key informant stated, when school leaders are properly supported they are able to create "a conducive school environment to introduce play-based learning" (Univ2, Tanzania). In particular, skills in coaching and mentoring—or shifting from being a supervisor to a facilitator—contribute to the creation of collaborative and innovative environments where teachers can openly share their hesitations, concerns, and challenges when trying new pedagogical approaches (Gerde et al., 2019).

However, in many cases, key informants explained that school leaders may not be familiar with play-based learning or have the knowledge and skills to provide supportive supervision and leadership. One of the key reasons is that their training primarily focuses on administrative and managerial issues. We identify that

school leaders are often appointed to their positions through political or familial connections, which may differently influence their incentives, awareness, willingness, and ability to support the introduction of new pedagogies (though we recognize that the converse may be true in some settings). These issues need to be addressed if school leaders are to fulfill their potential in supporting play-based learning, especially in contexts where decentralization means school leaders are responsible for the continuing professional development made available to teachers.

In addition to school leaders, we identify the essential role of education officials in the promotion of play-based learning, support for play-based approaches, and continuing professional development. Quality Assurance Officers (QAOs) in particular—those who observe classroom teaching and assess teacher performance—are essential actors in ensuring the efficacy, longevity, and sustainability of education reforms (Gerde et al. 2019; Haßler et al. 2014; Mengistie, 2014). Unfortunately, like school leaders, these officials are rarely provided with the professional development support required for the "effective nurturing of teacher performance" (Burns & Lawrie, 2015, p. 117). **We also find that assessment of teacher performance is often based on tools that reward traditional teaching methods such as rote learning.** As such, the literature and key informants recommend better

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alignment between teacher assessment and the tenets of learner-centered and play-based pedagogies. They also advocate for professional development support for education officials on play-based learning and skills strengthening on supportive supervision.

Further, we note the need for TTCs to become more innovative and supportive of pre-service and in-service teachers, with a key aspect being the extent to which teacher educators are well versed in learner-centered and play-based pedagogies. Too often, teacher educators lack contemporary classroom experience, and may also require additional support in order to upskill and acquire additional competencies in adult learning, teacher evaluation and assessment, and coaching and mentoring. **Recognizing areas for improvement in teacher educator skills, experience, and capacity, we strongly recommend professional development for teacher educators within TTCs in particular, but also across humanitarian, faith-based, and other non-governmental organizations to ensure coherence and consistency of practice.** The consequences of not fulfilling these needs, as Vavrus et al. (2011) explain, is that in the absence of proper modelling of pedagogical methods associated with play-based learning, student-teachers go on to teach using the

same rote teaching methods they experienced in their training programs. A final point of note is the insufficient number of teacher educators across the region, which is most pronounced in crisis and conflict affected settings. As such, to address recruitment and professional development needs we assert that multi-year funding is required to respond to persistent gaps in teacher education.

Finally, we posit that parents/guardians and communities are also important stakeholders in promoting quality education, including the implementation of new teaching approaches, such as play-based learning (Brooker & Woodhead, 2013; Gaskins et al., 2007). It is imperative to engage these actors when introducing play-based approaches as many hold negative perceptions (or misconceptions) of the use of play as a learning strategy, as previously discussed. Their lack of support can prevent teachers' use of play-based learning in their classrooms, particularly when they insist upon didactic teaching styles that they feel better prepare their children to succeed in high-stakes national exams. **On the other hand, when these actors are supportive of play-based approaches, they serve as one of the most effective proponents for enhancing the uptake of play-based learning and ensuring its sustainability.**



Policies and Partnerships for Play-based Learning in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda

Efforts to promote and implement play-based learning need to carefully examine the policy environment in order to identify the opportunities and challenges that both national governments and the myriad actors working across the humanitarian-development spectrum may encounter. While our research clearly acknowledges the enabling policy environment in the region, it also identifies the policy-practice gap that may complicate efforts to integrate play-based learning into the national education systems in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda.

One of the hallmarks of the enabling policy environment, indicated by the literature and key informants, is the Djibouti Declaration and related Plan of Action on Refugee Education in Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Member States (IGAD, 2017a, 2017b). The Djibouti Declaration is a regional benchmark for the provision and recognition of

professional certification and credentials for refugee learners and teachers. Against the backdrop of the Global Compact on Refugees (UN, 2018) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which call for access to public services, including education, for both refugees and host communities (UNHCR, 2016), the Djibouti Declaration boasts some of the most comprehensive and inclusive policies for supporting the integration of refugee education into national systems, including refugee teachers (Bengtsson et al., 2020). While plans for supporting the rollout and implementation of this policy continue to be developed, it is a promising breakthrough for regional cooperation and coordination.

At the national level, key informants in all three countries spoke about the “learning crisis” (Uwezo, 2018; World Bank, 2018b), which has generated momentum for finding out why children are not learning and examining what works best for children to gain foundational literacy and numeracy skills. The current health pandemic and related school closures have further compounded the learning crisis. The educational impact of COVID-19 has brought new meaning to providing quality education for children and youth and highlighted the critical role of teachers, particularly as the pandemic has disrupted schooling in the region, with the most pronounced effects experienced by already disadvantaged children and adolescents. **Increasing concern about COVID-19 school closures, the quality of education, the importance of teachers, and holistic student development and learning outcomes presents a strategic opportunity to introduce or strengthen play-based learning in education policies and practices.**

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In terms of general education policies and curricular reforms that provide an entry point for play-based learning, key informants described two main trends: 1) increased attention to ECD and its inclusion in national education sector plans; and 2) basic education reforms that promote competency-based curricula and learner-centered pedagogy. **Across the three countries, key informants stated that ECD has gained prominence in national education agendas, and described new and ongoing curriculum development and reforms for ECD as an opportunity for strengthening play-based learning at this educational level.** In Uganda and Ethiopia, key informants explained that ECD was recently included in the national education sector plans, while in Tanzania, pre-primary is compulsory for all children and has been included in the formal education system. Key informants also suggested that current policy documents and curricula include language on children's right to play and play-based learning. Nevertheless, **large gaps remain between the policies and curricula and their implementation.** Key informants' emphasis on ECD as a site for play-based learning also suggested resistance towards or difficulty conceptualizing play-based learning among older learners in primary and secondary schools. This could be attributed to summative assessment structures (e.g. high stakes examinations) and the perception that play is for fun and not for serious learning.

Ministries of Education in each country have been revising their basic education curriculum to be competency-based, a move that goes hand-in-hand with the promotion of LCP, and which opens opportunities for the inclusion of play-based learning. In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has included play-based approaches in the O-Class Curriculum (pre-primary, attached to primary) and is currently working with development partners to develop a new curriculum for pre-primary through secondary that includes play-based approaches. In Tanzania, the introduction of the competency-based curriculum, and accompanying teachers' guides, textbooks, and additional curricular materials, emphasized activity-based and play-based approaches. Key informants in Uganda also spoke of the government's motivation to move from a traditional, theory-based education system to a competency-based system that supports more

Despite these promising shifts, there are looming gaps between basic education curricular frameworks and teacher education curricula, which restrict teachers' abilities to implement play-based learning and LCP in their classrooms.

meaningful learning, including play-based approaches for lower-primary school students and corresponding revisions of the secondary curriculum. While relevant for the national host communities, the extent to which such reforms benefit refugee learners depends on each country's policies for refugee inclusion in the national education system.

Despite these promising shifts, there are looming gaps between basic education curricular frameworks and teacher education curricula, which restrict teachers' abilities to implement play-based learning and LCP in their classrooms.

The introduction of competency-based curricula, for example, provides opportunities to develop associated professional development interventions for teachers. In addition, policies in each country represent important steps in strengthening the professionalization of the teaching career, which is essential in supporting improvements in teachers' practices, retention, motivation, and well-being; in other words, conditions that improve the sustainability and impact of teachers' continuing professional development are needed (Haßler et al., 2020; Falk et al., 2019; Martin, 2018; Mendenhall et al., 2018; Popova et al., 2019).

As with curricula reform, not all teacher policies mention refugee situations explicitly nor stand to include or benefit refugee teachers. For this reason, Bengtsson et al. (2020) argue that greater attention is needed to translate existing policies into practices that are

relevant for refugee teachers and learners. Due to a lack of consistency in how policies are communicated downstream and concerns about inequitable service delivery between host and refugee communities, Bengtsson et al. (2020) also remind us that curricular reforms and teacher policies can become progressively weaker as they migrate through the system to sub-national and local levels.

Our study identifies a number of areas where targeted interventions would contribute towards improved conditions for the implementation of play-based approaches. For example, key informants spoke about the lack of clear policy-level definitions of learner-centered methodology that include play. This means that **key concepts do not get translated and disseminated into the work of Teacher Training Colleges, schools, and teachers.** According to key informants, there are no concrete policy-level actions, tools, or contextualized guidelines about how play is supposed to be implemented at the classroom level. Other key informants spoke of the strong presence of play in policy documents, but lamented the fact that some governments do not fund or oversee any ECD programs or pre-primary schools where play-based learning should be taking place. Reflecting on regional education policy to practice gaps, one key informant also highlighted the disconnect between “commitments” made by governmental stakeholders during regional forums and the difficulty of moving those commitments toward implementation when key stakeholders reconvene infrequently, prolonging the time it takes to develop and execute a policies (InterGovt I, Regional).

We contend that collaborative partnerships are an essential enabling factor for ensuring teachers receive adequate professional support from different stakeholders to successfully implement play-based learning.

Given these challenges and opportunities, our study outlines why collaborative partnerships with national governments, regional bodies (e.g. IGAD), humanitarian organizations, and development agencies are critical for the overall success of TPD for play-based learning in the region. Taken together, it is clear that there are multiple stakeholders working in a dynamic and somewhat crowded educational environment, which serves as an important reminder for donors and other actors to understand the dynamics of current partnerships and collaborations. **We contend that collaborative partnerships are an essential enabling factor for ensuring teachers receive adequate professional support from different stakeholders to successfully implement play-based learning.** Collaborative partnerships are key to:

- *Generate buy-in* about play-based learning among all partners in order to contribute to system strengthening;
- *Facilitate capacity building* opportunities among partners to ensure shared understanding and technical knowledge and skills for successful implementation;
- *Improve coordination across stakeholders* in a way that leverages institutional strengths and leads to broader coverage and implementation of effective initiatives across both refugee and host communities; and
- *Inform funding priorities* that increase financial allocations for relevant educational initiatives.

Donors’ and other actors’ efforts to engage government partners will contribute to larger system strengthening efforts and sustainability. One key informant cautioned, however, that initially play-based learning initiatives might receive an open and warm reception, but may equally fail to influence or change anything if national and international organizations do not work closely with the government and ensure a strong link between policy and practice. As another key informant promoted, **“It is not about telling the government what it is not doing, but [rather] telling the government how it can do what it is doing better.”**

Key informants also recognized the importance of engaging directly and collaboratively with national TTCs in order to support system strengthening and the broader institutionalization of new methodologies, including play-based learning. **Key informants called on donors and other actors not to engage in multiple, piecemeal, and uncoordinated play-based learning projects.** This recommendation aligns with broader consensus in the refugee education field about the wastage of resources invested in low quality, poorly coordinated teacher professional development programs and calls for harmonization and standardization with national education teaching standards that are extended to national and refugee teachers alike (Bengtsson et al., 2020; Mendenhall et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2020).

We also note that there are a number of humanitarian and development stakeholders working on refugee education policies and practices in the region; many of whom were key informants and several of which are already implementing play-based learning through their work. As buy-in is already strong within this stakeholder group, **we recommend that donors and other actors facilitate capacity building opportunities for humanitarian and development stakeholders who may be potential collaborators for future initiatives.** Apart from strengthening technical knowledge and skills among humanitarian and development stakeholders, one key informant proposed that donors support TPD efforts across different partners to ensure shared approaches and to help facilitate coordination.

As our study indicates, **it is important for humanitarian and development organizations across the three countries to collaborate and coordinate their efforts with a diverse constellation of stakeholders.** This includes community members (parents/guardians, religious leaders); local non-governmental organizations (NGOs); faith-based organizations (FBOs); and private organizations (engaged

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in ECD/pre-primary education). To make sense of multiple stakeholders and their contributions towards the efficacy and sustainability of play-based learning, our paper presents a detailed planning partnership model (see below) which identifies the roles of institutions and organizations within the domains of convening, system strengthening, and service delivery. Whereas NGOs typically have to work with myriad organizations to carry out their work and face the challenges of not dealing directly with key decision makers, within this model donors and other actors can create opportunities for I/NGOs to influence technical capacity building and policy development relating to play-based learning, TPD, and refugee education more directly.

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A potential partnership model for play-based learning in East Africa

<p>Convening Role</p>	<p>UN agencies engage and convene government partners at high-level (leveraging their inter-governmental mandates)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF (general education + refugee education) • UNHCR (refugee education) <p>This approach simultaneously supports UNHCR’s current strategy of operating in a more “catalytic and supportive role” in their efforts to pursue the Global Compact on Refugees as an advocate and convener of a broad range of stakeholders rather than a traditional implementer and funder of in-camp education projects (UNHCR, 2020, p. 4).</p>
<p>System Strengthening Role</p>	<p>I/NGOs work together to engage different governmental and local stakeholders working at the technical level to build capacity, particularly within TTCs, Curriculum Development Institutes, Teacher Supervision Departments, and local NGOs and FBOs.</p> <p>I/NGOs will focus on coordination and capacity building (when needed) of service delivery stakeholders (see below) and advocacy efforts to inform curriculum, teacher education, ECD policies and practices, and refugee education policies at the national level (with support from UN stakeholders mentioned above).</p>
<p>Service Delivery Role</p>	<p>Local NGOs and faith-based organizations implement, expand, and strengthen play-based learning in their work.</p> <p>Local stakeholders can engage in this work in more cost-effective and sustainable ways, have stronger local presence, and provide coverage across national contexts far more widely than INGOs do.</p>

Recommendations: Quality Teacher Professional Development for Play-based Learning

Drawing on our extensive review of the literature and key informant interviews, our study outlined four thematic areas and entry points—quality teacher professional development (TPD) programming, key actors and their roles, policies, and partnerships—along with strategic recommendations in each of these areas for donors and other actors to consider. We hope that these recommendations provide an opportunity to reflect on and plan for how to comprehensively support teachers, alongside other key actors, through professional development that strengthens teachers’ practices, including their uptake of play-based learning, and improves holistic student development and learning outcomes.

Supporting quality teacher professional development

- Support pre-service teacher education, particularly at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level, by working with national education actors, including Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), and development and humanitarian partners providing TPD to ECD teachers. In these efforts, integrate play-based learning as an important strategy for learner-centered pedagogy (as opposed to introducing it as a new or standalone methodology).
- Work with existing governmental, humanitarian, and development actors in refugee and host communities in East Africa in order to strengthen TPD interventions and to help fill gaps in providing teacher support.
- Respect and value teachers’ perspectives, knowledge, and experience by including teachers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of their professional development. Provide appropriate rewards and incentives for their involvement and leadership in their learning.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to learn through modeling by teacher educators and practicing play-based approaches and learner-centered pedagogy in the training; avoid training that is too theory-heavy with no application or practice-time.
- Ensure training is contextually relevant for teachers and responsive to their classroom and school environments.
- Provide continuous, sustained, and ongoing professional development for teachers in order to provide time for teachers to reflect on their teaching practice (e.g. what worked, what did not work, and how to overcome any challenges they have faced in applying new strategies) and make and sustain positive changes.
- Establish Communities of Practices for and with teachers—including Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs)—to provide opportunities for teachers to learn from and with one another. This helps to recognize that teachers are experts of what it is like to teach in the contexts where they are working, which are often extraordinarily challenging.

- Ensure training is conflict- and gender-sensitive, particularly in refugee and host community settings, where the majority of ECD teachers are female and where teacher and student populations have experienced conflict, displacement, etc.
- Advocate for the professionalization of teachers, particularly host community and refugee early grade teachers (through national inclusion strategies and policies), by ensuring teacher professional development is connected to clear pathways for career progression and fair compensation structures.

Supporting key stakeholders who interact with teachers in their schools and communities

- Advocate for the professional development of school leaders, education officers, and teacher educators on play-based learning, supportive leadership and supervision, and active and engaging facilitation.
- Collaborate with national education officials and institutions, as well as relevant humanitarian and development actors, to integrate learner-centered pedagogy and play-based learning into teacher education curricula and teacher assessment tools.
- Promote meaningful and ongoing engagement with parents/guardians and families of learners, including Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and community members, to ensure their expectations are aligned with the TPD provided to teachers.
- Advocate for capacity building opportunities for PTAs and School Management Committees (SMCs) on play-based learning, who can, in turn, work to raise awareness and generate support among families and the broader community.

Strategic opportunities for influencing policies and reforms

- Build partnerships with national education authorities involved in ECD, curriculum, teacher education, and/or refugee education policies to leverage “strategic opportunities” to inform policy reforms, curricular changes, minor modifications to assessment structures (top-down).
- Establish partnerships and facilitate learning communities among local partners and TTCs to curate promising practices that can also influence the policy-making process (bottom-up).
- Explore conflict-sensitive approaches for supporting refugee education programming, including cross-border engagement with refugees’ countries of origin and/or through collaborative endeavors with host communities.
- To address the need for regional and national coordination, collaboration, and coherence, consider hosting a series of consultations with the African Union, IGAD, ministries of education, UNICEF and UNHCR, INGOs, and national-level CSOs to devise a regional framework for play-based learning and corresponding national strategies and/or to build on existing strategies and frameworks for ECD and education.

Strengthening and expanding collaborative partnerships

- Facilitate differentiated capacity building opportunities for a range of key stakeholders (government, humanitarian, and development) to generate shared understanding, buy-in, and sustainability for play-based learning (NGO4, Ethiopia).
- Embed (or second) a “desk officer” within MOEs to serve as a resource person for the uptake and implementation of play-based approaches (UNI, Ethiopia).

- Develop (or support development of) strategy for collaborating with TTCs to strengthen their pre- and in-service teacher education programs, recognizing and integrating play-based learning as one approach within a larger toolbox of learner-centered pedagogical techniques and approaches.
- Build on existing inclusive mapping efforts in the region of the network of partners and stakeholders working on related activities to identify the “system influencers” and “critical voices,” (NGO4, Ethiopia), remaining mindful to balance representation across different profiles of stakeholders and proactively engage local organizations in these efforts.
- Consider different partnership and coordination models that leverage different stakeholders’ strengths (e.g. convening power vs. advocacy vs. coordination vs. service delivery) while prioritizing support for local organizations (including, faith-based organizations).
- Engage directly with IGAD to explore opportunities for collaboration around advocacy and policy implementation of the Djibouti Declaration, particularly as it pertains to refugee teachers; connect play-based learning with the teacher professional development activities that they are in the midst of developing in the region.



Research and Learning Agenda

Building a robust research and learning agenda around play-based learning must develop grounded understandings of teachers' experiences, practices, and decision-making within classrooms, schools, and communities to further inform the design and rollout of play-based approaches to learning within refugee and host communities in East Africa (and elsewhere). The key informants in our study overwhelmingly pointed to two overarching research questions:

1. How does play-based learning contribute to holistic student development and learning outcomes in overcrowded and under-resourced refugee and/or host community learning environments in East Africa?
2. How can teachers be better supported to learn and apply play-based learning approaches in overcrowded and under-resourced refugee and/or host community learning environments in East Africa?

As stated in the introduction, it was strongly suggested by multiple key informants that evidence about the effectiveness of play-based learning needs to be generated in settings in East Africa prior to efforts to widely implement and scale up this approach.

Play-based Learning: What Works?

In setting out to answer the central question—*How does play-based learning contribute to holistic student development and learning outcomes in overcrowded and under-resourced refugee and/or host community learning environments in East Africa?*—donors may also consider the following related questions below. We outline these questions as a first starting point, noting that while they are not directly related to teacher professional development, building a case for play-based learning will necessitate generating and sharing evidence

with education stakeholders, including teachers, about the primary and secondary impacts of these learning approaches.

- What student development and learning outcomes are improved and strengthened through the integration of play-based learning in classrooms, specifically in refugee and host communities in East Africa?
 - How, and by whom, are these outcomes defined and measured?
 - Are these impacts scalable across different kinds of contexts (e.g. refugee vs. host, humanitarian vs. development contexts)?
 - Are the learning outcomes uniform across ages and stages and domains of learning and development?
 - How effective is play-based learning compared to other teaching practices?

Teacher-focused Research for Play-based Learning

The findings and related recommendations that emerged in our study call for more attention, support, and investment in teachers and their efforts to provide quality education in refugee and host community settings. Similar to the overarching question above, a focus on teachers begs the question: *How can teachers be better supported to learn and apply play-based learning approaches in overcrowded and under-resourced refugee and/or host community learning environments in East Africa?* The questions below build on this line of inquiry, center the needs of teachers, and align with the thematic findings of our study.

- What kinds of TPD opportunities do different profiles of teachers (e.g. more experienced

teachers and novice teachers; refugee teachers and national teachers; full-time teachers and contract teachers; male and female teachers; teachers with disabilities, etc.) access?

- To what extent are these opportunities certified within and across borders in the region?
- Which teacher profiles access certain kinds of TPD? And why?
- What opportunities exist to integrate play-based learning within these TPD programs?
- What opportunities and barriers do teachers encounter in implementing play-based learning in their classrooms?
- What play-based learning approaches are teachers currently using in their classrooms?
 - How do teachers adopt and/or adapt play-based learning when teaching different groups (ages, nationalities, abilities, etc.) of learners in East Africa?
 - What decisions do teachers make in this process, and why, particularly in the context of overcrowded classrooms with material constraints and multilingual learners in East Africa?
 - To what extent does the integration of play-based learning approaches in teacher practices vary by teacher profile? Why?
- What kinds of support are teachers seeking and from whom as they further refine their teaching practices, including the use of play-based approaches?
 - Which supports do teachers find most effective/helpful for improving their teaching practices, self-efficacy, and/or overall well-being?
 - Which supports are unmet and/or unavailable?
 - How, if at all, are teachers engaging in peer learning and support activities? In what ways,

if at all, do teachers perceive support from their peers as strengthening their teaching practice, including their use of play-based approaches?

- To what extent, and how, are teachers able to balance demands for accountability—i.e. teacher performance, student development, and learning outcomes—and innovative pedagogical practices, like play-based learning, in their classrooms?
- To what extent, if any, are play-based approaches integrated in teacher education curricula? What challenges and opportunities emerge when integrating these approaches within teacher education curricula?
- How is the efficacy of TPD, including TPD that integrates play-based learning, measured? What, if any, teacher-oriented outcomes (e.g. teacher motivation, teacher retention, teacher well-being) exist to assess the efficacy of TPD?
- How, if at all, are teachers included in the design, implementation, and evaluation of their professional development, particularly TPD that promotes the uptake of play-based learning? What opportunities and challenges exist for greater teacher involvement in all stages of TPD?

Key Actors and Their Roles in Supporting Play-based Learning

School leaders

- What are the roles and responsibilities of school leaders (e.g. head teacher, deputy head teacher, academic coordinator) in refugee and host communities in East Africa? In what ways do their roles and decision-making influence teachers' use of play-based (and other) approaches?
- What opportunities and barriers do school leaders perceive in promoting play-based approaches in their schools?

- What kinds of professional development opportunities, if any, are available to school leaders?
 - Which actors and institutions are involved in the creation and delivery of school leadership professional development?
 - To what extent do these professional development opportunities support school leaders' development within the domains of instructional and supportive leadership, and school administration and management? What other skills and competencies are prioritized within these opportunities?
 - How does access to these opportunities vary by school leader profile (e.g. school leaders in refugee and host communities, school leaders who are political appointees, etc.)?

Education officials

- What are the roles and responsibilities of education officials (e.g. Quality Assurance Officers) in refugee and host communities in East Africa? In what ways do their roles and decision-making influence teachers' use of play-based (and other) approaches?
- How do education officers' assess, monitor, and support teacher practice?
 - What tools and evaluations do education officials use to monitor and assess teacher practice in classrooms? How often are these tools updated and by whom? How might play-based approaches be integrated within these assessment and monitoring tools?
 - What opportunities and barriers do education officers perceive in using these tools to promote and assess teachers' use of play-based approaches?
 - In what ways do their assessment and monitoring practices enable or hinder teachers' integration of play-based pedagogies?

- What kinds of training and support, if any, do education officials receive to support teachers? To what extent are education officials able to offer these supports onward to teachers?
- To what extent, if at all, do education officials' evaluations of teachers and their practices influence teacher pay, retention, professionalization, and development opportunities?

Teacher educators

- What are the profiles of teacher educators working in refugee and host communities in East Africa? What challenges or opportunities do they confront in integrating play-based learning into teacher education programs?
 - What incentives and supports do they need to integrate these approaches within the teacher education programs within which they work?
- What support do Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) need at institutional levels to integrate play-based approaches into their pre- and in-service teacher education programs?
 - What kinds of curricula do teacher educators use to train student-teachers? How are these curricula created and updated, and by whom? How might play-based approaches be integrated within these curricula?
 - What kinds of professional development support are provided to teacher educators? How, if at all, does this professional development support integrate play-based learning or active facilitation techniques?
- How do teacher educators expand their student-teachers' pedagogical knowledge and toolkits? How might teacher educators use and integrate play-based approaches to teaching and learning in developing student-teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and toolkits?
- What assessment tools do teacher educators use to evaluate and assess their student-

teachers? What opportunities exist for integrating play-based approaches to teaching and learning within these assessments?

Parents/guardians, families, and communities

- What are parents/guardians' and families' attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about play-based learning? What tools, techniques, and strategies might be adopted and scaled to expand and strengthen parents/guardians' and families' understanding and support of play-based approaches to teaching and learning?
- How do parents/guardians and families respond to changes in teachers' pedagogies and practices when they adopt and integrate play-based approaches in their classrooms?
- What opportunities exist at home and within communities for play-based learning and stimulation? How might these activities complement play-based learning activities within schools?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of PTAs and SMCs in refugee and host communities in East Africa? In what ways do PTAs and SMCs influence teachers' practices, including their use of play-based approaches?
- Which sets of actors are likely to have greater influence on parents/guardians' support for play-based learning?

Policies for Play-based Learning

- What are the key policies that bear influence on children's development and teacher development, motivation, morale, retention, and well-being in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda?
 - What are existing gaps within systems (e.g. teacher pay, professionalization, professional development opportunities, retention, teacher assessment and evaluation, etc.) in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda that are likely to influence teachers' attitudes,

practices, and experiences of integrating play-based pedagogies?

- How, if at all, are play-based approaches integrated/promoted in education policy and curricula? To what extent do these approaches appear and differ across different ages and grades?
- How are learning goals and competencies within the education cycles in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda harmonized and aligned, particularly during key transitions (e.g. learners' transitions from pre-school to primary school; transitions from primary school to lower secondary school etc.) and to what degree is play-based learning included as children and teachers transition to different grades?

Partnerships for Play-based Learning

- Which sets of actors—across the local, national, and regional levels (including countries of origin and host countries)—are working to support play-based learning in ECD and primary schools in refugee and host communities in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda? In what ways are these actors currently working together (or not)? How, if at all, could their collaboration be strengthened?
- How do partnerships around play-based learning in East Africa work toward bridging the humanitarian-development divide? How is long-term sustainability and success envisioned and operationalized? How are funding modalities changing, and how do these impact on the long-term development of play-based approaches?
- How is power distributed in the development of partnerships and coalitions around play-based learning and teacher professional development programs in East Africa? Which sets of actors take prominence and which sets of actors might be missing? What opportunities exist for local actors to initiate, drive, and own programs and agendas that emerge through these partnerships?

There is also a critical need for the broader research and learning agenda to address issues related to learners and teachers with disabilities, the role of teachers' unions,

gender dimensions among learners and teachers, as well as the current and future implications of the COVID-19 health pandemic.



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