

PlayMatters Emergency Response Mechanism (PM ERM) Learning through Play Promising Practices Study Report



Tsegaye Lolaso Lenjebo, Jonathan Kwok, & Anne Smiley

July 2023

Note: The authors' views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the PlayMatters consortium, or its partner, the LEGO Foundation.

Implemented in Partnership with



The LEGO Foundation



Table of Contents

Contents	2
Acronyms	3
Acknowledgments	4
Executive Summary	5
Background	7
Contextual Background	7
Learning through Play in Ethiopia	8
Methodology	9
Research Questions	9
Procedures	9
Sample	10
Tools	10
Data Analysis	11
Ethics	11
Findings	11
Lesson Planning and Deliver	12
Enabling Environment and Classroom Management	12
Learning through Play Methods Observed	13
Perceived Benefits of Learning through Play	17
Barriers to Implementing Learning through Play	19
Recommendations	21
Limitations	22
Conclusions	22
References	23
Annex	24

Acronyms

EiE	Education in Emergencies
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IP	Implementing Partner
LtP	Learning through Play
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services
MoE	Ministry of Education
PM ERM	PlayMatters Emergency Response Mechanism
TLMs	Teaching and Learning Materials
ToT	Training of Trainers
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
WEO	Woreda (Local District) Education Officer



Acknowledgements

The research team acknowledges with gratitude the children and educators for their willingness to participate in this study. We extend our appreciation to the School Directors and Woreda Education Officers for their approval and support in conducting this research.

A special recognition goes to **Yohannes Gebreselassie** for his exceptional leadership and coordination of the study logistics. We also would like to express our gratitude to Solomon Gadisa and Tesfaye Birhan for their valuable contributions to data collection.



Executive Summary

The PlayMatters project (2020 – 2026) initiated the Emergency Response Mechanism (PM ERM) in May 2022 in response to the conflict affecting the northern regions of Ethiopia. The PM ERM funded **12** partners (including direct responses from existing consortium partners IRC and Plan International) to conduct multi-sectoral PM ERM activities from September 2022 to September 2023 across Afar, Amhara, and Benishangul-Gumuz regions in **201** integrated pre-primary and primary schools, reaching **177,405** children. The Education component of the PM ERM included the adaptation of the PlayMatters Learning through Play (LtP) teacher training intervention to introduce LtP teaching methods into the teaching and learning process. In the context of PlayMatters, Learning through play (LtP) is an active teaching and learning method in which children learn through guided, hands-on, meaningful, play-based interactions in safe and inclusive environments.

As one of the first LtP interventions in an emergency response context, this qualitative exploratory study investigated teachers' instructional practices and classroom processes to identify promising LtP practices. Across five implementation sites in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, we conducted **37** classroom observations and subsequent semi-structured interviews with pre-primary and primary school teachers. Data was analyzed using a typology for categorizing classroom-based LtP methods based on PlayMatters formative research and additional thematic analysis based on interview protocols.

Findings from this study reveal that teachers have made attempts to integrate LtP methods into their lesson plans and, in most cases, successfully execute these lessons. Additionally, classroom observations reveal that teachers are able to create conducive classroom environments, both in the physical space as well as the emotional environment, by regularly encouraging and praising students, building rapport with students, and maintaining a warm tone of voice and facial expressions. Data analysis reveals that teachers have made attempts to apply LtP methods in their classrooms, or activities in the LtP Practice Zone, frequently using student-centered instructional practices like using locally-available materials to create manipulatives or models and pair/group work. Additional LtP methods observed included the use of stories and role play, games, songs connected with the lesson objective.



Despite such promising practices, barriers remain. In some cases, teachers were observed attempting LtP practices but failing to fully implement them as designed, or activities classified in the LtP Proximal Zone, due to structural barriers like a lack of sufficient or diverse materials (classroom spaces, classroom furniture, and play materials). Teachers were also observed implementing some LtP activities with minimal connection to the learning objectives, indicating attempts at implementing LtP but areas for further training and support to strengthen implementation. Some activities were observed in the Non-Learning Zone or Passive Learning Zone primarily due to structural barriers such as large classes or lack of textbooks or used strategically given the objective of the lesson (e.g., revisions for exams).

Teachers viewed LtP as beneficial to enhancing the teaching and learning process, by increasing engagement and enjoyment at school. As previously mentioned, barriers in addition to structural issues include a need for additional training and support and awareness raising with parents and community members. This study provides a deeper understanding of promising LtP practices being implemented in conflict-affected contexts, laying the foundation for future funding, research, and interventions aimed at supporting teachers to integrate such methods into their daily practice to ensure quality education for all children.



Background

Contextual Background

In the world, Ethiopia is the ninth-largest refugee-hosting country, and the third-largest in Africa. In addition to the challenges of being a refugee-hosting nation, Ethiopia has also been impacted by additional crises such as drought, internal conflict, and the COVID-19 health pandemic^[1]. Armed conflict that started in November 2020 in the Northern part of Ethiopia traumatized children and displaced many, leaving deep and lasting scars that remain far longer than the violence. While the conflict has impacted millions of people, children are amongst the most vulnerable groups of people affected. Even if children have not experienced the direct consequences of the violence, they have become orphans, experience sexual abuse or exploitation, are forced to join in the fighting, may be displaced, and often have interrupted schooling. Once the conflict ebbs, they will have to battle disease, inadequate shelter, or limited or no access to basic essential services. Conflict has a notable impact on children's access to quality education as students often have interrupted attendance because of insecurity, lack of teachers, limited resources, or attacks occurred directed at schools and teachers^[2].

The conflict mainly affects Tigray, Afar, and Amhara regions and results in adverse effects on educational facilities, learning outcomes, and psychosocial wellbeing of school-aged children. 2.7 million children in northern Ethiopia have been affected by the destroyed schools and schools that were transitioned into shelters for IDPs. Schools have also been looted, with an approximate of 203 schools in Afar, 4,000 schools in Amhara, and 1,000 schools in Tigray^[3]. Needs assessments and situational reports reveal that humanitarian needs are cross-cutting. Additionally, despite peace settlements brokered in 2021 for the Northern Conflict, ongoing instability and insecurity remains throughout the Amhara region in clashes between national and regional defense forces since April 2023.

As members of the school community and society at large, teachers were significantly affected by the conflict. In the Amhara region specifically, most teachers were displaced from their permanent residences due to the conflict and returned after the conflict resolved. Many teachers lost all their assets in their homes, representing more than ten-years investments, due to the conflict. Unfortunately, many teachers had to re-start their lives from nothing, affecting their personal well-being. As teachers are generally underpaid, the poor remuneration compounds the loss of assets and can exacerbate a lack of motivation and low job satisfaction amongst the

teacher workforces. This intersection of personal well-being and professional well-being can play a factor in teachers' classroom practices^[4,5].

To minimize the conflict's impact on children's educational and life outcomes, PlayMatters, in partnership with the LEGO Foundation, started an Emergency Response Mechanism (PM ERM) intervention in the conflict-affected areas of Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regions with the aim to complement other existing emergency response funds in Ethiopia to ensure the safety and health of disaster-affected populations through rapid and equitable emergency response. The PM ERM's goal was to deliver a coordinated, rapid, and effective humanitarian response to respond to the needs of children, focused on their health, safety, and educational wellbeing as necessary to be meaningfully engaged and impacted by the larger PlayMatters education technical assistance programming in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda. By the end of the project, the PM ERM was implemented in 201 integrated pre- and primary schools, reaching 172,457 children. The PM ERM centered Education in Emergencies (EiE) programming with school-based multi-sectoral approach across Education, Child Protection, Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH), and Health and Nutrition sectors. The PM ERM was implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Plan International, ChildFund, Children Believe Fund, Concern Worldwide, ImagineIDay, Faith in Action, Lutheran World Federation, Rift Valley Women and Children Development Organization, Save the Children Denmark, Tesfa Berhan Child and Family Development Organization, ZOA, in partnership with the LEGO Foundation.

As part of the program's integrated approach, the PM ERM contextualized PlayMatters' Learning through Play (LtP) methods, or participatory teaching methods, content to support the uptake of such methodologies in emergency contexts. While there is emerging evidence of the role of LtP teaching methods in low-resource contexts and contexts of protracted crisis, there is little evidence on the role of LtP participatory teaching methods in crisis, recovery, and fragile contexts. The present study investigates promising practices of LtP methodologies in such emergency contexts. Findings from this study can be used to support the design and implementation of LtP in future EiE interventions.

Learning through Play in Ethiopia

Education in Ethiopia

Active and participatory teaching methodologies have been integrated into Ethiopia’s national education policies stemming from the *Curriculum Framework for Ethiopian Education of 2010* and the *Education and Training Policy of 1994*^[6,7]. However, implementation research reveals gaps in the successful implementation of active teaching methods in the classroom^[8,9]. The Education Sector Development Plan VI identifies gaps in implementation due to gaps in teacher

capacity on pedagogical content knowledge as a primary barrier to implementation^[10]. Abebe and Woldehanna (2013) additionally found that additional barriers include a top-down curriculum without inputs from teachers themselves, perceived unacceptability and incongruence between active teaching principles and cultural beliefs, and a lack of institutional support to actually change teachers’ deep-rooted practice^[11].

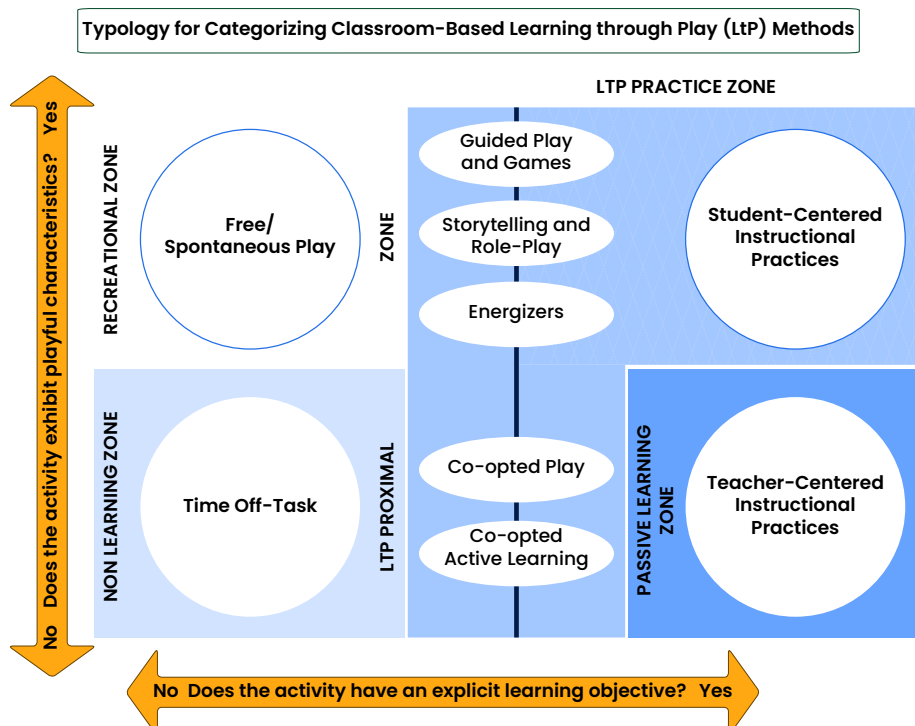
Learning through Play

Global evidence suggests that learning through play (LtP) and play-based teaching methods support children’s learning, holistic skills development (cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and creative skills), and well-being^[12–14]. Evidence also suggests that quality EiE can mitigate the negative effects of conflict and displacement that affect children^[15]. Thus, integrating LtP into EiE contexts may support quality education delivery, though there is scant evidence of the relevance, implementation, or impact of such interventions.

In the context of PlayMatters, Learning through Play (LtP) is an active teaching and learning method in which children learn through guided, hands-on, meaningful, play-based interactions in safe and inclusive environments. PlayMatters formative research developed the following

typology of classroom-based LtP methods in Figure 1^[16]. The typology places LtP methods and activities across two axes: whether the activity has an explicit learning objective in the X-axis and whether it exhibits characteristics of play – actively engaging, meaningful, socially interactive, iterative, and joyful – in the Y-axis^[12]. This typology identified 5 zones: the LtP Practice Zone, the LtP Proximal Zone, the Passive Learning Zone, the Non-Learning Zone, and the Recreational Zone. Activities are not fixed in zones and the introduction or removal of learning objectives or playful characteristics may shift activities between zones. Additionally, activities across the spectra can be beneficial for children’s holistic skills development and should be strategically employed by teachers according to their teaching objectives..

Figure 1. Typology for Categorizing Classroom-Based Learning through Play (LtP) Methods



PlayMatters ERM's Learning through Play Intervention

At the inception of the PM ERM, the team planned to use the PlayMatters@Home learning packets developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a core component of the LtP intervention. The packets were translated into Amharic by the PM ERM team. Upon contextualization and roll-out, the team discovered that the home learning packets were not as relevant as initially expected due to the fact that schools in the PM ERM were open and instructional activities were occurring while the home learning packets were designed for extended school closures. These packets were provided to Implementing Partners (IPs) and teachers with general use in pre-primary classrooms as a resource bank of LtP activities for teachers to apply in alignment with their lesson objectives.

Thus, the PlayMatters technical team shifted its LtP intervention focus to a teacher professional development (TPD) model by adapting PlayMatters Ethiopia's core LtP teacher training content to integrate conflict-sensitive approaches, EiE principles, and contextual relevance with technical training and support from the core PlayMatters intervention team. With this content, the PM ERM team conducted three 5-day Training of Trainers (ToT) in December 2022 and January 2023 in Debre Birhan, Hawassa, and Bahir Dar towns with IP technical staff and select Woreda

(Local District) Education (WEOs) and Zonal Education/Curriculum Experts to serve as Master Trainers. These Master Trainers cascaded the LtP training to teachers at local levels in February 2023, with some trainings lasting 3 days with select teachers in the school (Pre-primary through Grade 4 teachers), while other trainings lasted 5 days and took a whole school approach. Approaches varied depending on the size of the school and allocated budget, time, and space for the training.

Overarching guidance included to train at the woreda level rather than the school level, to conduct the training cascade in phases to reduce teacher absenteeism in schools, and to use the language most relevant to participants. Many IPs conducted the cascade in Amharic due to limited English proficiency, primarily at the pre-primary level, though translations were not uniformly conducted by the central PM ERM team. Additionally, guidance required a minimum dosage of 3 days of training but IPs implemented flexibly depending on budget and time. Such flexibility was required to balance quality assurance across the IPs and regions but needed to be adaptive regarding the scope of many IPs, the vast geographic coverage of and access constraints to some sites, and the capacity of IPs themselves.

Methodology

This study takes a qualitative exploratory approach to understanding promising LtP practices in an emergency response.

Research Questions

Given the dearth of evidence of LtP in EiE contexts, this qualitative study seeks to fill evidence gaps by addressing the following research question *"What are promising practices of Learning through Play (LtP) participatory teaching methods in crisis-affected settings in Ethiopia?"* and following sub-questions:

1. What are promising strategies for increasing the use of LtP participatory teaching methods in primary and pre-primary classes during education in emergency response?
2. How do teachers perceive the relevance of LtP teaching methods in crisis-affected settings?

Procedures

The research team consisted of one national Principal Investigator and two international Principal Investigators, all part of the PlayMatters Research and Learning team. The team also included two PlayMatters program staff who were trained in procedures, ethics, and tools, and collected data over a 2-week period in May 2023. Data were collected in conjunction with routine monitoring and support visits. At each study site, we spent 2 days collecting data from 6-8 participant teachers. With each teacher, we observed a full lesson (approximately 30-40 minutes) followed by an in-depth interview. Each teacher was assigned a random anonymized code to align the observation notes and the interview transcript.

Sample

This study took a purposive sampling approach due to a variety of factors. Of the 12 PM ERM implementing partner organizations (IPs), only 10 participated in the LtP training and intervention due to strategic priorities or security concerns that delayed access and implementation. The second factor affecting site selection was ongoing insecurity at the time of data collection that limited access to certain implementation sites. Five IP sites (ChildFund, Concern Worldwide, IRC, Tesfa Berhan Child and Family Development Organization, and ZOA) were selected for participation. School sites were selected in collaboration between IPs and WEOs. Based on these criteria, all data are from the Amhara region.

We collaborated with School Directors and WEOs to randomly select a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 8 teachers for participation, considering relative gender balance and distribution across grade levels. The primary criterion for participation was the teacher received the LtP training from the PM ERM intervention. In total, 37 teachers participated in this study and a summary of demographic characteristics of the sample can be found in Table 1 below. Despite attempts at gender parity, females are overrepresented in the sample due to some schools only providing training for pre-primary and lower grade (Grades 1-4) teachers, of which females are overrepresented. Additionally, for some of the sample schools located in towns, females are overrepresented in these schools due to government allocation practices. Table 2 below also describes the average, minimum, and maximum class sizes of students present during lesson observation, indicating a teacher-student ratio that exceeds the government standard as of writing of 1:30 in pre-primary classrooms and 1:40 in primary classrooms^[17].

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (n=37)

Sex	
Female	28
Male	9
Grade	
Pre-Primary	14
Grade 1	7
Grade 2	3
Grade 3	2
Grade 4	1
Grade 5	3
Grade 6	3
Grade 7	2
Grade 8	2
Total	37

Table 2. Class Size Characteristics (n=37)

Class Sizes	
Minimum	21
Maximum	80
Mean	44

Tools

This qualitative study consisted of two core components of data collection to deepen understanding of LtP practice.

Classroom Observations: Classroom observations were conducted using a semi-structured classroom observation tool. The tool had three components:

- 1. Before observation:** demographic data and assessment of LtP integration into the lesson plan
- 2. During observation:** checklist and open note-taking space organized by key domains related to LtP practice developed from PlayMatters LtP training content.
- 3. After observation:** assessment of the execution of LtP activities during the lesson.

As data were collected by program staff, data were captured in English and scanned for digital analysis. This tool can be found in Annex A.

Key Informant Interview: Interviews following lesson observations used a semi-structured interview

guide. The tool prompted participants to reflect on promising LtP practices observed in the lesson and explain why such methods were selected by the teacher. Additional questions sought to understand deviations from the lesson plan, benefits of the training, and additional gaps. Data were collected in Amharic and recorded using audio recorders. Recordings were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. This tool can be found in Annex A.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study took an iterative approach to coding and analysis using Dedoose. Classroom practices observed during lessons were documented and emic codes were identified from data itself. Then, a codebook was created using etic codes from the typology in Figure 1 (e.g., LtP Practice, LtP Proximal, Student-Centered Instructional Practice) and the emic codes themselves (e.g., Songs, Tone of Voice, TLMs). This codebook was also applied to the interview data drawing on questions asked and themes emerging from the data. Analysis was conducted by two researchers with significant discussion and preliminary analysis validated by the broader research team in an analysis workshop to ensure accurate findings.

Ethics

School Directors of every school and WEOs provided permission for data collection to take place. All teachers provided informed written consent prior to their participation. The Principal Investigators received social science research ethical certification from either CITI or Protecting Human Research Participants. Additional researcher team members were trained in ethical data collection, principles of 'Do No Harm' and inclusion in research processes. This study received ethical approval from IRC's Institutional Review Board under protocol EDU 1.00.031.

Findings

Lesson Planning and Delivery

Integrating LtP into the lesson plan and the execution of the lesson plan are critical to the quality implementation of LtP. Prior to lesson observation, we assessed teachers' lesson plans to assess the integration of LtP throughout the lesson. This assessment was made considering the relevance of such LtP activities to the stated lesson objective. We found that most teachers tried to integrate some aspects of LtP into their lesson plans, as depicted in Table 3 below, but

there are remaining gaps in teachers' ability or motivation to fully integrate quality LtP activities into lesson plans. We additionally observed that the LtP activities integrated into lesson plans do not fully account for differentiated instruction to include all learners for deeper learning. This could be due to the large class sizes that teachers have to navigate and being unable to fully understand the comprehension levels of their students.

Table 3. Summary of Teachers' Integration of LtP into Lesson Plans (n=37)

LtP Integration in Lesson Plan

Not integrated at all	3
Somewhat integrated	17
Well Integrated	17
Total	37

While the LtP training included sessions on lesson planning, some teachers struggled to identify relevant LtP activities for certain curricular topics which may have led to sub-optimal integration of LtP, as described by Teacher B5 below.

An additional reason for this discrepancy could be due to minimal time to lesson plan or the

lack of motivation due to low remuneration and low job satisfaction. Another potential reason is that a majority of teachers in this study were also affected by the conflict and were internally displaced with mental health stressors that may impact work performance or motivation.

“ All subjects are suitable for the LtP methodology, but there are some topics or content that are a bit challenging to teach through play. However, it doesn’t mean they are impossible to teach. We need to put in extra effort. – Teacher B5

Additionally, we found that most teachers executed some or all of their planned LtP activities, though some deviations to the lesson plan took place, as depicted in Table 4 below. Observations confirmed that all teachers taught the lesson objectives that they planned for but only some explicitly communicated that objective to the

students or connected it to previous lessons or students’ everyday lives. Further discussion on the remaining barriers to LtP that caused deviations in the execution of planned LtP activities will be addressed in section 3.5.

Table 4. Summary of Teachers’ Execution of Planned LtP Activities (n=37)

Execution of LtP Activities

No Activities Executed	3
Some Activities Executed	17
All Activities Executed	17
Total	37

Enabling Environment and Classroom Management

In addition to LtP performance, a key element of LtP and its implementation is the physical and psychosocial environment of the classroom. A core characteristic of LtP and EiE general principles is a positive and safe learning environment. As a result of the conflict, school compounds and classrooms have been looted, damaged, and destroyed. Researchers observed that school environments were rehabilitated, cleared, and cleaned to be a safe environment for learners.

Additionally, observations concluded that a positive and safe learning environment was identified in almost every classroom. We drew this conclusion based on four primary factors from thematic analysis.

The first factor was the apparent rapport and engagement between teacher and students in participating in lesson activities. This was observed through good facial expressions from the teacher, a warm and approachable tone of voice, positive discipline strategies, and the consistent use of praise and encouragement.

The second factor was the inclusion and or attempts at engagement of all children, with particular recognition of girls’ participation. Both girls and boys were given equal opportunities to participate and girls’ participation exceeded boys’ participation in some cases.

The third factor was the general attentiveness and engagement of students in lesson activities (e.g., smiling or appearing joyful or appearing

determined or concentrated in the lesson). The fourth factor was the child-friendliness and age-appropriateness of classroom furniture and aesthetic of the classroom (e.g., relevant posters hanging on the wall, TLMs stored in an organized manner). Many classrooms had relevant posters, age-appropriate classroom furniture (e.g., mats or small tables for pre-primary learners and combined desks for older learners) and the seating arrangement was organized for the teacher to walk around and groups to be formed, generally a “U” shape. In some classes, primarily in classes in which LtP was not as successful, student desks were not child-friendly or were organized in traditional rows, an issue in classes with larger numbers of students.

Creating a positive and inclusive environment is critical for students’ learning because it allows students to relax and engage in classroom activities and with their teacher and peers. This is particularly relevant in conflict-affected EiE contexts in which students may face additional social-emotional or mental health challenges.





When we encourage children and show appreciation, we notice that they become more motivated and engaged. I frequently use this technique as it helps students feel comfortable while learning. Instead of criticizing a student for making a mistake, we acknowledge their effort and ask for an alternative explanation. By doing so, we boost their confidence to express themselves, whether their answers are right or wrong. Motivation plays a crucial role in students' learning process.

– Teacher B3

Learning through Play Methods Observed

Using the typology identified in Figure 1 above, the following findings present the LtP methods observed in classrooms across the different zones, including examples and rationale for use by teachers.

LtP Practice Zone

The following activities outline LtP activities observed in the LtP Practice Zone as distinguished by student-centered instructional practices, guided play and games, storytelling and role-play, and energizers. Findings are presented from most prevalent to least prevalent in observations, though it should be noted that teachers strategically employed strategies and activities that aligned with their lesson objectives.

Teaching and Learning Materials

Student-centered instructional practices were observed in every classroom and were the most dominant type of activity observed in the LtP Practice Zone. Of these practices, the integration of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) into the teaching and learning process was most observed. TLMs included posters and visual aids of items related to the lesson objectives (e.g., a poster of the body for a hygiene lesson), models or examples of relevant items (e.g., a replicated structure for a cultural heritage lesson), and manipulatives (TLMs that allow for every child to physically touch and move around) for student use (e.g., stones or dried fruit seeds for counters in a mathematics lesson). Posters, visual aids, and everyday items were most prevalent in classrooms

as a way to provide concrete understanding of lesson topics. Hands-on materials for children were typically used for manipulation in basic numeracy and literacy lessons for counting or letter formation and identification. Many TLMs were created out of locally available materials from the environment or out of paper or cardboard, especially in pre-primary classrooms, while few teachers utilized manufactured TLMs or textbooks. When probed further about the reasoning behind the use of visual aids and physical models, teachers frequently cited the effect such strategies have on students' memory of concepts and their ability to relate it to their lives as described by Teacher C5 below:



The household items will help students understand self-hygiene. We first give the students a water bottle. They will first understand how they should properly clean the bottle with soap and a sponge to use to drink water. They also learn how they should clean their lunch box and their clothes as well. They also learn why they should comb their hair after washing it and brush their teeth. We teach them that they need to use a toothbrush, toothpaste, and water. We teach the students these things using the materials because they will have a better chance of remembering them. – Teacher C5

Additionally, the following quote from Teacher A1 elucidates the value in using manipulatives to concretize abstract concepts.

“ Children usually learn best through tactile experiences. It makes the learning more concrete for them. If we only rely on verbal instructions, they might not grasp the main point. That’s why we often choose corks, especially when teaching the place value of numbers. To teach place value effectively, we use an abacus, which consists of pallets, wires, and corks. This arrangement makes it easy to understand. If we were to put a six in the tens place without using concrete objects, the children might not comprehend it. So, by using real objects and arranging them as you observed, it becomes easier for them to understand how many corks should be placed in the tens or ones place. – Teacher A1

Pair/Group Work

The second most common student-centered instructional practice observed was pair work and group work. In some cases, teachers created groups based on the seating arrangements of the students while in others, teachers strategically grouped students based on ability levels to provide differentiated tasks and instructions. During group work, teachers were frequently observed walking around the room to check for understanding and ensuring participation.

In most cases, students were engaged and boys and girls were able to participate equally while some cases saw some students off-task, drifting into the Non-Learning Zone. Teachers elaborated that group work and pair work supported teachers’ assessment of students’ progress, opportunities for inclusive and equal participation of all students, and built students’ social and emotional competencies, as further described by Teacher A8.

“ Grouping the children has multiple benefits. First, when they work in teams, they practice the skill of arguing and expressing their opinions, which will be useful for them in the future. Second, they learn to take turns and actively participate in discussions. – Teacher A8

Demonstration of Knowledge

Approximately half of teachers included formative assessment strategies for students to demonstrate acquired knowledge. Teachers utilized a variety of strategies to do so, including independent practice in exercise books, group work that included share-outs and blackboard demonstration, and asking open-ended questions to the class. One teacher provided each student

with an individual board to think, respond, and share answers with the teacher. Teachers mostly provided equal opportunity for girls and boys to participate and made efforts to engage all students in these activities. Additionally, teachers used this information to inform group work, as well as scaffolded support for differentiated instruction.

Energizers and Songs

Another common LtP practice observed was the use of songs. In many observations, songs were directly connected to the lesson objective. They were frequently used as an introduction to the lesson, though some teachers used them to reinforce topics during the lesson or reiterate the main concepts at the end of the lesson. Songs were used in classes related to language and literacy (English and Amharic), social studies,

mathematics, and science, demonstrating its relevance across different subject matter. While it was more commonly observed in pre-primary contexts, some upper primary teachers also used songs. Teachers described that songs were primarily useful in engaging learners in an entertaining and joyful manner while also supporting retention of content, as described by Teacher D1 below.

“ Instead of just using words, we incorporate music into their learning. When they learn with music, they understand the concepts easily. They even sing the songs at home or anywhere they are, which helps them practice and remember the lessons. This approach works not only for first graders but also up until the 4th grade. When we rely solely on words or writing, they tend to forget. But with music and active learning, they remember the content better, and it’s very effective. – Teacher D1

Storytelling and Role-Play

Following songs, storytelling, folk tales, and role-play activities were observed in approximately a third of the classrooms. In these practices, teachers integrate lesson objectives like ethics, conflict-resolution, mathematics, and science into existing cultural stories or newly-created stories. One teacher described the importance

of connecting the curriculum to Ethiopian culture with storytelling as a medium for doing so. Additionally, like songs, teachers elaborated on the benefits of storytelling for purposes of memory and engagement as explained by teacher A5 below.

“ Using stories and different teaching methods like riddles helps children become aware of their surroundings. It enables them to explain their environment well. Additionally, it enhances their knowledge and makes learning memorable. – Teacher A5

In addition to stories, role-playing and demonstration were used to help students connect concepts to their daily lives. Some students dramatized cultural practice in a Grade

5 heritage lesson while other students pretended to be buyers and sellers in a market to practice communication skills and mathematics skills relevant to Grade 1 students' experiences.

Guided Play and Games

Some teachers integrated games and guided play activities into their lessons. In many cases, this required additional thinking and preparation for execution on the part of the teacher. Games were used throughout the lesson but primarily as a core component of content delivery or as an assessment strategy.

For example, a Grade 1 Mathematics teacher described using local games and other games for reinforcing counting and simple calculations. Teachers cited the benefits of developing physical and social skills, along with deepening learning, when integrating games as an LtP activity.

“ We motivate the children to play games integrated with the lessons so they would easily remember the things they learn. I believe this would help motivate them and increase their interest in the lessons. – Teacher C3

LtP Proximal Zone

The LtP Proximal Zone consists of activities that show promise of LtP yet lack a key component (either an explicit learning objective or exhibition of playful characteristics). The LtP Proximal Zone activities detailed below build on identified gaps in teacher capacity or other structural barriers that limit quality LtP practice.

Guided Play and Games

While some games employed by teachers were connected to learning objectives, a few classrooms observed included games that were irrelevant to the learning objective or the connection between the game and the lesson objective were not easy to identify. For example, one game involved counting coins to discuss Ethiopian currency in a Grade 1 mathematics lesson. Students collected and counted money, with the winner being the person who had collected the largest amount. In this game, the connection between the lesson objective of types of Ethiopian currency notes was not explicitly supported through the collection competition. Such examples of games are LtP proximal practices because teachers make attempts at incorporating playful activities yet struggled to fully think through the connection between the activity and the learning objective.

This study focused on classroom-based activities however it is important to note that few teachers utilized outdoor environmental spaces or activities to further enhance learning experiences.

Another example of guided play that falls under the LtP Proximal Zone was a game in which the teacher brought students to the front of the classroom to arrange the names of tributaries of the Nile River. However, this activity was difficult for all students to be engaged due to the classroom set up and the teacher was not able to properly scaffold the selected students' actions for all students to be part of the activity.

In this way, the activity supported the lesson objective on the Nile River and its importance and exhibited some playful characteristics but was not as effective as it was planned to be.

Energizers and Songs

While energizers and brain breaks can be effective methods for supporting the teaching and learning process in general, energizers often fall under the LtP Proximal Zone due to the lack of an explicit connection to the lesson objective. Teacher C8 describes movement towards LtP practice by implementing more student-centered, playful activities even though they do not reinforce the lesson. "If they [students] are tired or it is in the afternoon...I first give the children a warm-up because I want them to follow me with focused mind and in a way that they can focus. I think it has helped me in this way. I give warm-up first and go to my lesson." In some ways, energizers can lay the foundation for deeper LtP practice while when appropriate, teachers could strategically tailor

their energizers to coincide with lesson objectives to reinforce relevant concepts.

Similar to how energizers are used as entertainment, some teachers used songs in an introductory warm-up manner. In some classrooms, songs were employed but lacked an explicit connection to the learning objective. This cut across grade levels, with similar practices observed in pre-primary levels all the way up to upper primary levels. While songs for entertainment can be effective brain breaks or opportunities to re-engage learners, these activities fall under the LtP Proximal Zone because they are not able to deepen the learning objective.

Co-opted Play & Co-opted Active Learning

In a few classrooms, researchers observed insufficiency of TLMs in support of LtP, a sentiment corroborated by teachers themselves. While some teachers made attempts at creating materials, they frequently did not have enough materials for all learners to meaningfully engage with them or a lack of variety of TLMs to select from. Another observed gap was the use of visual aids that were not relevant to the lesson objective. Teachers often used every day items when they were relevant to the lesson but observations suggest that teachers lacked the creativity or confidence to sufficiently develop their own relevant TLMs. Without proper training on the production, storage, and use of TLMs, primarily made from locally-available materials, teachers will not be able to move into the LtP Practice Zone with quality use of TLMs. Another example observed was teachers selecting

few students to participate in an LtP activity at the minimal space in the front of the class but unable to have all learners participate due to overcrowded classes. This could be due too few models or manipulatives, visual aids that were not big enough or visible for all children, or materials that were not relevant to the lesson objective. Teachers described a lack of resources as a primary barrier to implementing LtP, an idea further discussed in section 3.5.1 below.

Another example of this that happened during a few observations was when the teacher attempted to engage the whole classroom in an LtP activity but failed to properly manage the classroom, causing the teacher to revert to rote lecture in order to regain control of the lesson.

Non-Learning Zone

The primary gaps identified in the Non-Learning Zone were areas of time-off task, particularly when it came to group work or individual students working at the blackboard. In these situations, students became distracted with themselves, their peers, or the environment, disengaging from learning activities. In some of these situations, teachers intervened and successfully re-engaged students in the learning activities while some teachers did not notice the unengaged students or were unable to bring students' attention back. The likely reason for such instances occurring is that teachers are unable to effectively group work in large classes.

Passive Learning Zone

Few teachers employed teacher-centered instructional methods through rote lecture. In the instances when this was observed, it was attributed to teachers' intentionally choosing this method given the focus of the lesson: reviewing content for examination purposes. The other times rote lecture was observed was previously described in Section 3.3.3 to maintain order.

Additional activities in the Passive Learning Zone arose due to the lack of student textbooks, particularly an issue in upper primary grades. Consequently, teachers spent significant time writing text from the one teacher guidebook that they had onto the chalkboard for students to copy verbatim into their personal exercise books. This created significant loss of time as students were not actively engaging with the textbook material as a learning resource.

Recreational Zone

As this study focused on classroom-based lesson observations, recreational free play time was not observed.

Perceived Benefits of Learning through Play

Shifts in Perception and Practice

Teachers described a shift in their teaching practice as a result of the LtP intervention. This shift is two-fold, first in their perception of LtP and its role in the teaching and learning process and the second being the actual implementation of LtP in their lessons. This is elucidated in the following quotes.

“ We were previously using the teaching methods we learned in college. But after taking that training, we now integrate games into each lesson... Integrating games with the lesson not only brings joy to the children but to the teachers as well. You feel the joy of the kids in the class. So, it is important to integrate games into your lessons. – Teacher C6

Compared to the previous method, which was tiresome and boring, the teaching process after the training is much better. I also gained valuable knowledge from the training. I noticed how the children started to enjoy the teaching process. Previously, I mainly relied on teaching through writing on the blackboard with a few flashcards. But after the training, with materials provided by [IP], I can use any material at any time to teach the students, which is also enjoyable for me. The students' ability to receive and retain lessons has significantly improved with the teaching through play method. I now have the ability to utilize this method effectively, and the teaching-learning process is in a good state. – Teacher D2

More specifically, teachers reported that their lesson planning skills have improved to incorporate LtP methodologies, as described by Teacher B2 below. This aligns with our findings that most teachers integrated LtP into their lesson plans well.

“ The things I learned or included in the training are important because they help me in preparing the lesson plan, using interactive teaching methods, understanding each student's knowledge, and engaging them in daily activities that promote learning while having fun. I apply the techniques from the training, and they all benefit me. – Teacher B2

It should be noted, however, that not all teachers embraced a comprehensive change in teaching practice but rather viewed LtP as a complementary approach to teaching and learning as described by Teacher E2.

“ You assume that traditional methods of education are inadequate, but that is not the case. We firmly believe in the value of traditional approaches. However, in the context of innovation and progress, we acknowledge the need to incorporate modern techniques alongside traditional ones. Let me clarify one thing: our commitment to preserving and promoting traditional methods remains unwavering. Therefore, in our case, the ideal approach lies in a balanced combination of both traditional and modern educational practices. We understand the importance of adapting to the changing times, but our core values and principles remain unchanged. It is crucial to strike a harmonious balance between tradition and innovation. – Teacher E2

Student Engagement

Additionally, teachers overwhelmingly held positive perceptions of LtP and described the relationship between LtP and increased student engagement in classroom activities. As it is observed and reported by the teachers, the LtP intervention contributed to the implementation of active learning methods and engaged both teacher and students as part of the lesson. This is further explained by the quotes below. Classroom observations confirm promising motivation, engagement and participation of students in the classroom activities.

“ However, now when students engage in practical work, they immediately see its value and relevance. This hands-on experience serves as a convincing proof of what they learn, making the learning process more enjoyable. The students, just like myself, are happy about this approach. In fact, if some students are not given the chance to participate, they become really disappointed. This shows that student participation is high, and their interest in learning and applying knowledge has increased significantly. I truly believe that this is an excellent teaching method. – Teacher E8

It has helped us a lot. LtP taught us that we should approach the students with games, stories, and music. There’s another material also that we use to teach the students about the five senses. There is material to practically teach them. It makes me happy that we have the support of these materials for our lessons. Both teachers and students do not get bored with the learning-teaching process. – Teacher C5

Teacher and Student Joy

In addition to deeper engagement, teachers reported that LtP has brought increased joy, relaxation, and stress relief for both students and teachers alike. This is particularly relevant given that both teachers and students in these contexts have experienced the negative effects of conflict. For students, LtP is seen as supportive of children’s happiness and an escape from the harsher realities of hunger, loss, and other conflict-related stressors that can place additional pressure on them. For teachers, LtP and its training has helped teachers to strengthen their relationship with students and facilitate smoother lesson planning, delivery, and assessment processes.

“ The LTP training is highly significant. It has brought us immense joy and made the learning and teaching process effective and engaging for the children. It has also made us more interesting as educators and has allowed us to work happily. It’s even hard for me to express how much it has changed us. I mean, it has also transformed the lives of the children. It has facilitated a smooth learning and teaching process. – Teacher A3

“But now, when we started using [LtP], it has strengthened the relationship we have with our children. – Teacher A1

Reduced Dropout and Absenteeism

Teachers also reported that LtP contributed to the reduction of dropout and absenteeism from the school, which is very important to improve the quality of education and ensure every child benefits from education. This can be best explained by the following quote.

“ Yes, the organization has made significant contributions to this school. Previously, many students dropped out of school due to a lack of educational resources. However, despite the fact that some students may be missing from class for a few days, the students are currently attending courses on a regular basis. Almost all of them show up for class.... – Teacher A6

Barriers to Implementing Learning through Play

Despite promising implementation of LtP in classrooms, barriers remain that inhibit teachers' ability to plan for or execute LtP activities.

Structural Barriers

Most educators identified challenges related to structural barriers. Firstly, the shortage of quality and suitable classrooms to accommodate their class sizes is a barrier. With continued instability, internal movement, and service delivery in PM ERM schools, enrollment has increased in schools, placing additional strains on the existing infrastructure and class allocations. This limited the types of LtP activities that were implemented, and led some activities to be LtP Proximal Activities, such as only being able to do a demonstration with a small group in the front of the classroom instead of the whole class being involved.

“ Our school, by the way, lacks a suitable number of classrooms. There are only two grade one classes, for example. About a hundred and twenty students attend these two classes to learn. I'm hoping that this will be fixed in the future. – Teacher D4

Additionally missing or insufficient TLMs, such as laboratory equipment, textbooks, and other play materials. These limit teachers' ability to practice some LtP activities requiring the participation of all students or sufficient TLMs to cater for their class sizes. This is particularly relevant in areas that were heavily affected by the conflict in which school materials were damaged or destroyed. This issue is further exacerbated by the change in the national curriculum, leading to insufficient access to textbooks.

“ I would like to explain that this area has been heavily affected by the war. Many things in the school compound have been destroyed, and resources are limited. For example, in my class, there are thirty-seven students, but in other classes, such as kindergarten and grade one, the number of students is larger, often exceeding fifty. Teaching in May and June becomes particularly challenging due to the intense heat. Furthermore, we have a shortage of teachers, materials, and classrooms. We face difficulties in helping students in other shifts due to the limited availability of classrooms. Additionally, there is a scarcity of materials, including textbooks, student resources like media and lab chemicals. These shortages pose challenges in our school. – Teacher D6

Classroom observations confirmed that some of these issues affected teachers' execution of LtP as planned. For example, the lack of student textbooks reduced the amount of student engagement and affected time allocations in the lesson plan. Thus, addressing these structural barriers is critical to supporting teachers to fully practice LtP methods in the classroom.

Importance of Holistic Responses

In conflict-affected contexts, holistic EiE responses are needed to support quality education delivery. Inter-sectoral approaches that support children's physical development (Health and Nutrition, WASH, and Child Protection) and psychosocial development and well-being (through mainstreaming gender, inclusion, and psychosocial support) are critical to supporting LtP and quality education delivery. The holistic EiE response played a critical factor in developing an enabling environment through various rehabilitation activities (e.g., hand-washing facilities, latrines, MHM rooms, etc.) and trainings (e.g., Case Management Training, MHPSS Training, Hygiene Management Training, etc.), following the physical and psychological damage resulting from the conflict.

The PM ERM also provided some school feeding support to select learners but the quote from Teacher A4 below reveals persistent gaps in education programming and the need for stronger inter-sectoral support. More positively, teachers described the relevance and success of LtP for engaging and including girls equitably in their classes. However, one teacher noted a lack of capacity to provide targeted support for children with disabilities.

“ Considering that students may come to class on an empty stomach or without having had lunch, they still enjoy the lesson because of the teacher’s engaging activities in the classroom. – Teacher A4

Parental and Community Perceptions

Teachers also described a need to include awareness sessions for parents to increase the acceptability of LtP teaching methods by parents and the community in general. LtP and the word ‘play’ is misunderstood by education stakeholders and, while teachers have gained a deeper understanding of LtP, stakeholders with influence on teachers’ practices require the same engagement and awareness. The LtP intervention did not plan for comprehensive parent and community awareness sessions, a key gap raised by teachers like Teacher D5 below.

“ We are forced to keep the kids in the classroom and teach them everything because society believes they are not learning and are only playing all the time. This puts stress on the kids. Society might misinterpret the word ‘play’ and not understand that it can be a teaching tool. So, creating awareness in society is necessary. – Teacher D5

Additional Training Needs

The implementation of LtP has shown improvements in the teaching and learning process as reported by all teachers and observed in most lesson observations. However, teachers requested additional refresher trainings on LtP methods. While the initial training supported teachers’ initial uptake of LtP, further TPD is needed to ensure the sustainability and deeper integration of LtP. More specifically, teachers requested further pedagogical content knowledge and strategies for integrating LtP across different curricular subjects. A gap explored previously in Section 3.1 is the need for additional training on how to integrate LtP strategies creatively and effectively into lesson plans.

Teachers also requested support in the creation of locally-available TLMs and technology solutions to support the teaching and learning process as described below. They also requested additional training on strategies for inclusion, particularly for children with disabilities. The training provided covered general LtP principles and practices and did not cover the aforementioned topics deeply. Thus, these areas represent key opportunities for refinement and additional TPD to adequately support LtP integration in schools.

“ Additional support would be helpful, particularly in terms of skill development. By skill development, I mean, for instance, producing teaching materials using local resources. However, the production process itself requires specific and detailed training. Currently, we are producing materials based on our assumptions. – Teacher E7

Training was not enough because the training was given only for three days. It’s not possible to say we’ve got a lot of knowledge in three days because it was quite a race to finish...But, for now, if we were given at least ten days or so of training, and if there was continuous assessment, that would be really nice. – Teacher D3

Teachers also requested for stronger continuous professional development mechanisms, particularly from supportive supervision mechanisms through School Directors, WEOs, or other relevant instructional leaders. Teachers requested LtP to be incorporated into their supervision structures to provide relevant and actionable feedback and support, as described by teacher D2 below. While some of these actors were engaged as Master Trainers, some teachers reflected that current monitoring and supportive supervision tools do not reflect LtP and are therefore receiving insufficient support from such structures. The project’s technical strategy did not fully account for strengthening such TPD mechanisms and such gaps in government LtP expertise are a barrier to LtP integration. Such practical, school-based TPD can support teachers’ lesson planning and delivery to integrate LtP with quality.



Because I use the teaching through play method, my supervisor should also be familiar with it. However, their evaluation system is based on the traditional method. Therefore, since my approach is different, it would be helpful to have an additional teacher who uses the same method.

– Teacher D2

Given changing teacher assignments and recruitment, teachers also requested an expansion of the training for other teachers, particularly for those who are new to schools. Stronger peer learning mechanisms and opportunities to share experiences was not fully integrated into the rollout strategy. This would increase the sustainability of LtP integration across the school. It is important to note that additional training, especially on creation of TLMs, do not fully address the structural constraints that teachers navigate but beyond the scope of this intervention.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, we recommend the following actions.

Recommendations for PlayMatters ERM Stakeholders

- Develop a roadmap for supporting teachers' school-based continuous professional development on expressed LtP-related training needs. Consider systems like peer learning, peer coaching, and supportive supervision mechanisms that can provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on their own teaching practice and find mutual support. Consider the feasibility of innovative TPD systems that blend technology and face-to-face training, where appropriate.
- Celebrate and recognize the progress teachers have made towards integrating LtP into their teaching practice.
- Hosting a parent or community awareness session highlighting teachers' successes can help institutionalize LtP in schools.
- Develop guidance or allocate remaining resources to contribute to the acquisition or development of TLMs.

Recommendations for Education in Emergencies Practitioners, Researchers, Policymakers, and Donors

Recommendation 1: Teachers in emergency and recovery contexts desire to and can implement LtP in their classrooms. Framing LtP as a core component of education quality in EiE response within project design, strategy, and quality standard documents can strengthen learning and well-being in emergency contexts.

- Practitioners and program managers should integrate LtP into EiE programs.
- Policymakers should integrate LtP into relevant teacher training and EiE policies.
- Further research, particularly longitudinal and/or external research, on the effectiveness and impact of LtP on children's holistic learning outcomes and well-being in these contexts can strengthen the case for LtP implementation.

Recommendation 2: Where possible, LtP should be integrated into teacher training and development programs in EiE response, in connection with long-term strategic planning to transition into mainstream education systems. Building from teachers' existing teaching practices and cultural knowledge, such as games, stories, songs as observed, can strengthen opportunities for

integrating LtP. Understanding and responding to teachers requests for further professional development opportunities and topics can increase their skills and motivation to implement quality LtP.

- Practitioners and program managers should design conflict-sensitive and contextually-relevant LtP interventions that center the practical application of LtP to teachers' daily practice.

Recommendation 3: Provide scaffolded and targeted support to teachers' lesson planning practices and execution through targeted training and continuous professional development, particularly coaching or peer learning opportunities, to brainstorm solutions and opportunities to integrate LtP into all curricular subjects.

- Practitioners and program managers should consider multi-pronged TPD opportunities, particularly including school-based continuous professional development.
- Policymakers should ensure that continuous professional development guidelines integrate LtP methods.

- Donors should consider longer-term funding to support consistent quality TPD.
- Further research is needed on successful and innovative models for teachers' continuous professional development that change teachers' methodologies.

Recommendation 4: Always aim to allocate sufficient resources to minimize structural barriers to LtP implementation in emergency settings, while maintaining a strong focus on teacher continuous professional development for classroom based LtP practice. Create and uphold standards for basic support to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive.

- Practitioners and program managers should provide material support and appropriate training to ensure an age-appropriate, inclusive, and playful school environment is maintained.
- Donors should consider financing school rehabilitation, classroom construction, and TLM distribution efforts to fill resource gaps in emergency response.

Recommendation 5: Consider the broader socio-ecological environment that teachers operate in. Training system actors with the mandate to support teachers through supportive supervision and coaching are critical to sustaining changes in teachers' practices. Parental and community awareness of the benefits of LtP can support teachers' uptake of LtP.

- Practitioners and program managers should include training for system actors on LtP to support teachers through continuous TPD. They should also include parental and community awareness components in programming, with specific calls for support to teachers.
- Further research is needed on the impact of parental engagement on teachers' uptake of LtP and the sustainability of LtP methods in schools.

Limitations

Ongoing security concerns limited access to schools and delayed data collection, potentially affecting results. Data collection took place near the end of the academic year, meaning that some classroom observations took place without content delivery but rather summary sessions.

Because this was conducted by project staff in connection with routine monitoring, there may have been a positivity bias in the interview process. Additionally, despite attempts at reassuring teachers that the observation was not an evaluation of their performance, they may have performed differently than under normal circumstances. Thus, we recognize the findings of this study are not indicative of long-term change, they highlight opportunities for LtP to be integrated into emergency response and what LtP implementation looks like in practice.

Conclusion

In contexts of complex emergencies, LtP and participatory teaching methods can be integrated into education in emergency response interventions to provide quality education to conflict-affected children. This study provides a deeper understanding of promising LtP practices, revealing that most teachers have made meaningful attempts to integrate LtP into their lesson plans. In practice, teachers were successful in implementing LtP through a variety of strategies and practices including but not limited to songs, storytelling, role-play, games, and student-centered instructional practices like group work and the use of teaching and learning materials.

Teachers were also successful in creating inclusive and positive learning environments, both physically and psychologically, emphasizing active praise and encouragement and warm facial expressions and tone of voice. Despite such promising LtP implementation, barriers remain. For some teachers, time to intentionally plan and deliver LtP-integrated lessons was a barrier while others still required additional training and support, often on subject knowledge, to better integrate LtP into their lessons.

Additional structural barriers like insufficient teaching and learning materials also limited LtP implementation. Amidst such barriers, there are opportunities for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to strengthen LtP implementation in conflict-affected Ethiopia and other EiE responses to ensure quality education for all children.

References

1. UNHCR. Refugee statistics. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>
2. IOM. (2022). Ethiopia national displacement report 11. Retrieved from <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ethiopia-national-displacement-report-11-december-2021-february-2022>
3. OCHA. (2022). *Ethiopia - humanitarian update situation report, 27 Jun 2022*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-27-jun-2022>
4. OCHA. (2021). *Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia humanitarian update situation report*.
5. Hina, Q., Zamir, S., & Nudrat, S. (2014). Impact of employee benefits on job satisfaction of teachers at higher level. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(7), 122-129.
6. Ministry of Education, Ethiopia. (2010). *Curriculum Framework For Ethiopian Education (Kg-Grade 12)*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
7. Ministry of Education, Ethiopia. (1994). *Education and Training Policy*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
8. Keski-Mäenpää, K. (2018). *Active learning in Ethiopian school context: Widely phrased, poorly practiced*. The European Conference on Education. <https://papers.iafor.org/submission42140/>
9. Serbessa, D. D. (2006). Tension between traditional and modern teaching-learning approaches in Ethiopian primary schools. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 9(1), 123-140.
10. Ministry of Education, Ethiopia. (2021). *Education Sector Development Programme VI (ESDP VI)*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
11. Abebe, W., & Woldehanna, T. (2013). *Teacher training and development in Ethiopia: Improving education quality by developing teacher skills, attitudes and work conditions*. Young Lives.
12. Zosh, J. M., Emily J, H., Jensen, H., Neale, D., Liu, C., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). *Learning through play: A review of the evidence*. LEGO Foundation, Billund, Denmark. https://cms.learningthroughplay.com/media/wmtlmbe0/learning-through-play_web.pdf.
13. Tominey, S. L., & McClelland, M. M. (2011). Red light, purple light: Findings from a randomized trial using circle time games to improve behavioral self-regulation in preschool. *Early Education & Development*, 22(3), 489-519.
14. Toub, T. S., Rajan, V., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2016). Guided play: A solution to the play versus learning dichotomy. *Evolutionary perspectives on child development and education*, 117-141.
15. Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Baum, R., Gambon, T., & Lavin, A. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3).
16. Abraha, A, Ezati, B, Ferrans, S., Kwok, J, Raphael, C., Smiley, A, & Ssekusu, P. (n.d.). *Understanding perspectives and practices of "Learning through Play" in East African refugee and host country schools*. PlayMatters.
17. በኢ.ፌ.ዴ.ሪ የትምህርት ሚኒስቴር የቅድመ መደበኛ ትምህርት ስታንዳርድ. (2017). ትምህርት ሚኒስቴር.

Annex: Tools

Teacher's Name: _____

Sex: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

Name of School: _____

Woreda: _____

Subject: _____

Topic: _____

Time: _____

Number of Learners, Boys:	Girls:	Total:
_____	_____	_____
Special Needs, Boys:	Girls:	Total:
_____	_____	_____

Prior to Lesson Observation

1. Did the teacher consent to their participation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (*IF NO, STOP AND DO NOT CONTINUE)
2. Did the teacher have a lesson plan?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. To what extent does the lesson plan integrate LtP activities?
 - a. Not integrated at all
 - b. Somewhat integrated
 - c. Well integrated

*** Use Next Page during lesson observation**

After Lesson Observation

1. Did the teacher execute LtP activities as planned?
 - a. Yes – all activities
 - b. Yes – some activities
 - c. No

LtP Elements/Domains

Facilitator Actions/Classroom Activities or Behaviors Observed

Teachers **connect** the academic lesson/ theme to students' **prior knowledge and lived experiences**, could include:

- Teacher clearly states objective at start of the lesson.
- Teacher uses strategies like "thinks aloud" to model language/reasoning.
- Teacher returns to lesson objective/ explains progress toward goal at the end of the activity.

Teachers facilitate a **variety of teaching and learning** activities, could include:

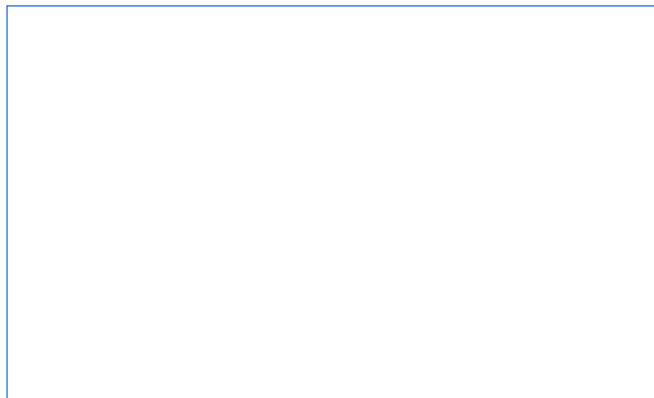
- Multiple activities linked to lesson objective
- Teacher facilitates different types of activities to teach a lesson objective ranging from whole class to small group to independent practice.
- Teacher uses songs, body movements, and games aligned with lesson objectives
- Storytelling or role play.
- Use of visuals and everyday items.

Children are actively engaged with their **teacher, peer, and materials** through **group work, pair work and discovery/exploration**, could include social activities such as:

- Small group activity.
 - Pair-share activity.
 - Time to speak and share ideas/opinions
- And/or student interaction (hands-on) with materials such as:
- Books/reading materials.
 - Counters/math materials.
 - Science kits or materials.
 - Natural items (e.g., sticks, stones).

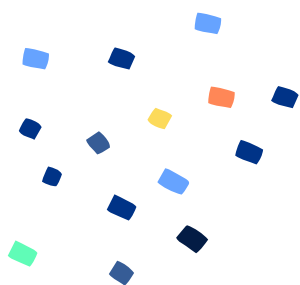
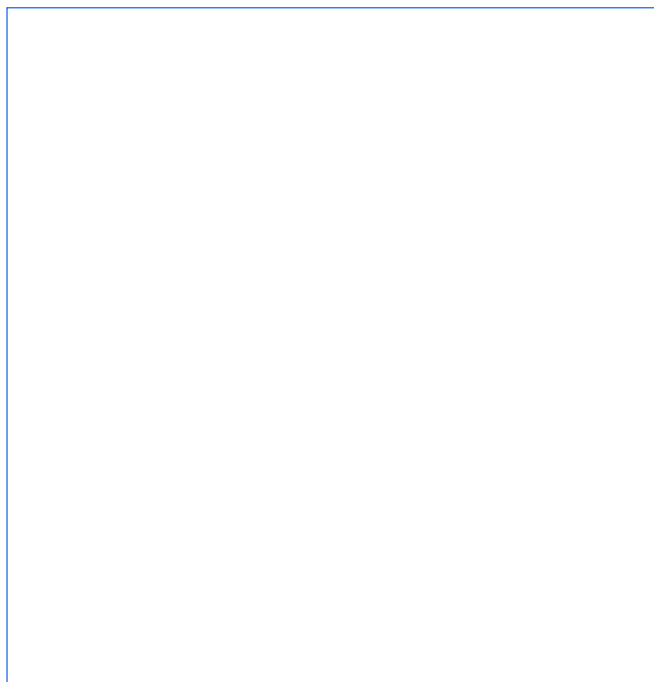
Teachers use (inclusive) and interactive **assessment of learning** progress, could include:

- Asking open-ended questions.
- Walk-and-check.
- Asking students to demonstrate their understanding individually or in small groups.
- Games aligned with lesson objectives.



Teachers create a positive, safe and inclusive learning environment that motivates students to learn, could include:

- Teacher uses a friendly tone and body language.
- Teacher praises students' efforts.
- Teacher uses positive behavioral management strategies (e.g., breaks, energizers, routines).
- Teacher avoids criticizing or using other harsh practices with students
- Teacher makes efforts to engage all students in the lesson.
- Teacher uses inclusive language (gender and minority group-sensitive)
- Teacher avoids showing preference for certain students.





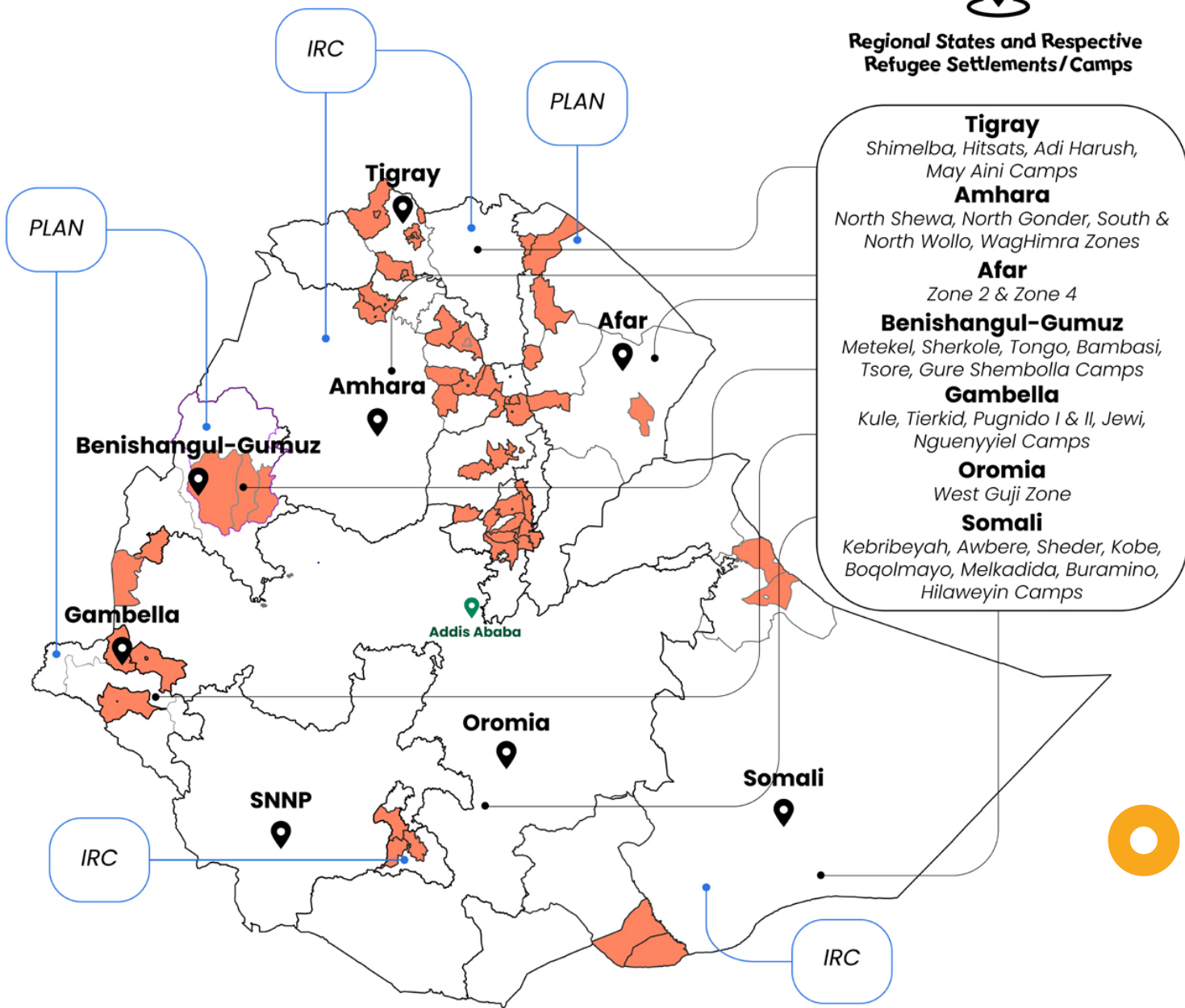
Zenebech Yesuf, a Grade II teacher interacts with learners during a mathematics lesson.

Derk Weyra Primary School,
PlayMatters ERM, Dessie, Kombolcha,
Ethiopia





Regional States and Respective Refugee Settlements/Camps



Regional Office

Plot 8, Lower Naguru East Road, Kampala, Uganda
 Tel: +256 (0) 394 822 224, +256 (0) 200 900 697
www.playmatters.org

Anne Smiley (Deputy Project Director, Technical and Research)
 Email: Anne.Smiley@rescue.org

Implemented in Partnership with



The LEGO Foundation