



The Perivoli Schools Trust Early Child Care and Education Model:

Exploring lived experiences and wider social impacts

April 2024

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Initial Reflections and Emerging Themes

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Background & Context

Following completion of data collection at the end of Year 2 (December 2023), this paper provides a brief summary of some of the themes which are beginning to emerge from the qualitative investigation into the Perivoli School's Trust Teacher Training Programme (PST TTP) project in the three sampled regions viz Otjozondjupa, //Karas and Kavango East. All audio-recordings have now been transcribed and are catalogued.

The purpose here is to offer a short overview based upon (a) the project team's initial reflections on their experiences of talking to participants during the four phases of data collection in the three regions (both in-person and online), and (b) the early and initial coding process of approx. 15% of the data sample*.

It should be noted that this summary is not underpinned by a formal thematic analysis of the qualitative data set, and as such, does not indicate nor report the findings of the project. The analysis of the data set continues and is not expected to reach completion until the latter half of this year (2024). For that reason, the following reflections and themes are not presented in response to the study's research questions, but instead, are offered to share an initial illustration of some of the observations of the team, and some of the thoughts, feelings and opinions shared by some of the participants. The summary points below are not an exhaustive list, but an indication of some of the themes that have started to emerge during the initial data analysis process.

In respect of the process of carrying out the study and collecting the data at the six selected Centres, the research team felt welcomed, and in general, through a number of interactions, participants indicated that they felt able to talk openly and honestly about their thoughts and experiences of the PST TTP.

**For ease of reference, the total sample for the project is 86 adult participants. This figure comprises 54 interviews (parents and caregivers, Educators, and Perivoli Schools Trust staff) and 4 talking circles with a range of community stakeholders in the Early Childhood Development sector (n=32). Roles held by talking circle participants include, but are not limited to, Reception Class and Lower Primary School Teachers (current and retired), Community Leaders, Community Development Workers, a Councillor, Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MGEPESW) Officer (ECD Division) and National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) Education Officer (for ECD curriculum development, retired).*

Initial Reflections & Early Themes

Overall, in the three regions in the sample, there is a strong sense that the PST TTP is a very positive programme and is received well in different contexts in Namibia. Whilst there is variety in its application across different settings, in the round the programme is highly regarded by a wide range of community members and stakeholders from across the Early Years' sector.

Quality of Teaching & Provision

- The majority of participants report that the approach used for children's early years' education (i.e. learning through play) together with the clarity of the guidance on classroom management from the PST offers something new to the existing ECD training provision for Educators in Namibia, and therefore to the children's experiences of learning during their early years.
- Educators are proud of the educational toys they have produced for use in their Centres and how the PST training manual and participation in the programme has supported their class-based teaching style/approach. Many feel that the model sits well alongside, and can be used to complement, other knowledge or training they may have already had access to (e.g. Ministry-based schemes).
- Community stakeholders, report that the children who have begun formal schooling/who they have taught who received early years' provision from Educators trained through the PST TTP, are typically much more advanced in terms of their learning and development, compared to children who had not been taught by PST trained Educators.

Environmental Agenda/Message

- The use of waste materials, or locally available resources (LARs) for the purposes of teaching and learning to create educational activities and toys for use at Centres, is recognised as a highlight of the programme. Not only in terms of the cost-free and available nature of waste materials (e.g. sand, sticks, stones, etc.), but the added benefits of the collection process in that it involves the wider community in gathering waste materials or making donations (e.g. posters and boxes from shops and stores).
- Participants talk about the benefits of the PST TTP in that it promotes a strong environmental message/agenda to children at a young age (and their families who support the collection of materials) in relation to recycling and reusing. This in turn is recognised by participants as simultaneously improving the physical environment of the local area, especially informal settlements where there may be little or no community infrastructure. This was specially emphasised in the rural areas or where there were high levels of poverty in the community.

- Some participants talk about the programmes future plans to develop a module in the programme on climate change/global warming, with a view to positing teachers as ‘citizen scientists’.
- Parents and caregivers feel that centres provide safe spaces for children which promote their learning and development. In particular, the importance of having outside spaces for children to undertake physical aspects of play through games and to learn about plants/caring for the environment was noted. In relation to the latter, it is acknowledged that this may be the first opportunity to role model ideas of ‘environmental stewardship’ to children.

Capacity Building & Sustainability

- Participants report the benefits of the PST TTP for the community as a whole. A range of participants talk about the clear economic gains which have come from the training of Educarers. Not simply in relation to employment or professional development for Educarers (and the financial gains for them and their families), but also in terms of the wider impact upon the community in relation to the role of investing in children’s early education and the improved outcomes for their children’s futures.
- Educarers report how their completion of the programme has built their own capacity and opened up many opportunities for them. It has also contributed to their professional development and built their confidence, and at no cost to them. Furthermore, some participants also describe how the programme contributes to developing a pool of trained Educarers in the ECD sector at a national level.
- Participants report that the focus upon empowerment and training of Educarers/teachers, (as opposed to the provision of ‘bricks and mortar’, material resources or infrastructure) is a much more sustainable approach which foregrounds skills-based training and its application during the length of the programme.
- Educarers state that the training prioritises implementation - is accessible in that it is classroom-based through observations, and allows them ‘to learn on the job’ and does not remove them from their classes in order to complete the programme. The programme fits well with their term dates and teaching commitments.
- Training Educarers in groups, connecting people via digital technologies, followed by regular Centre visits for guidance, mentoring and observation builds strong networks amongst communities. The professional networks which are conceived through the PST TTP are recognised as developing ‘*communities of teachers*’ that keep skills within the region, whilst offering accessible support through small learning groups. These in-person opportunities are considered crucial by participants in the context of Namibia’s often limited connectivity.

- Educarers/teachers emphasise the important of the graduation ceremony, and the opportunity to share this event and celebrate their achievement with their parents, family members, and the wider community.
- Educarers express need for the PST TTP qualification to be accredited and registered on the National Qualifications Framework to also allow for articulation and further studies. That said, Educarers feel the letter of evidence they currently receive to be highly valued whilst accreditation may be explored.
- In relation to their training role, and their own continued professional development, Trainers talk about how they would welcome the opportunity to receive a training qualification through the programme that recognises their own contribution and supports career development in the ECD sector.
- Some questions were posed around the future of the programme – for example, how would longevity be ensured if its funding and or management should move from the PST to another potential provider.

Parental Involvement

- The process of collecting materials is noted as easily achievable and accessible, but the involvement of parents and or caregivers/family members in this task is a particular challenge of the programme. Whilst this does happen, it is an area identified for development by the majority of Centres/schools.
- Of note, Trainers report the challenges of attracting parents or caregivers to participate in the parent-focused module, both in practical terms, but also conceptually in terms of involvement in their child(ren)'s early education and learning, in general.

Public Health Emergencies

- With the outbreak of Covid-19, teaching and learning was ceased at most of the Centres in the sample. Parents were expected to continue with the provision of education at home, but most parents did not have the capacity to do that. The Educarers say they were not equipped with alternative ways to continue with teaching. Following the reopening of Centres, both Educarers and stakeholders note this to have caused a setback or punctuation in the children's learning and development.
- 'Tippy Taps' for purposes of handwashing were observed in all of the Centres in the sample. Some Educarers based within Centres with no running water note the challenges that lack of basic facilities create (e.g. filling the buckets from the river). Whilst inadequate infrastructure is not within the remit of the PST, these challenges create impacts upon the Educarers' ability to deliver provision, and therefore upon the children's capacity to learn.