

# Enhancing Quality Instruction in Pre-primary (EQUIP) Project

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Rwanda, 2019– 2021



# Introduction

APIE received a grant from UKAID Direct's Small Charities Challenge Fund, with match funding from the Grille Foundation and APIE to achieve system-wide positive change in the attitude towards and in the capability to deliver high quality pre-primary education across Rwanda. The EQUIP course was developed as an e-learning platform to respond to the training needs of early childhood education (ECE) teachers in rural districts in Rwanda.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- 1) To develop an accessible, high quality training programme with online modules for ECE teachers in Rwanda
- 2) To increase the knowledge, skills and competence of ECE teachers across three districts in Rwanda
- 3) To increase the recognition of the importance of ECE in Rwanda

This report shares the project's achievements, challenges, lessons learnt, and policy recommendations to continue improving the quality of ECE in Rwanda. Data for this report is derived from a baseline assessment conducted in 2019, focus group discussions and online evaluations conducted in 2020, and an endline assessment conducted in 2021. The photographs and case study are shared with consent and names have been changed.

REGISTERED CHARITY NAME: A Partner in Education  
REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1133224  
COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER: 07079874  
REGISTERED ADDRESS: 91 Eaton Terrace, London, SW1W 8TW



# Project outcomes

## Objective 1: Online training course

The EQUIP course was created, pilot tested, and modified by APIE staff and validated by REB in 2019. The course was designed to be self-conducted by ECE teachers on a computer at school via flash disk, with support provided by the head teachers. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the course was uploaded to a website. ECE teachers and head teachers were supported to access and complete the course online using a device with internet access, such as a smartphone. Funds were distributed via mobile money to purchase data bundles. A total of 455 ECE teachers and HTs have engaged with the course as of January 2021.

174 fully  
completed  
course



281 partially  
completed  
course



455 engaged  
in EQUIP  
course



“Now, I know it is important to love the children and not just come in and teach. The EQUIP course made me love teaching kids.” ~ECE Teacher

“It is important to teach my lessons with all my heart and to prepare in advance is helpful.”

~ECE Teacher

## Objective 2: Training teachers

Baseline observations revealed the need to increase the knowledge and improve the competence of the ECE teachers in five areas:

- Facilitation of play-based learning
- Creation and use of teaching aids
- Adoption of inclusive education practices
- Administration of positive discipline
- Use of indoor and outdoor learning environment

All five areas are key components of the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) adopted by MINEDUC in 2015.

As a result of the project, a number of improvements were observed. The ECE teachers:

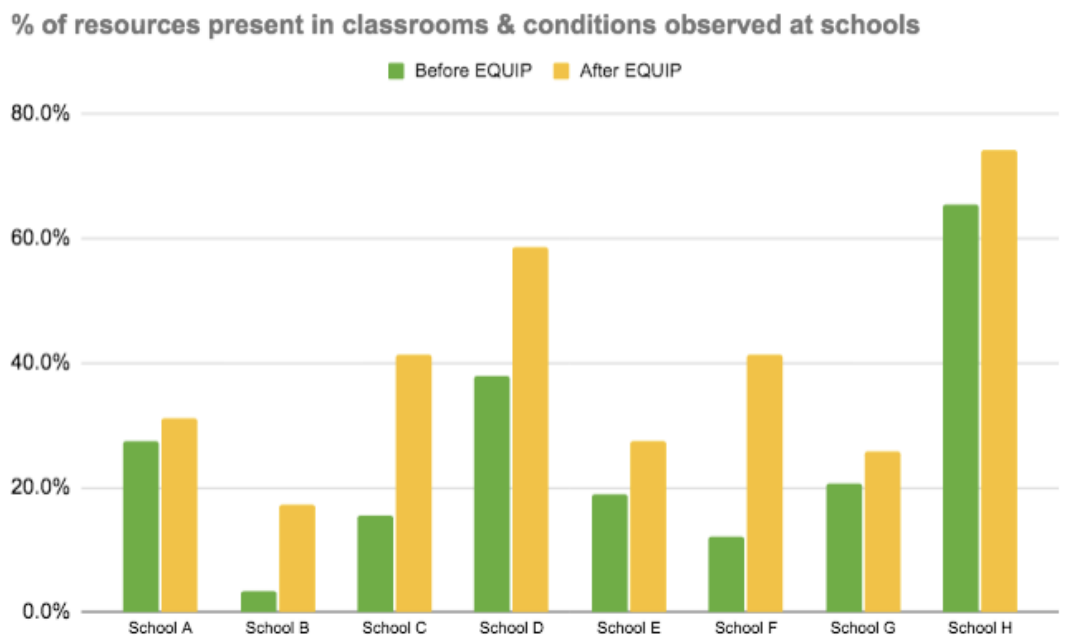
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|--|--|---|
| ✓ Develop lesson plans based on the CBC                | ✓ Talk with children & encourage them to share ideas | ✓ Know how to use ICT for their own learning                      |
| ✓ Praise & motivate children                           | ✓ Engage with parents                                | ✓ Feel confident & capable  |
| ✓ Play with children inside & outside of the classroom | ✓ Create & use teaching aids with local resources    | ✓ Teach with differentiation; include children with special needs |

“Before, the nursery teachers used to make the students sit in one place. Now, the students move around...and play inside and outside. They do not get bored.”

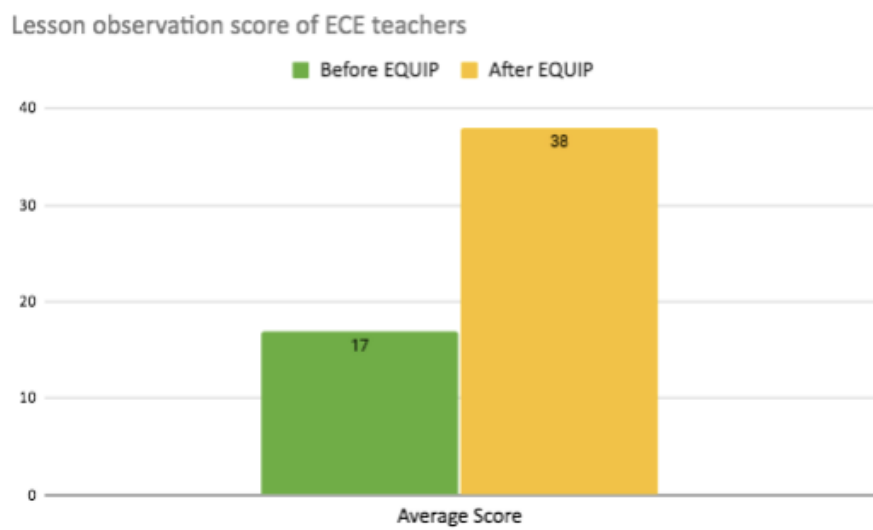
~Head Teacher



A checklist of 62 items was used to assess the presence of local and purchased resources and a copy of the CBC, and indoor and outdoor conditions at the nursery schools. Results indicate an average improvement of 14% across eight schools from baseline to endline.



ECE teachers were observed teaching a lesson at baseline and endline by APIE staff and an independent consultant. The tool assessed use of the CBC, teacher competency, learner engagement, and inclusive education strategies, with a maximum possible score of 68. Results show a 30% increase in average scores from baseline to endline.



“Before, I used to think that the nursery section was not important. Now, I think the nursery is just as important as the primary and secondary sections. ~Head Teacher

## Objective 3: Attitudes towards ECE

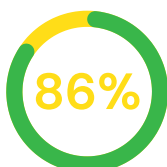
APIE gathered feedback from headteachers on the course and their attitude towards early childhood education.



recommend the course to other HTs and ECE teachers

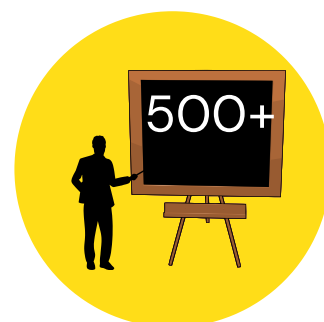


report the course changed their understanding of and attitude toward early childhood education



recognize the importance of early childhood education

Since the inception of the EQUIP project in 2019, over 500 ECE teachers have been added to the government payroll in Rwanda. Previously, there were less than 50 ECE teachers on the government payroll.



“Now, our nursery students are sharp, active, and relaxed around the ECE teacher because she plays with them.”

~Head Teacher





## Case Study: Esther's Story

*"I am a nursery teacher and I have 68 children in my classroom. Before EQUIP, I had two main challenges: First, I have many children of different age groups in my class. Second, I was not trained in ECE. So, I was not confident and did not know exactly what to teach. The course exceeded my expectations and helped me address my challenges. This course taught me how to use teaching aids that match my lesson plan, to have a theme of the day, and the importance of learning through play.*

*I never used to pay attention to each child or spend much time with the children with special needs. Now, I know about inclusive education and using different centres in my classroom. I also learnt that any available resource at home can be used as a teaching aid, as long as it does not harm children and it is visible enough for them to see and touch.*

**“ This course taught me how to use teaching aids ... and the importance of learning through play.”**

*This course included more details compared to previous trainings. The videos, pictures, and photographs provided examples of what we can use in the classroom. It helped me to better understand how to use best practices in my teaching.*

*It was a challenge to access the course. I do not have a smartphone and I wanted to complete the course. I asked many people to please let me use their phone. Finally, my roommate agreed to lend me her phone for a few hours every day."*

# Findings and recommendations

An online evaluation of the course (total responses = 97) supports the following recommendations to successfully scale up the EQUIP course at national level and to provide further supported related to ICT and internet access.

## FINDINGS

- Only 22% of schools had internet access
- Only 22% of ECE teachers were able to complete course without ICT assistance
- 48% agree that ICT competence of ECE teachers improved with EQUIP
- 99% of ECE teachers agree EQUIP course helped their professional development
- 53% of ECE teachers live in extreme poverty (on less than \$1.90/day)



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase internet access at schools / Provide funds for data bundles
- Provide ICT training to ECE teachers
- Roll out EQUIP course across Rwanda
- Include ECE teachers' salary in MINEDUC budget



# Conclusion

Head teachers and ECE teachers benefited from the EQUIP course, reporting increased self-confidence and knowledge of the CBC and ECE methodology, and improved ability in teaching and disciplinary methods.

They also report positive attitudinal change toward ECE, recognising the importance of ECE and the unique social, emotional, and intellectual needs of this age group.

These changes will ultimately impact children in pre-primary schools. EQUIP Phase II is currently being administered to Year 1, 2 and 3 ECE students at all 16 teacher training colleges in Rwanda as part of their pre-service training.



“This course was very helpful. I am so glad that I completed the course and I highly recommend it for other nursery teachers.”



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