

## UNICEF Education Case Study

Nigeria: Enhancing Play-based learning through Supportive Supervision

30th April 2023



*Pre-primary students attend classes at Miya Central Primary School, Bauchi State, 2018.*

Pre-primary education is recognized as an essential component of education in Nigeria: compulsory and free pre-primary education for all children is mandated under the Universal Basic Education Act (2004). Operationalizing this mandate has proved challenging. The most recent data indicates that 37 per cent of five-year-olds<sup>1</sup> are not attending any level of education. The Government of Nigeria is working to accelerate access to pre-primary education for all, while simultaneously investing in the quality of existing services. In 2016 the Government of Nigeria adopted the learning through play (LTP) approach in early childhood education (ECE) as part of an investment in quality and inclusion.

To implement the LTP approach and ensure play-based learning is fully institutionalized in the ECE sub-sector, the government focused efforts at 3 levels—ECE curriculum and materials reform, teacher training, and supportive supervision, mentorship, and oversight. Piloting the LTP approach in 2018, a key success of the programme in supporting the adoption of play into teaching and learning approaches was to appoint school support officers (SSOs) to assess pre-primary provision within schools.

---

<sup>1</sup> MICS 2021 indicator, which uses age 6 as the official primary school entry age

The role of SSOs in ensuring the quality of ECE and the effective delivery of LTP is to:

1. Assess the quality of pre-primary education in terms of teacher preparedness, play-based pedagogy, gender-inclusion, language of instruction, teaching and learning materials, and water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities;
2. Communicate effective practices and areas for development to teachers and school leaders; and
3. Provide supportive supervision and mentoring to class teachers and school leaders to enhance provision.

To support assessment of quality of pre-primary education, SSOs use a classroom observation tool to monitor critical aspects of quality. This includes process quality such as use of play-based approaches, teacher child interactions, and how the teacher encourages interactions between children. Structural quality considerations include availability of teaching and learning materials and physical facilities.

Developed by the Universal Basic Education Commission and the National Colleges of Education with support from UNICEF, the tool helps ensure that classroom observations are comprehensive, that measures of quality are evenly applied across settings, and that assessments are focused on critical aspects of quality.

Following the observation, SSOs meet with teachers to appreciate successes and to share feedback. The teachers can plan for the next day's lesson in collaboration with the SSO to begin to address any challenges identified and discussed. School leaders may also be part of these discussions and any further mentoring.

To ensure that SSOs and teachers appreciate each other's roles and responsibilities in supporting the delivery of LTP approaches, SSOs are encouraged to be part of teacher training, and school leaders are encouraged to be part of SSO training.

Through this process teachers, school leaders and SSOs gain insights into these complementary professional functions, which can in turn enhance their own contribution to the shared aim of delivering quality pre-primary services.

## **RESULTS ACHIEVED**

- During the 2018 pilot, the approach was tested in 600 schools across 10 states (60 schools per state), with a total of 251 SSOs trained to implement the new quality assurance (QA) guidelines and to lead supportive supervision practices. The approach has now been adopted and scaled in 12 states.
- Through a process of iterative changes and pilots, the Government of Nigeria has been able to adopt LTP into QA systems while discussions around an update of the national minimum standards are initiated.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the approach of classroom observation paired with mentoring is effective as a means of enhancing quality of the teaching and learning environment. In some cases pre-primary teachers have established peer mentoring groups around a cluster of schools to continue to support each other and exchange learning between SSO visits, demonstrating appetite for supportive approaches to professional development.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- SSOs are members of the local community, which creates potential opportunities for stronger engagement of families and communities in the governance and accountability structures that support quality pre-primary education.
- Although the SSO model is effective, the number of trained SSOs remains inadequate to supervise all pre-primary schools. Investments are required to build the SSO workforce so that the positive momentum established through the pilot and early implementation is sustained over time and effective practices institutionalized.
- Under Nigeria's federal system, quality assurance processes vary from state to state. Whilst some states have dedicated quality assurance officers or school support officers to pre-primary classes, most deploy the same set of officers to monitor both pre-primary and primary classes. To ensure that monitoring and supportive supervision is tailored to best practices for pre-primary aged children, states are encouraged to have dedicated SSOs for pre-primary classes. To support uptake across all states, further advocacy will be required to sensitize all states to the benefits of this sub-sector specific model.
- While data on quality of pre-primary education is gathered by SSOs and shared locally and at state level, systems for use of data should be strengthened to ensure that data captured is analysed and used to inform planning, decision-making and budgeting both at state and national levels.

## NEXT STEPS

As well as investing in the supply of SSOs, there are plans to invest in the ongoing development of SSOs so that they continue to develop a depth of expertise in support of quality pre-primary education. UNICEF will provide support to strengthen the regulation of private and community provision of ECE services by harmonizing the indicators used by public and private providers in line with the national standards. The SSOs will be key to support this process.

**Cost effectiveness:** From 2018 to date, UNICEF invested approximately US \$91,000 in strengthening supportive supervision for Nigeria's pre-primary education subsector, benefitting nearly 120,000 pre-primary students.

For more information, please contact:

UNICEF Nigeria Country Office: [spanday@unicef.org](mailto:spanday@unicef.org)

© UNICEF April 2023