



Gender Analysis of Early Childhood Education in Rwanda and Mozambique

October 2022

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1 Introduction

Attention and support for advancing gender equity in education has led to important achievements in recent decades. While gender disparities continue to exist and undermine children’s (usually girls’) opportunities, enormous strides have been made in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) to break down barriers and promote gender parity¹. Linked to the traditional period of schooling in LMICs, this work has historically been focused on primary-aged children and older – with a particular emphasis on enrollment, completion of and transition to schooling cycles, and academic performance². Notably less attention has been paid to the importance of gender equity and sensitivity in early childhood education (ECE), though this is changing as governments and donors increasingly recognize the years before primary school as critical window of learning and development.

The period of early childhood (from conception to age eight) is now well understood to be one of unprecedented growth and development – a time in which children are growing, changing, and learning faster than at any other point in life. Through the compelling research and critical thought leadership of experts over the past decade, policy makers and educators now understand that the care and education a child receives in the early years creates a significant and lasting impact on their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. This development is tightly interconnected, with children’s development across domains, including language, social and emotional development, cognition, and much more, building together and from each other as young children make sense of their world.

The importance of equal access to ECE

Quality early learning experiences have a clear and direct link to future academic success. Children who enter primary school “ready to learn”- with the foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning skills in place to support their primary-level learning – are more likely to

1 Silvia Montoya (2019). Data to Celebrate 50 Years of Progress on Girls Education. Blog: Unesco Institute for Statistics. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/blog/data-celebrate-50-years-progress-girls-education>

2 Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Mensch, B., Woyczynski, L., & Chuang, E. (2022). Policies and interventions to remove gender-related barriers to girls' school participation and learning in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of the evidence. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 12, e1207. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1207>

succeed throughout their academic career³. These children are less likely to repeat grades⁴ or drop out of school early⁵ and are more likely to attain higher levels of education⁶ over their lifetime. The logical progression of benefits that stem from attendance in a quality preprimary program are expansive⁷ and, if the system can offer coherence and continued quality, the cumulative effect is significant.

Research has extensively shown that social and economic differences have a measurable impact on academic achievement and that significant divisions are already apparent at the start of primary school. These gaps do not close over time, but rather widen as children move through their schooling⁸. ECE programs help to close the equity and opportunity gap by ensuring more children start school with the school readiness skills needed to succeed.

From a gender perspective, it is critical to ensure that boys and girls are starting primary school on equitable footing, with similar tools, skills, and attitudes about learning. Gender equitable, gender responsive ECE is an important place to start in supporting this goal and requires more than ensuring parity in girls' and boys' enrollment in ECE.

The importance of gender sensitive ECE

The social and cultural norms that children interact with in early childhood strongly impact how they view the world and their place within it. Gender norms are among the most pervasive social constructs, with society sending strong, continuous messages about the “right” characteristics and behaviors of girls or boys⁹. Learning in early childhood plays a critical role in building and sustaining or, potentially, challenging deeply engrained gender norms and the messages that will inform how children come to view each gender, and themselves as a member of their gender group¹⁰.

Most children begin to notice gender differences from around 24 months of age¹¹, can accurately label their own gender by about 3-years-old, and by 4-years-old, have established a stable sense of their own gender identity¹². It is around this age that children will start to show noticeable gendered behavioral differences and preferences, particularly through their play, acting out the gender norms they have learned to this point¹³. This learning is constant, unavoidable, and begins extremely early, with some small discernible gendered differences evident in the social behavior

3 Duncan, G. J., Claessens, A., Huston, A. C., Pagani, L. S., Engel, M., Sexton, H., Dowsett, C. J., Magnuson, K., Klebanov, P., Feinstein, L., Brooks-Gunn, J., Duckworth, K., and Japel, C. 2007. “School Readiness and Later Achievement.” *Developmental Psychology*, 43 (6): 1428-1446. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0012-1649.43.6.1428>.

4 Crouch, L., and Merseth, K. A. 2017. *Stumbling at the first step: Efficiency implications of poor performance in the foundational first five years*. Paris: UNESCO IE. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-017-9401-1>.

5 Bietenbeck, J., Ericsson, S., and Wamalwa, F. M. 2019. “Preschool attendance, schooling, and cognitive skills in East Africa.” *Economics of Education Review*, 73, 101909.

6 Krafft, C. 2015. “Increasing educational attainment in Egypt: The impact of early childhood care and education.” *Economics of Education Review* 127-143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2015.03.006>

7 Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C. H., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., McCoy, D. C., Fink, G., Shawar, Y. R., Shiffman, J., Devercelli, A. E., Wodon, Q. T., Vargas-Barón, E., and Grantham-McGregor, S. 2016. “Early childhood development coming of age: science through the life course.” *The Lancet*, 389: 77-90. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31389-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31389-7).

8 Chmielewski, A. K. (2019). The Global Increase in the Socioeconomic Achievement Gap, 1964 to 2015. *American Sociological Review*, 84(3), 517–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419847165>

9 Deborah L. Best, Dustin J. Foster. (2017) *The Psychology of Gender and Health, Conceptual and Applied Global Concerns*; 143-174.

10 Jamie Solomon. (2016) *Gender Identity and Expression in the Early Childhood Classroom: Influences on Development within Sociocultural Contexts*. *Young Children*. 71(3). <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/jul2016/gender-identity>

11 Some emerging research suggests this may emerge earlier, around 18 months, with gender-normative play preferences emerging as early as 12 months: Molloy, A. M., Kirke, P. N., Brody, L. C., Scott, J. M., & Mills, J. L. (2008). Effects of folate and vitamin B12 deficiencies during pregnancy on fetal, infant, and child development. *Food and nutrition bulletin*, 29(2_suppl1), S101-S111.

12 Jason Rafferty (2022) *Gender Identity Development in Children*. *American Academy of Pediatrics*.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx>

13 Note, the behavioral differences noted are learned behaviors, not gendered differences in ter

and demonstration of fearfulness in older infants and toddlers¹⁴. Researchers largely attribute this to the gender normative messaging and modeling for very young children by parents, caregivers, and their wider communities¹⁵.

Parents and caregivers often see and communicate about children’s behavior through a highly gendered lens. For example, parents often over-estimate boys’ physical abilities and girls’ emotional expression, even when boys and girls are performing at the same level¹⁶. Parents’ and educators’ beliefs and gendered messages influence the opportunities children receive and, eventually, the way young children start to view their own capabilities and role in society. Many children internalize these messages so strongly that by the age of 4 or 5, they communicate very fixed beliefs about what is and is not appropriate for girls or boys to like, wear, do, and say.

Some learned gender differences can strongly impact education opportunities, both in terms of the opportunities that parents and caregivers offer, and the opportunities that children pursue. By an early age, many children have begun to assign qualities and capabilities to themselves that can be socially, physically, and academically self-limiting. For example, in the United States, 1st grade girls already report that they are “worst” in the academic subjects of science and computers, while boys report they are worst at reading and language¹⁷. Similar trends can be seen globally in ways that deeply and negatively impact society as a whole. For example, women make up only 30% of science and technology professionals across Sub-Saharan Africa¹⁸ and only 28% of all physicians in Africa¹⁹.

Despite strong early influences, however, gender concepts are not fixed at this stage and children’s understanding of gender roles will continue to develop throughout childhood. Through interactions with caregivers, educators, peers, and literature, young children will gain a deeper understanding of how society views the roles and qualities of boys and girls, and what opportunities are available to each as they grow. This will include an understanding of the types of skills, capabilities, characteristics, behaviors, rights, privileges, and limitations normalized for each gender²⁰. It is therefore essential that caregivers and educators understand how their words and actions impact children’s understanding of these gender stereotypes and work to promote gender equality in ECE.

¹⁴ Gagne JR, Miller MM, Goldsmith HH. Early-but modest-gender differences in focal aspects of childhood temperament. *Pers Individ Dif.* 2013 Jul;55(2):95-100. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2013.02.006. PMID: 24958978; PMCID: PMC4064677.

¹⁵ Large libraries of research exist analyzing the differences in how parents and educators speak to, encourage, and present young children with gender-specific play opportunities from infancy and throughout childhood. For some examples, see: Marlene Kollmayer, Barbara Schober & Christiane Spiel (2018) Gender stereotypes in education: Development, consequences, and interventions, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 15:4, 361-377, DOI: 10.1080/17405629.2016.1193483 and Dinella, L.M., Weisgram, E.S. Gender-Typing of Children’s Toys: Causes, Consequences, and Correlates. *Sex Roles* 79, 253–259 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0943-3>

¹⁶ Olsson M and Martiny SE (2018) Does Exposure to Counterstereotypical Role Models Influence Girls’ and Women’s Gender Stereotypes and Career Choices? A Review of Social Psychological Research. *Front. Psychol.* 9:2264. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02264

¹⁷ The AAS (2020). Mukhwana A.M., Abuya T., Matanda D., Omumbo J., Mabuka J. Factors which Contribute to or Inhibit Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics in Africa. Nairobi

¹⁸ Boniol M, Mclsaac M, Xu L, Wuliji T, Diallo K, Campbell J. Gender equity in the health workforce: analysis of 104 countries. Working paper 1. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 (WHO/HIS/HWF/Gender/WP1/2019.1). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

²⁰ Gunderson, E.A., Ramirez, G., Levine, S.C. et al. The Role of Parents and Teachers in the Development of Gender-Related Math Attitudes. *Sex Roles* 66, 153–166 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9996-2>

2 Analyzing Gender Equitable ECE

This paper aims to understand the extent to which gender equitable ECE is supported in two countries: Rwanda and Mozambique. As detailed above, gender equitable ECE requires both that children have equal access to ECE opportunities (the ability to enroll and attend), as well as equitable learning opportunities within ECE programs. Beyond this, we must also consider how gender responsive is the ECE pedagogy, the messaging being delivered to young children and their families, and the extent to which those messages support gender equitable ideas that will impact children as they grow into adolescence and adulthood.

Gender equitable ECE is programming that ensures boys and girls have equal opportunities to learn and develop. Gender responsive ECE is programming in which teachers and caregivers mindfully provide learning opportunities that serve the specific learning needs of boys and girls and dismantle gender stereotypes that cause harm to one or both genders²¹. To understand how these concepts are supported in each country, this paper analyzes the following 5 key elements of gender equitable ECE:

Equal Care and Learning Opportunities. Both girls and boys must have equal opportunities to attend ECE and are equally encouraged and supported to learn by the adults responsible for their care and education. Compared to other age levels, gender parity in ECE programs is usually quite high²². This is because the childcare element of ECE is often a big motivating factor for parents who choose to enroll their children, and this need affects boys and girls equally²³.

Under this element, this analysis reviews (1) the parity levels in enrollment data for each gender and (2) the pedagogical practices that teachers utilize in the classroom must also be reviewed to understand the extent to which children receive equal care and learning opportunities²⁴.

Equal access to play and learning materials. Both boys and girls should have access to play and learning materials and no child should be given preferential or limited access due to their gender. Children should likewise be encouraged to engage in play that challenges gender stereotypes. Play is the “work” of early childhood, in which children interact meaningfully with ideas, concepts, and knowledge; it is through this process that children learn and gain skills²⁵. For example, a recent study²⁶ examining brain activity in boys and girls shows that playing with dolls activates regions of the brain that support development of empathy and social information processing skills in children of both genders. Block play is strongly associated with the development of spatial skills, mathematics, and other STEM skills²⁷. Restricting children’s play based on their gender limits their opportunities to make meaningful learning connections and practice skills. Conversely, encouraging children to explore all play areas equally promotes

²¹ VVOB and Forum for African Women Educationalists (2019). Gender-Responsive Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education: A toolkit for teachers and school leaders. https://www.vvob.org/sites/belgium/files/grp_in_ece_toolkit_one-sided_300dpi.pdf

²² According to the household data consolidated by the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) across Sub-Saharan Africa, girls’ enrollment in ECE averages 42%, compared to boys’ enrollment at 43%.

²³ Thomas, Kate. (2021) Examining what works in Pre-primary: a review of the evidence. United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

²⁴ VVOB and FAWE, Gender-Responsive Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education

²⁵ Zosh, J. M., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). Learning through play: a review of the evidence (white paper). The LEGO Foundation, DK.

²⁶ Hashmi S, Vanderwert RE, Price HA and Gerson SA (2020) Exploring the Benefits of Doll Play Through Neuroscience. *Front. Hum. Neurosci.* 14:560176. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2020.560176

²⁷ Zimmermann, L., Foster, L., Golinkoff, R.M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2019). Spatial Thinking and STEM: How Playing with Blocks Supports Early Math. *The American Educator*, 42, 22-27.

better, more diverse skill development and breaks down gender stereotypes before they really take root in a child's self-image²⁸.

Under this element, this analysis reviews (3) the play and learning materials available in ECE programs and (4) the attitudes about play and learning expressed by teachers and parents.

Gender-equal parental engagement. To best support young children, parents of both genders should participate in children's learning and promote equal opportunities for both their male and female children. While mothers are still often viewed as the primary caregiver of young children, especially across Sub-Saharan Africa²⁹, research consistently demonstrates that a father's involvement in a child's care and education has a big impact on their development and academic outcomes³⁰.

To review this element, this analysis addresses (5) the parental engagement practices of each country, including the extent to which gender-equal parental engagement is encouraged, and (6) parents' attitudes towards ECE for children of both genders.

Gender-sensitive messaging. All messaging from teachers, school leaders, and literature utilized in the ECE program must reflect the equal value and potential of girls and boys, and their equal right to protection, opportunities, and a life free of violence. In addition to intentional messaging, this also includes *gender-sensitive representation*, showing both boys/men and girls/women in non-gender stereotyped roles. Children benefit from role models in their real social environments and in the ECE pedagogy and literacy materials used in their classrooms³¹.

To analyze this element, this paper reviews (7) the messaging promoted by each country's ECE system and (8) the extent to which children are exposed to gender-sensitive representation and role models. Point 2 includes, among others, gender parity in the ECE teacher workforce and school leadership roles.

A final point of analysis for consideration are the *gender outcomes for each country*. ECE services are still relatively new and underutilized in both Rwanda and Mozambique, thus the current gender outcomes cannot closely be linked to their current ECE practices. However, these represent both a valuable baseline and provide perspective on the environment in which the parents and educators responsible for delivering gender equitable ECE have grown to adulthood.

Limitations of the Research

The gender equitable ECE analysis of Mozambique and Rwanda is a desk study and is limited to the documented evidence supporting each of the outlined analysis areas. Given that ECE is emerging in both countries as an area of focus, the documentation, research and available data is limited.

Significantly less information, detail, and data is available for Mozambique than for Rwanda, likely because preschool has not been a top priority for Mozambique prior to the current Education Sector Plan (2020-2029). Additionally, the data that does exist is inconsistently reported in

²⁸ Spinner, L., Cameron, L. & Calogero, R. Peer Toy Play as a Gateway to Children's Gender Flexibility: The Effect of (Counter)Stereotypic Portrayals of Peers in Children's Magazines. *Sex Roles* 79, 314–328 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0883-3>

²⁹

³⁰ Allen, S.M. & Daly, K.J. (2007). *The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence*. Centre for Families, Work & Well-Being, University of Guelph, Guelph: Ontario.

³¹ Jo Barkham (2008) Suitable work for women? Roles, relationships and changing identities of 'other adults' in the early years classroom, *British Educational Research Journal*, 34:6, 839-853, DOI: 10.1080/01411920802041558

different sources. For clarity and accuracy, this reports defers to official data, originally presented in government sources.

The primary sources of data for this analysis include:

Rwanda:

Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey 2019-2020, Rwanda Ministry of Health³²

Rwanda Education Statistical Yearbook 2020/21, Ministry of Education³³

National Children’s Development Agency database of resources³⁴

Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion database of resources³⁵

Mozambique:

Education Sector Plan (Plano Estratégico da Educação), 2020-2029³⁶

Preschool and Child Development under Extreme Poverty Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Rural Mozambique³⁷

A Process Evaluation of the Mozambique Early Childhood Development Project (DICIPE)³⁸

Evaluation of the UNICEF Mozambique Accelerated School Readiness Pilot Programme: Final Report³⁹

3 Analysis

Equal Care and Learning Opportunities.

1. Parity levels in enrollment data for each gender
2. Pedagogical practices that teachers utilize in the classroom must also be reviewed to understand the extent to which children receive equal care and learning opportunities.

Rwanda:

Student enrollment. Net enrollment in preschool (children 4–6 years old) in Rwanda was 25.9% for the 2020/2021 school year (Rwanda Education Statistical Yearbook 2021), representing 293,832 students. Gender parity at the nursery level is high, with a slight disparity in favor of girls (1.05;

³² National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) [Rwanda], Ministry of Health (MOH) [Rwanda], and ICF. 2021. Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey 2019-20 Final Report. Kigali, Rwanda, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NISR and ICF.

³³ <https://www.mineduc.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=57558&token=7fcfee8241823a71f559fdcd2fc7b72f6baac3e0>

³⁴ <https://www.ncda.gov.rw/publications-1>

³⁵ <https://www.migeprof.gov.rw/publications/laws>

³⁶ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/strategic-education-plan-2020-2029-mozambique>

³⁷ S. Martinez, S. Naudeau, V. Pereira (2017). Preschool and Child Development under Extreme Poverty Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Rural Mozambique – World Bank

³⁸ J.A. Lima & S.H.B Martins (2020). A Process Evaluation of the Mozambique Early Childhood Development Project (DICIPE), World Bank, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/780851578031676363/pdf/A-Process-Evaluation-of-the-Mozambique-Early-Childhood-Development-Project-DICIPE-2015-2019.pdf>

³⁹ J. Bonilla, E. Spier, K. Carson, H. Ring, Y. Belyakova, I. Brodziak, & E. Adelman-Sil (2019). Evaluation of the UNICEF Mozambique Accelerated School Readiness Pilot Programme: Final Report. American Institute for Research and UNICEF, <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Mozambique-Early-Childhood-ASR-Program-Evaluation-December-2019.pdf>

enrollment in 2020/21 was 48.7% male and 51.3% female). This ratio holds across all provision types (public, community, private), through parity is closest for children in private schools (1.01).

This is an improvement in general enrollment from 2019/20 levels, when 282,428 students enrolled in preschool, 50.8% of whom were female. In 2019/20, 138,911 boys attended preschool, representing about 22.8% of the target population; 143,517 girls attended, representing about 25.4% of the target population.

Pedagogical practices. No analyses on pedagogical practices related to gender-specific biases were found for Rwanda. However, in 2018, Rwanda’s Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), with the support of UNICEF, developed the National Gender-Responsive Teacher Training Package, which supports teachers and school leaders to develop and deliver gender-responsive education at all levels, including preprimary.

Additionally, while learning outcome data for ECE students is not robust, results from the 2020/21 DHS show that approximately 12% of children 3-6 years old are on track in the literacy-numeracy domain (based on parent surveys), and 94% are on track in the social-emotional domain. Among these, girls were more likely than boys to be developmentally on track (78% and 74%, respectively, measured as a whole average across all surveyed domains). This indicates that the education and care young children receive is at least not putting girls at risk for underachievement in comparison to their male peers.

Mozambique:

Student enrollment. Currently, about 101,259 children are enrolled in ECE in Mozambique, corresponding to 3.5%⁴⁰ of the population aged 3 to 5 years (about 2.9 million children). Prior to the new education sector plan, preschool has not been a priority of the education sector and preschool data has not been historically captured by EMIS and other official tracking mechanisms. As a result, no (publicly available) official data exists regarding preschool enrollment and disparities therein (though currently, the 3.5% of enrolled children are understood to be primarily children of wealthier and urban families). Disaggregated boys and girls enrollment data is unavailable.

Pedagogical practices. Two program reviews (the DICIPE program and ASR program) showed that preschool teachers (“facilitators”) appeared to give equal attention to both boys and girls and did a good job of balancing activities for both genders. However, the ASR impact study showed that participation in the program has a larger impact on boy’s development than on girls. The study showed strongly positive gains for both girls and boys, but the effect was larger for boys.

Equal access to play and learning materials.

3. play and learning materials available in ECE programs
4. attitudes about play and learning expressed by teachers and parents.

RWANDA

Across Rwanda, children lack access to literature and play materials. In an interview with the National Children’s Development Agency, ministry officials stated that parents find the advice to “read and play with their children” to be very challenging and demoralizing, as most do not have

⁴⁰ based on the 2019 Education Sector Analysis. This diverges from the UNESCO Data estimate of 25%.

these resources available. Data from the ESY 2020/21 and DHS 2019/20 confirm this, showing that access to toys and literature across Rwandan homes remains poor. Only 2% of children under age 5 have three or more children's books in the household, and less than 1% have 10 or more children's books. Sex of the child was not a differentiating factor, though location was, with urban children being more likely than rural children to have access to materials, and children in Kigali being marginally more likely to have access to books and toys than their peers living in other regions.

Importantly, the factor with the greatest impact on access to learning materials was mother's education. Children whose mothers gained 'more than secondary education' were significantly more likely to have access to learning materials (see table).

Table: Children's home access to play materials and books by mother's education

	3+ children's books	10+ children's books	Homemade toys	Store-bought toys	2+ playthings
No education	0.7%	0%	35.5%	4.2%	32.5%
Primary	1.1%	0.1%	38.3%	8.9%	35.6%
Secondary	4.4%	0.7%	40.5%	34.2%	53.5%
More than secondary	13.8%	2%	47%	71.7%	53.5%

In Preschool programs: Preschools in Rwanda also have weak general access to all types of play materials (see table). No discernable gender disparity is evident from the data available. This is logical as it appears most preschools currently gain these resources by *accepting materials* as they become available, rather than *selecting materials* from a broad base of options. The latter might show more evidence of preferences and biases, but currently there is no evidence to confirm this.

Table: Prevalence of sample play materials found in Preschools in Rwanda (2020/21)

Play materials	Percentage of schools with these materials
Small balls	22.3%
Small toys	20.4%
Cubes/blocks	15.2%
Puzzles	13%
Hand puppets	10.6%
Climbing equipment	6.2%
Small bicycles	3.7%

Gender representation in children's literature: There is little analysis available on existing children's literature in Rwanda. In one recent study, Dr. Ruterana of the Rwanda College of Arts and Social Sciences⁴¹, reviewed gender themes of popular Rwandan fairy tales and conducted a small-scale study of primary-aged children on their reflections of gender roles based on exposure to this literature. He offers the following reflection on traditional literature:

⁴¹ Ruterana, P. (2017). Using children's literature to promote gender equality in education: The case of the fairy tale of Ndabaga in Rwanda. *Rwanda Journal*, vol 2(2). doi:10.4314/rj.v2i2.4A

In ...[Rwandan] fairy tales male characters have been portrayed as being strong, potent, and powerful, with mastery themes such as cleverness and adventure, whereas female characters were portrayed as impotent, weak, passive, naive, even sweet, with second sex themes such as beauty, gentility, domesticity, marriage, emotions, motherhood, and so on. This corroborates findings from a study by Davies (2003) on reading fairy tales to children. She found that children as old as 4 to 5 years can already associate male and female characters with supremacy and dependency respectively.

However, while the primary-aged children interviewed recognized these traditional stories, many voiced strong opposing positions regarding gender roles and stereotypes, stressing that boys and girls are equal in their abilities and potential. From the study:

children from urban as well as rural areas are convinced that both boys and girls have the same potentialities, and no one should undermine them on the basis of gender. This is indeed due to current political discourses on gender issues in Rwanda through different media, radio and television programs, civic education text books, and from their teachers which emphasize gender equality. (page 38).

The political discourse referenced above is strongly evidenced through numerous Rwandan policies and other national guidance. Some notable guiding examples include the National Gender Policy (2010, rev. 2021), National Gender-Responsive Teacher Training Package (2018), National Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy for Integrated Early Childhood Development, Nutrition And Wash (2018-2024), National ECD Policy (2011, rev. 2016), and the National Parenting Curriculum (2018).

More clarity is needed on whether these values are represented in new children's literature and whether this literature is reaching children in classrooms, but there does appear to be small-scale evidence that the narrative is reaching young children and strongly impacting their views of gender equality.

Mozambique:

Despite significant searching, no data, reports, nor anecdotal reviews were available on this topic in Mozambique. This is confirmed by the Nurturing Care-ECDAN score card⁴² for Mozambique, which likewise found no data to report.

⁴² https://ecdan.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ECD_Countdown2030_Mozambique.pdf

Gender-equal parental engagement.

5. parental engagement practices of each country, including the extent to which gender-equal parental engagement is encouraged
6. parents' attitudes towards ECE for children of both genders

Rwanda:

The importance of fathers' engagement in children's development and education is well recognized in Rwanda. This is stated in numerous national documents, including, for example, the National Parenting Curriculum which states:

"... men and women are equal partners in a marriage and a family, especially as it relates to the responsibilities of parenthood. Parenting education facilitators should build gender equality into all aspects of their teaching, insisting and advocating for equity between parenting partners. This may include pushing the boundaries of what Rwandans currently believe about male and female roles in parenting. This may also include pushing the boundaries of what the community, local leaders, and service providers believe about this as well. As an advocate for optimal child development however, these preconceptions must be challenged; all parenting education must seek to send the message of equality."
(page 20)

However, attitudes expressed by parents across Rwanda state that many parents do not understand the importance of this engagement and do not feel comfortable engaging in what they see as gender non-conforming care practices. A study on parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices in 2016 consistently highlighted this theme, with parents of both genders expressing doubt that the father had an active role to play in children's care and education. The 2020/21 DHS evidence these beliefs, showing that only 4% of children engaged in four or more early learning activities with their fathers, while 25% engaged in at least four activities with their mothers.

The National Parenting Curriculum recommends Father-specific parenting sessions, as civil society organizations in Rwanda have found that intentionally focus on Fathers has a transformational impact on the attitudes those men hold about gender roles in parenting, more so than wide-spread messaging or gender-combined parenting classes.

Mozambique:

Based on the available program evaluations, parents report a significant labor division between men and women, including childcare and educational practices. Like in Rwanda, men are not viewed as responsible for these activities and do not typically engage in home learning activities nor school interactions. However, when purposefully engaged in school leadership activities through the DICIPE program, fathers participated more, taking about 50% of leadership roles on the councils established for each school. likewise, in the study report, about 25% of respondents were fathers. This suggests that purposeful engagement of fathers is a strong way to counter these gender stereotypes and encourage more fathers' engagement in early learning.

The studies also found that parents did not favor boys over girls in enrollment in the program. Observations by program facilitators did not see differential treatment of children based on gender in other parenting or health practices.

Gender-sensitive messaging.

7. messaging promoted by each country's ECE system
8. gender-sensitive representation and role models, including gender parity in the ECE teacher workforce and school leadership roles

RWANDA

As stated above, Rwanda has been purposeful about messaging in recent years, establishing policies and guidance to shape messaging in schools, other educational programs, and national media. However, gender representation across educational staff in the ECE sub-sector has not yet caught up with these expressed national values.

While women make up 49.3% of total school-based staff (including teachers, leadership, administration, and support staff, etc.), they make up 85.6% of preschool teachers. Among preschool leadership staff, women only represent 47.3% of positions, while men hold 52.7%. This is an enormous disparity in representation between teaching staff and school leadership that may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes.

MOZAMBIQUE:

Mozambique's Education Sector Plan highlights a need to educate parents and encourage enrollment of girls in school at the right age, starting with enrollment in preschool. Several reports and articles highlighting efforts around girls' education at older age levels were found, however little evidence is available that indicates efforts for the early years.

Data on preschool in general is limited, however preschool teachers are reported to be primarily female (estimated at 93%). School management, conversely, is reported to be primarily male (no % available) at all levels of the Mozambican education system, including preschool.

