

PlayMatters

Evidence Brief: PlayMatters Tanzania Implementation Research Findings on Key Outcomes

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In partnership with



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2023–2024 school year, PlayMatters delivered a core package of support to early childhood development (ECD) centers and primary schools located in refugee camps in Western Tanzania with a goal of integrating Learning through Play (LtP) as a pedagogical approach. Through implementation research in six of these primary schools, located in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp serving Congolese refugees, researchers found the following baseline–endline changes:

- Head Teachers improved support for teachers
- Teachers’ occupational well-being significantly improved
- Teacher classroom management practices significantly improved
- The intervention was implemented with high levels of quality and fidelity

These findings, which represent changes over the course of one school year in a camp that supports Congolese refugees using the Congolese curriculum, provide strong evidence that PlayMatters’ theory of change is working as expected in a refugee camp setting. Based on these findings, LtP has the potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning in crisis-affected and refugee-hosting contexts.

BACKGROUND

PlayMatters is a teacher professional development intervention focused on supporting pre-primary and primary teachers to use LtP, an active teaching and learning methodology, to deliver curricular content in protracted refugee contexts in Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania. The intervention includes six components at the school level: teacher training, training for school leaders to deliver school-level teacher continuous professional development (TCPD), school management training, community engagement, provision of teaching and learning materials, and safe school infrastructure. PlayMatters ultimately aims to improve holistic learning and well-being for children living in conflict and crisis.

Through a collaboration between a researcher from the University of Dodoma and the International Rescue Committee, an implementation research study was conducted in PlayMatters schools during the September 2023 – June 2024 school year in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in the Kigoma Region of Tanzania. The study examines the validity of PlayMatters’ theory of change as well as the quality and fidelity of implementation. This brief summarizes findings from the following research questions (a sub-set of the broader study research questions):

1. What professional development opportunities did teachers receive and what were their experiences with face-to-face training, teaching learning circles and supportive supervision?
2. What baseline–endline changes are observed in the quality of the learning environment, teacher supports, and the availability and use of teaching and learning resources?
3. What changes are observed in teachers’ attitudes towards learning through play, instructional practices, pedagogical practices, motivation and wellbeing?
4. What enablers and challenges emerged regarding the implementation of PlayMatters?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a sequential mixed-methods approach from a sample of 6 primary schools serving Congolese refugees in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania. From baseline to endline, the research team found an approximate attrition rate of 21% of teachers in the quantitative sample due to repatriation or resettlement, absenteeism, and leaving the profession.

Table 1: Quantitative Sample Table

Participant	Baseline (Pre-Training)	Post-Training	Endline
Teacher Survey	129	-	129
Classroom Observation	-	46	46

For the quantitative data, surveys were administered by trained enumerators as follows:

- **Teacher Survey (Baseline & Endline):** Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, Scale on Perceptions of LtP, ASSETS (Wellbeing Assessment of Skills and Supports that Enable Teachers to Succeed), Teacher Sources of Stress, and Teacher Access to TPD
- **Classroom Observation (Post-Training & Endline):** Teacher Classroom Observation Scale (Time on Task, Materials available and used, Quality of learning environment, Teacher instructional practices, Classroom management practices, Student engagement)

For the qualitative data, face-to-face training observations and key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted according to Table 2 below. It should be noted that one school had 2 Head Teachers and thus 2 KIIs and an increase in data quality collection procedures led to an increase in participants in teacher FGDs at endline.

Table 2: Qualitative Sample Table

Participant	Post-Training	Endline
Education Coordinators (FGD)	5	5
Head Teachers (KII)	-	7
Teachers (FGD)	32	58

FINDINGS

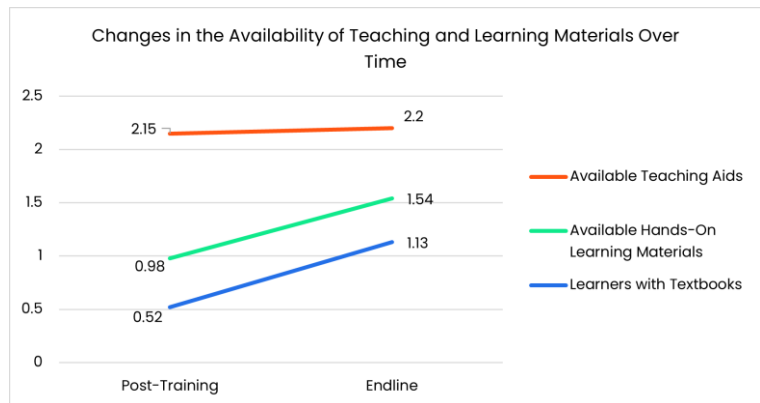
Key Finding 1: Teachers Reported Significant Increases in Professional Development Opportunities Relevant to Their Work

Teachers at endline reported statistically significantly better TCPD opportunities than at the baseline. This includes approaches such as teacher learning circles (TLCs), face-to-face in-service training, and coaching and mentoring. A majority of teachers described increased professional development opportunities, confirming reported surveys: *"We teachers helped each other on areas we identified to be problematic or difficult. We have been asked to be open to mentors so they can help in addressing the difficult to improve instruction"* (FGD, Teacher School

3). Additionally, Head Teachers described increased capacity to provide school-based TPD: *“participation in the PlayMatters project enabled us to develop capacity to assure teaching done by classroom teachers. We have been oriented to assure teaching by conducting classroom observation to learn the extent to which subject teachers integrated LtP and use of manipulatives to promote learning, and the extent all students are involved in the learning activities”* (KII, HT School 3). As a project with a core mandate to implement TCPD, this finding confirms that the PlayMatters project delivered key activities.

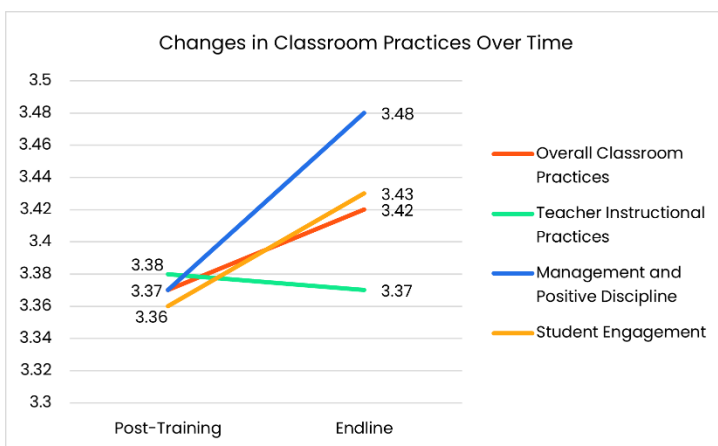
Key Finding 2: Physical Learning Environments Improved

PlayMatters conducted light school rehabilitation and provision of teaching and learning materials (TLMs). Positive but not significant changes were observed in terms of infrastructure such as the cleanliness of the classroom and seating arrangements. Minimal effects were detected primarily due to a minor scope and budget allocated to rehabilitation efforts. Statistically significant increases in the availability of hands-on learning materials and textbooks were observed over time with moderate effect sizes, indicating more opportunities for students to engage with TLMs.



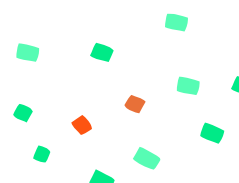
Teachers also described increased use of TLMs in their lessons: *“LtP makes students become engaged in learning all the time, they interact with each other, with the teacher and the learning materials. Therefore, all the time they are active. This was contrary to the traditional methods we used before the introduction of LtP by the PlayMatters project.”* (FGD, Teacher School 2).

Key Finding 3: Teachers Improved Their Classroom Management and Student Engagement Practices



From post-training to endline, teachers displayed significantly better classroom and positive discipline practices. In addition, we observed positive improvements in teachers’ student engagement scores, though not statistically significant. We also observed slight decreases in teachers’ instructional practices, which were also not significant. One explanation for this phenomenon is the sample size was too small to detect larger effect sizes or statistical

significance in these domains. Additionally, rather than a pure baseline, the first classroom observation was conducted one month post-training, indicating that teachers may have

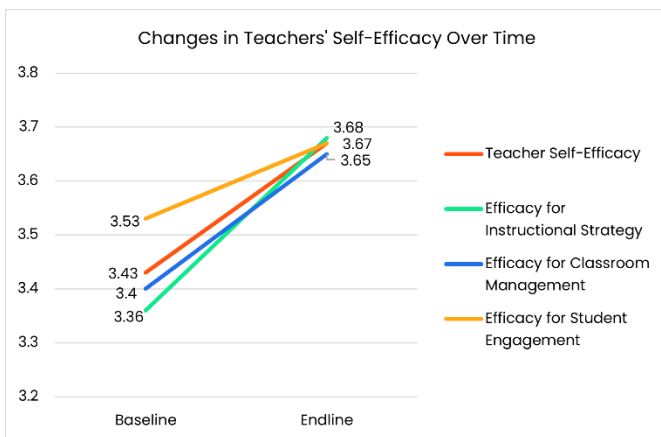
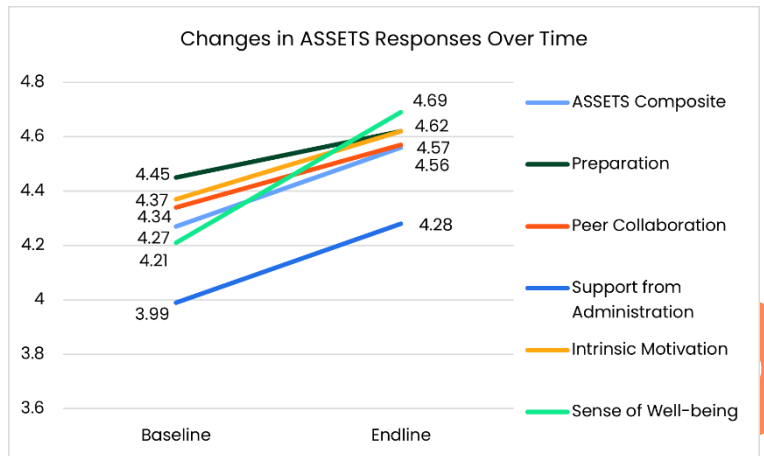


improved their practices immediately following the training (at which point they were first observed) and the decline represents teachers reverting to their prior practices throughout the academic year. It is plausible that these scores are still an improvement from teachers' baseline skills prior to participating in any PlayMatters activities.

Qualitatively, respondents described positive learning environments. One Head Teacher reported: *"I lead the school, student and teacher, by creating a positive classroom teaching environment"* (KII, HT School 3). Similarly, an education supervisor described the inclusivity of LtP: *"I ensure that the education provided involves all, so all children have the opportunity to receive education, regardless of their intellectual, gender, or physical differences"* (KII, Education Coordinator). Despite the lack of quantitative data, teachers repeatedly described an increased uptake of LtP in their teaching practice through planning and executing actively engaging lessons, signaling promise of LtP.

Key Finding 4: Teachers Improved Their Occupational Well-being

Teachers at endline reported significantly better skills and supports to succeed related to teacher well-being than at baseline. This suggests the PlayMatters Core Package influenced positive improvements in teachers' well-being across all sub-domains, despite the complex challenges refugee teachers face in Tanzania. The largest effect size observed was in the sub-domain of sense of well-being.



In addition to improvements in teachers' well-being, teachers reported self-efficacy significantly improved from baseline to endline. This suggests the PlayMatters Core Package provided teachers with the confidence and belief that they were able to effectively implement practices related to instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement.

Key Finding 5: PlayMatters was Implemented with Quality and Fidelity

Teachers reported that key factors related to the successful implementation of the project and their promising uptake of LtP related to PlayMatters' co-creation and co-implementation approach coupled with school-based TCPD. Teachers reported appreciating PlayMatters' collaboration with relevant and mandated education supervisors to deliver training.

Additionally, Education Coordinators perceived LtP and project activities to be contextually relevant and described personal motivation to sustain project activities: *“TLC and peer mentors will continue even if the project ends because they are based on the guidelines and will be used to sustain the LtP. Even after the end of the project, teachers will continue to build their capacity through one another”* (KII, Educational Coordinator).

Despite the promise of LtP, structural barriers beyond the project’s scope impeded the implementation of LtP. While teachers reported overall less stress at endline than at baseline, the primary sources of stress remained the same over time: inadequate salary, shortage of equipment, and large class sizes. One teacher, for example, explained: *“Having a large number of students in schools can indeed pose challenges when it comes to using play, and particularly those that require group work, as our class has up to 100 students. In such a situation, it is difficult for teachers to manage the class”* (FGD, Teacher School 3).

CONCLUSIONS

These findings are encouraging for PlayMatters, indicating positive improvements across all of PlayMatters key outcome areas, including improved teacher professional development opportunities, classroom management practices, teacher wellbeing, and teacher self-efficacy. Identifying opportunities to strengthen existing system mechanisms to sustain comprehensive pedagogical support to teachers is critical for LtP to strengthen education services in Tanzanian refugee schools.



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