



Play to Learn Project

“Early Childhood Development HomeKit Action Research”

Full Phase Report

Submitted by,
Progress Inc. Bangladesh
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Abbreviation

CBLF	-	Community Based Learning Facility
ECD	-	Early Childhood Development
ECDHK	-	Early Childhood Development Home Kit
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
IRC	-	International Rescue Committee
KII	-	Key Informant Interview
NYU	-	New York University
PTL	-	Play To Learn
SEL	-	Social Emotional Learning
SWBD	-	Sesame Workshop Bangladesh
YPSA	-	Young Power in Social Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The coastal area of Cox's Bazar region in southeast Bangladesh faces several challenges due to recent Rohingya refugee migrations and severe events, resulting in complex socio-economic issues affecting both local residents and refugees, particularly impacting children's learning environments. Sesame Workshop Bangladesh (SWB), in partnership with BRAC, International Rescue Committee (IRC), New York University (NYU) Global TIES for Children, and the LEGO Foundation, initiated the Play to Learn (PtL) project to address these concerns. This program, notably leveraging the Early Childhood Development (ECD) home kit, aims to provide crisis-affected children with growth opportunities through play-based learning.

In partnership with Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), the ECD home kit improves the learning experiences of children aged 3-6 attending community-based ECD centers and Community Based Learning Facilities (CBLFs). This study evaluates the home kit's quality, relevance, benefits, and feasibility among families in Ukhiya engaged with Young Power in Social Action's (YPSA's) centers.

Methodology of the Study

A longitudinal panel design was adopted for this study, where an identical group of respondents were interviewed in the initial and final phases of the study. Data was gathered from the host community, as well as camps 13 and 14, which were the targeted areas for implementation in the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected using a quantitative household survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Key Informant's Interview (KII), and observation. 281 households were surveyed in phase 3 of the study, while observational data was collected from 10 households (5 from the host community and 5 from the camp community). A similar set of respondents was interviewed and observed in the initial and final phases of the study. In addition, four (4) FGDs and six (6) KIIs were conducted in the final phase by the study team. A total of eleven (11) FGDs and sixteen (16) KIIs were conducted during the total time span of the study. Caregivers from both the host and camp communities were involved in the FGDs, whereas KIIs were carried out with officials from SWB and YPSA.

Findings

Demographic information

Among the respondents, 63% were from camp community and (37%) were from host community of Jaliapalong union of Ukhiya. Most of the caregivers (51%) belonged to 26 – 35 years age group, 33.50% were aged between 18 - 25 years old, 12.50% of the participants fell within the age range of 36 to 45 years old, 1.40% of the respondents were 46 – 60 years old, and the rest of the respondents (1.40%) were below 18 years. The children whose parents were interviewed, the majority of them (53%) were four (4) years old, where 30% of them were five (5) years old, 11.7% of them were six (6) years old, and 5.3% of them were 3 years old. In some cases, more than one (1) child from the same household received home kits. Among these additional children, 38.50% of them belonged to five (5) years old age group, 30% of the children were at the age of four (4) years old, with 21% of this group being six (6) years old, and 11% of them being three (3) years old

Relevance of the home kit

The relevance of the home kit was emphasized by all the stakeholders, particularly the caregivers, YPSA team, and SWB team considering the context where girl children are restricted to play outside with limited

or no indoor play materials. Prior need assessment ensured the alignment with ECD home kit materials and local context. Caregivers' perceptions of the ECD home kit had impacts on the acceptance and regular utilization of the materials. Regarding ease of use, an overwhelming 99% of caregivers strongly affirmed the materials' accessibility for engagement. Additionally, an equally high percentage (99%) of parents believed that the home kit materials resonated with their local culture and were entirely relevant within their context. Furthermore, 99% of the caregivers highlighted that the ECD home kit materials significantly contributed to their children's learning journey.

Quality of content and in terms of utilization

With regards to utilization, it was unveiled that hand puppets (88%), zoo set (87%), soft toys (85%), and softball (81%) were the most employed materials from home kits, particularly among the children who are three (3) to four (4) years old. Increased use of color pencils (75%), dice board games (75%), drawing and color book (69%), wooden color blocks (63%), story books (63%), and alphabet cards (63%) was also observed in phase 3. Insights from qualitative findings showed that children from comparatively higher age groups prefer to be involved in playing with challenging content like dice board games and puzzle boards. Nonetheless, a limited number of resources like colored pencils, drawing books, pencils and erasers limited the willingness to use these materials. It is worth noting that caregivers were not acquainted with some emotions from emotion cards, and they struggled to introduce these emotions to their children. The fragile nature of number and alphabet cards also restricted the use of these materials.

Timeline and continuous practice played a crucial role in the efficient adoption of the utilization of home kits by caregivers. Unlike the initial phases, no gender-related preference towards any home kit was observed in the final phase of the study. In phase 3, 99% of caregivers confirmed the materials were safe, durable for regular use, and visually appealing, while only a few numbers of caregivers (1%) mentioned signs of wear and tear in some materials. Moreover, 100% caregivers unanimously agreed that the materials were entirely safe to play with. In terms of weariness, caregivers noted that number cards, alphabet cards, and books displayed signs of worn out.

Effectiveness and sustainability of the home kits

The effectiveness of the materials is reflected in terms of the usage of the materials as per the routine where the study team observed that 50% of the caregivers shared that they play with the materials at least 3 days a week and 18% shared more than 3 days in a week. Not only did the home kits are played by the direct child recipients, but also other children are using the materials. 96% respondents reported ECD home kit is also being played by other children. 79% of these additional children were siblings of the children and 36% of them were neighbor's children, 33% were children's playmates from the community and 27% cousins of the children. Participation of these additional children underscored the great effectiveness of the home kit in the community.

Additionally, after observing the benefits of the home kits provided, 99% of the caregivers expressed their willingness to endorse comparable materials to their neighbors and relatives, intending to impart their knowledge about various activities. Nonetheless, providing training on low-cost materials would ensure a long-lasting effect in the community in terms of children's education.

Efficacy and benefits of the ECD home kits

Perception of caregivers with regard to child development was explored from four (4) key themes - language and numeracy development, physical/motor skill development, cognitive development, and

social-emotional development. Concerning the overall development, caregivers emphasized on children's counting ability (64%), identifying alphabets (63%), drawing skill (61%), writing skill (55%), and reading skill (54%). Speaking more eloquently and better object recognition skills were also pointed out by caregivers in qualitative consultations. In relation to cognitive development, improved problem-solving skill (62%), increased skill in sorting things (53%), and better memories and recall abilities (67%) were also mentioned by the caregivers from both the host and camp community. From observational data, it was found that children can catch and throw the soft balls as well as clap hands when happy, and also, they can turn the pages of the story books given.

In terms of cognitive development, 81% parents/caregivers shared that children are recognizing familiar objects 62% improved problem-solving skills, 53% ability to sort things by colors and sizes, while 67% children developed enhanced memories and recall abilities.

In terms of social-emotional domain, caregivers mentioned about practice of greetings exchange (95%), efficient interaction with peer groups (95%), and increased respect for others (66%) were highlighted by the caregivers in the concluding phase of the study. All these findings exhibited that advancements in areas such as better interaction, and respect toward others achieved a higher extent from the caregivers' viewpoints in terms of children's social and emotional development.

Indirect benefits and positive outcomes

Caregivers referred to the achieved personal benefits by utilizing the home kit regularly. The dominant skills mentioned by the caregivers were better interaction ability with children (81%), improved ability of storytelling (78%), and efficiency in handling the emotions of children (75%), spending more time with children (86%), better understanding with their children (82%), and realizing the importance of child's education (73%). The higher percentages signified improved relationships among children and caregivers. Nevertheless, observational data underscored that parents struggled to identify their children's mistakes, as they had to learn from their children first. This information bolstered the importance of training of caregivers. 45% caregivers also highlighted their ability to advise other caregivers in the community regarding children's learning.

Feasibility of the home kits through support and satisfaction

Caregivers played a highly active and confident role in assisting and supporting their children during activities. While asked, a significant majority (91%) of caregivers shared a robust sense of confidence and active participation in their children's learning sessions. Caregivers shared a positive perspective with regard to spending time with children. In the final phase, 87% of the caregivers shared that they have ample time in their everyday routine engage with their children. The heightened confidence exhibited by caregivers in using the home kit can be credited to increased practice and ongoing support provided by YPSA. It was also found from the observational data that parents can provide better support to children in the learning sessions.

Regular visits by ECD center/ CBLF facilitators and informal orientation sessions influenced the caregivers, which led to a higher level of confidence. However, some caregivers are still unable to identify their children's mistakes in the playing sessions. Regarding the training provided by YPSA, 81.5% of caregivers found it highly satisfying, while 18% found it somewhat satisfactory. However, qualitative data highlighted deficiencies in training. YPSA staff noted that household-level orientation lacked effectiveness without a formal environment and emphasized the necessity for integrated training involving at least one caregiver from each household focusing on the literacy gap is mandatory to ensure a higher extent of implementation of the piloting project.

In terms of satisfaction with the ECD home kit, 91% of the caregivers said they were very satisfied with the ECD home kit. It was also emphasized by the caregivers that encouragement from ECD center/ CBLF facilitators played an evidential role in being satisfied with the ECD home kit. Nonetheless, it was also reinforced by the caregivers that repetitive activities, and reading the same story over and over might discourage the children from actively participating in the playing sessions.

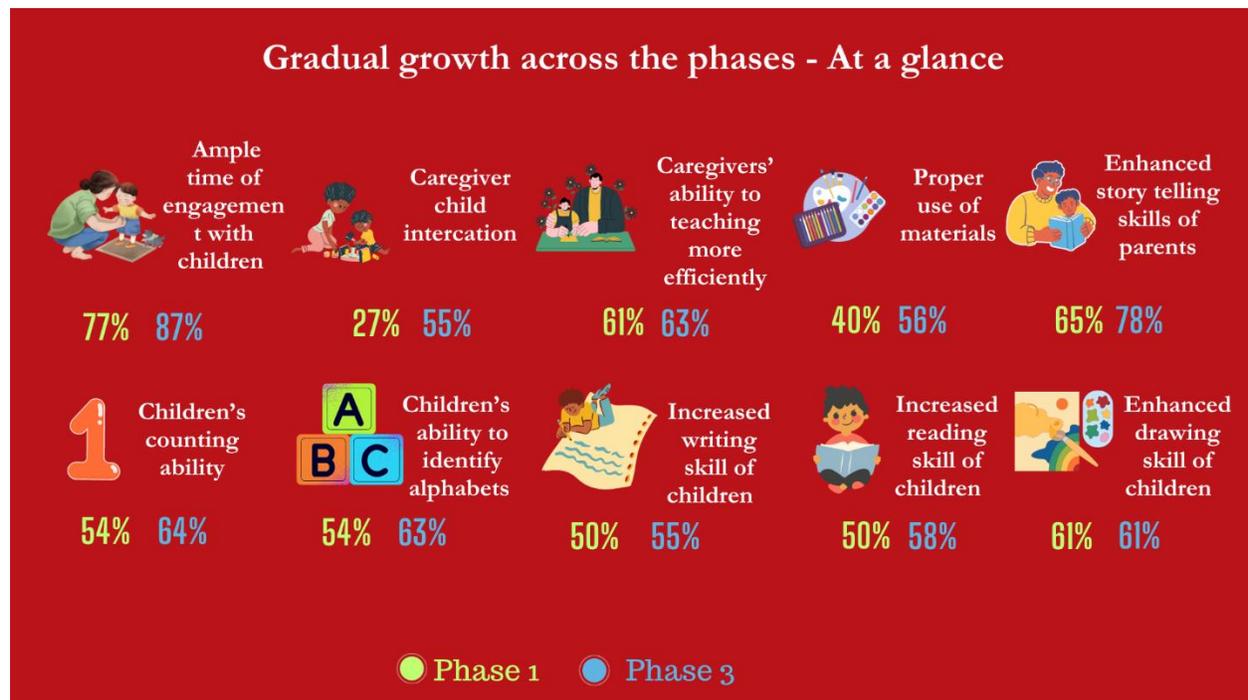
Comparison among the 3 phases

Findings from the study identified the gradual growth of both caregivers and children in terms of utilization of materials, community acceptance, caregivers' capacity building, enhanced capacity of children in different development domains, and limitations of using different home kit materials.

In terms of utilization, significant growth was observed in using color pencil, dice board game, drawing and color book, wooden color blocks, story books, alphabet cards, emotion card, and puzzles compared to initial phases. Continuous practice and support from the ECD center/ CBLF facilitators boosted the utilization of these materials, as shared by the caregivers. Even though all the caregivers gave the highest remarks to the home kit materials regarding safety, a slight decrease was observed in the final phase in terms of visual appeal considering the withering nature of some materials.

More numbers of caregivers also found the home kit relevant to their context and culture in the concluding phase than initial phase (phase 1 – 67%, Phase 3 – 94%) in phase 3 considering the supports provided by YPSA staffs. Additionally, more caregivers shared about being more confident concerning providing support to their children than in phase 1 (phase 1 – 81%, phase 3 – 91%) as a result of the regular house visits.

In terms of challenges, even though only 9% caregivers shared about challenges than phase 1, as the time went the caregivers further realized that lack of clear instruction on the usage of home kit material (34% in phase 3), limited availability of necessary resources (Phase 1 – 32%, phase 3- 29%), and difficulties in adapting the activities as per the need of the children (phase 1 – 32%, phase 3 – 23%) still remained the dominant factors that hindering the highest utilization of the home kit materials throughout the piloting phases.



Challenges

Several challenges were identified in the concluding phase of the action research. 33% of caregivers reported about insufficient guidance from ECD center facilitators regarding the usage of home kits, and 30% reported about limited resources 30%. Additionally, only 23% of caregivers found the activities challenging to adapt. This insight underscored the struggle of caregivers to properly utilize the home kit.

The distribution of home kits encountered various issues, including few materials mismatched the few kits bags, with instances of some materials being duplicated in certain bags while missing from others. Communication gaps were apparent to relay challenges or objections about the home kit materials from grassroots to central levels. Caregivers and ECD center/ CBLF facilitators lacked effective communication channels except for household visits and orientation sessions to address home kit-related concerns. Budgetary limitation was also highlighted by the SWB officials, leading to a shortfall in the initial budget. Bureaucratic red tape was also a hindering factor in this piloting project. Delay in obtaining government permission stalled the project by three months. Moreover, the incentives for ECD center and CBLF facilitators was restricted until the project's conclusion, which was considered a demotivating factor for facilitators. In addition, both YPSA and SWB teams highlighted insufficient manpower, indicating a pressing need to augment human resources for the project.

Recommendation

- Increasing the number of writing and drawing materials (paper, pencil, drawing book, etc.) would ensure a higher extent of engagement of both caregivers and children.
- To increase the longevity of the number card and alphabet card, these materials can be laminated.
- Considering the literacy and capacity of the caregivers from both the host and camp community, formal capacity development training on the materials needs to be provided to the caregivers.
- Refresher training on the usage of home kit materials should be arranged for ECD center/ CBLF facilitator.
- Enhancing collaboration with multiple stakeholders who are involved in early childhood education in Cox's Bazar would ensure better implementation of the ECD home kit.
- As per community demand, introducing activities involving cricket bat, tennis ball and toy cars would enhance children's interest and increase caregiver engagement as well as for the physical/ motor skills development.
- Providing an honorarium on a monthly basis to the ECD center/ CBLF facilitators would encourage them to engage in the house visits for orientation with more enthusiasm.
- Considering the project location and its exposure to natural calamities, establishing a contingency plan is crucial, so that in the instance of natural disasters quick support can be provided to the children.
- A learning and documentation process can be established to ensure the swift sharing of solutions for future challenges and mitigation measures regarding home kit.
- The puzzle set can be reintroduced using a familiar character.
- More story book, particularly character-centric books should be added in the home kit.
- An easy-to-adopt version of dice-board game can be reinstated.
- No. of color pencils, pencils, practice book, paper can be increased.

- To establish more engagement, instead of a 3 days weekly routine, a 5 days weekly routine can be initiated.
- For better storage of the zoo set, a storage box can be added.