

Review of EQUIP-Tanzania's School Readiness Programme

School readiness is a powerful framework for improving equity in access to education and in learning outcomes, especially for marginalised children. Available evidence shows school readiness to be an important factor in education achievement, children's development and learning, school completion and the achievement of potential in adulthood.

The EQUIP-Tanzania School Readiness Programme (SRP) contributes to national efforts to expand access to good quality pre-school education by supporting parents and community leaders to set up and support School Readiness Centres.

A review of the SRP completed in 2017 finds that children on the 16-week programme are achieving much higher scores than those with no access to pre-school and are even outperforming those children on the formal pre-school course, which lasts for one or two years. The total cost per child for the implementation in 2016 was GPP 9.60. The shorter, community based intervention is enabling more children to access pre-school education sooner while formal pre-schooling continues to expand. This Policy Brief summarises the findings of a review and International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) of 1191 children (606 girls and 585 boys) in 42 School Readiness Centres across 14 districts in seven regions. It was commissioned by EQUIP-Tanzania, a six year UKAid funded-programme, now working across nine regions, designed to achieve better learning outcomes, especially for girls.



The EQUIP-Tanzania SRP Model

The EQUIP-Tanzania model has three distinctive features:

- A community-based approach supported by existing government structures
- The use of active learning methods
- Support to nationally and locally developed high quality, low cost learning aids

The EQUIP-Tanzania model establishes School Readiness Centres within about two hours' walk of a 'mother school', with its Head Teacher providing oversight and support. Centres are run by School Readiness Centre Facilitators (SRCFs), volunteers selected by communities with oversight from the Ward Education Officer (WEO). EQUIP-Tanzania provides the SRCFs with training by District Facilitators, who are trained by zonal teams who were in turn trained by national trainers. The SRP supplies 12 story books focusing teaching on major themes each week and building core competencies, a toolkit and guidance for developing further books and learning materials. EQUIP-Tanzania supported a pilot in 2015 and a scale up programme in 2016 when over 2,700 centres were supported and 160,888 children were enrolled (80,651 girls and 80,237 boys).

Review Findings

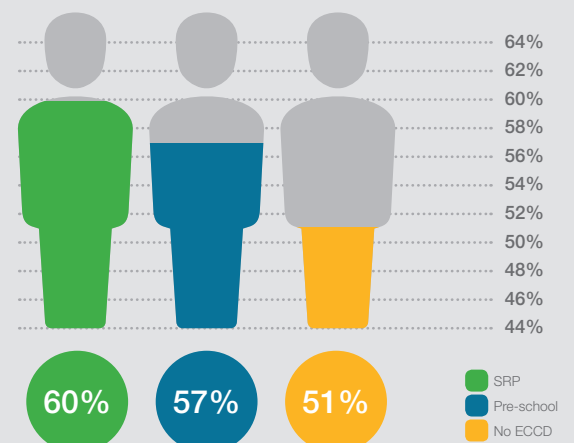
Overall scores for children in the SRP show significantly higher achievement than for children with no access to pre-school and a marked difference against those children in formal pre-primary education. Given the comparative length of the two schemes, this indicates that the SRP methods and approaches are highly effective.

A similar pattern is evident for the overall spread of scores, with SRP children achieving 54% of scores between 61% and 90% against 45% of pre-school children.

Promoting Active Learning

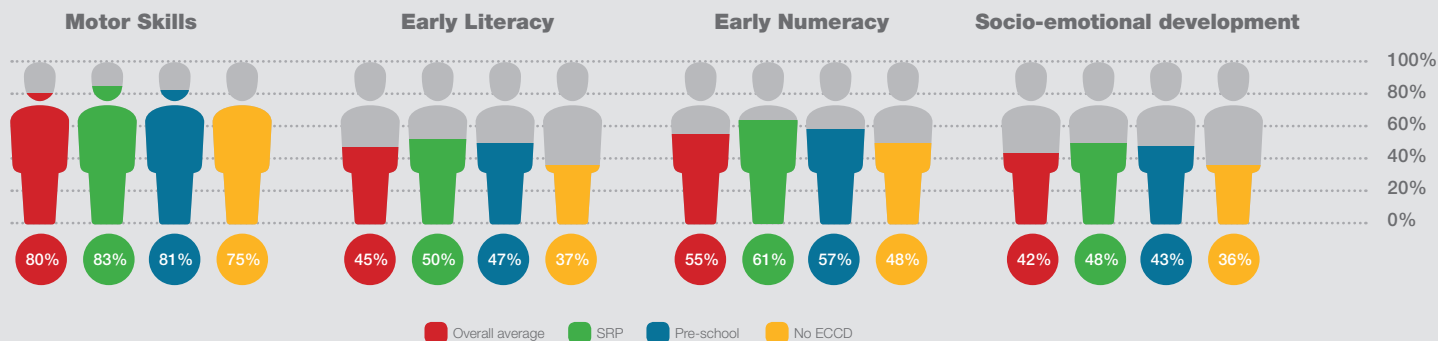
Qualitative data provides insight into the stronger scores of children in SRP.

SRCF training puts an emphasis on active learning which is competency based while using play and story books provided to the SR centres. Visits to SR centres show that good teaching quality and active learning methods are generally well implemented.



Improving Key Skills

The breakdown of IDELA skills by domain shows that the strongest domain is motor skills with an average of 80% and the weakest are of socio-emotional development with 42% average scores with literacy skills just above the lowest level at 45%.



It is worth noting that the school readiness centre gave specific attention to socio-emotional development which has not been a feature of the pre-school curriculum.

Consistent progress

The results also show a 37% increase in scores between an August 2016 baseline in two regions and the March 2017 results in the same two regions indicating strong progress. Taking these results together with the comparison of results between children who attended school readiness centre and those with no access to pre-school, they build a picture of a growing positive effect of School Readiness Centres.

Targeting Inclusion

There was no significant difference between girls' and boys' scores in any of the study groups observed. Nevertheless, practices to promote gender equality were discussed during sessions in the SRP training and story books were designed to address gender inequality. One story book focused on the importance of a girl child going to school who was being kept at home to do household chores. The story ends with her going to school. In addition, the training of the SRCF provided very basic skills on identifying the probability of some forms of disabilities. The programme targeted remote rural areas where children did not have access to government pre-schools.

Achieving Results and Value for Money

Given the need to extend access to pre-primary education with limited resources, cost efficiency of the programme should be considered alongside the results achieved. The direct cost per child paid by EQUIP-Tanzania, usually via LGA, is GBP 0.15 per child per day.

In terms of total rollout, the school readiness costs were for four days a week for 16 weeks (64 days). Therefore the total cost per child for the implementation in 2016 was GPP 9.60.

Apart from the shorter duration, a number of features that enable the direct costs of SRP to be kept low include:

- SRCF are unpaid volunteers unless community members decided to pay them a small allowance.
- School Readiness Centres are existing religious or community buildings provided by communities without any rent having to be paid by the LGA or EQUIP-Tanzania
- Simple toolkits are provided to SRCF to make learning materials to reduce the number of books needed and training includes guidance and ideas for making materials from locally-available materials.
- Most guidance to the SRCF is provided by the mother primary school rather than any additional structure developed by EQUIP-Tanzania. Overall oversight is also provided by existing cadre within local government.

Building on Success

Following the pilot in 2015, the story books and related teaching methods for promoting active learning have been incorporated into the national formal pre-school system with school level implementation of new approaches starting in 2017. Other opportunities to develop and improve the formal system of pre-primary education, based on learning from SRP include:

- Exploring how to develop community involvement, involving parents learning at home with their children and using community facilities for learning
- Build on teaching approaches, especially learning through play
- Adopting approaches to develop low or no cost teaching aids which, when made with learners, encourage activity-based learning
- Sharing of practice between the pre-primary class and the Standard 1 teacher
- Explore how to find a path for recognising the SRCF within the formal pre-school system.