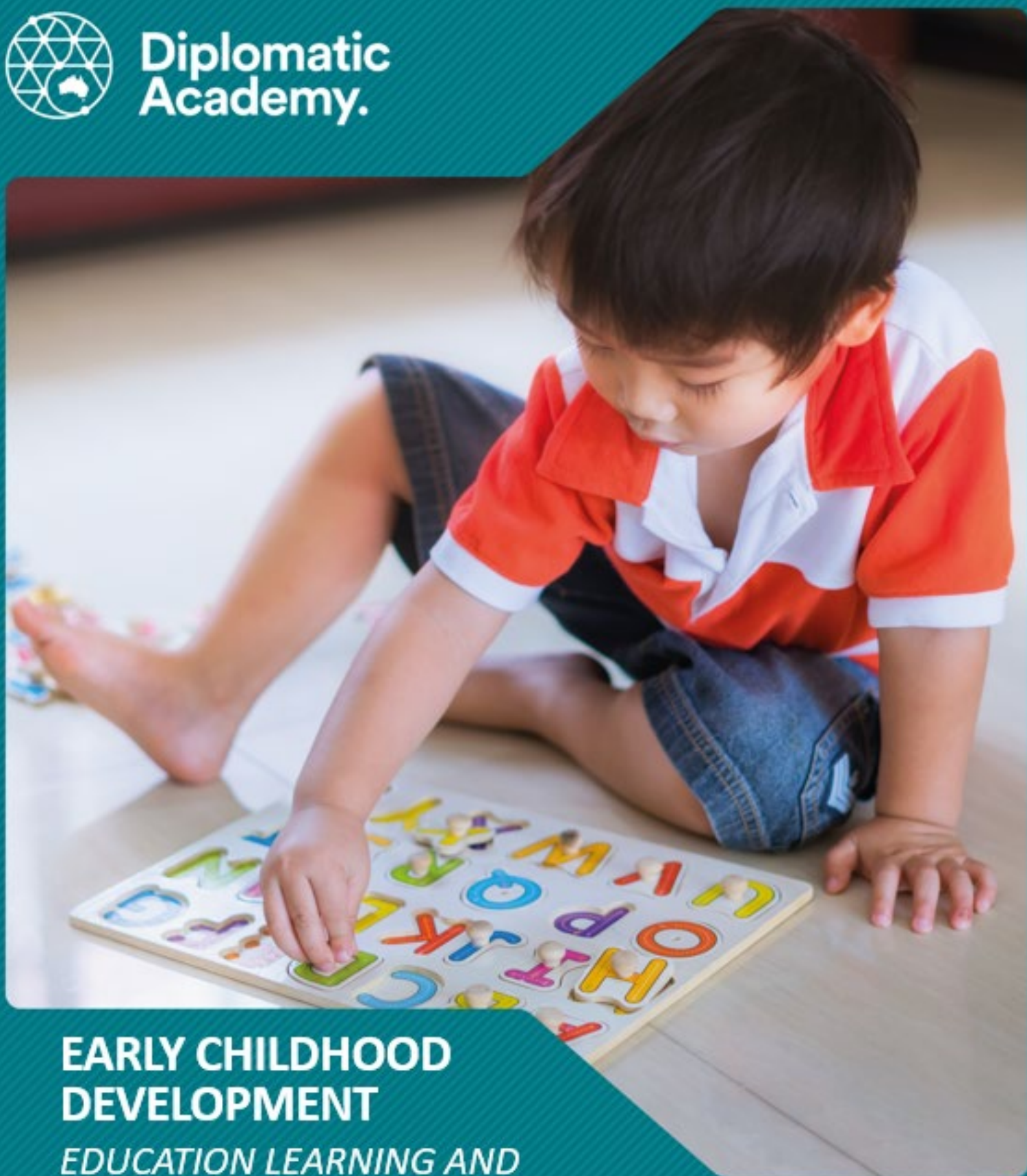




Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



**Diplomatic
Academy.**



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

*EDUCATION LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT MODULE*

*Practitioner Level
2021*



CONTENTS

Acronyms.....	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Why focus on early childhood?	4
3 Why Develop Early Childhood Development Policies?	13
4 What needs to be done to develop ECD policies or policy frameworks?	17
5 What kinds of support can development agencies provide to help governments expand and enhance ECD?	20
6 Test your knowledge.....	28
References and links.....	32



ACRONYMS

ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Regional Network on Early Childhood
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
ECD	early childhood development
ECCE	early childhood care and education
ECEC	early childhood education and care
ECED	early childhood education and development
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grades Reading Assessment
ELDS	Evaluation of Early Learning and Development Standards
EMIS	education management information systems
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
MELQO	Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
PAL	Partnerships Achieve Literacy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund



1 INTRODUCTION

This Practitioner level module is designed to inform staff members about issues to consider when engaging with international and domestic partners on early childhood development (ECD). It covers the case for ECD, the process of policy development and how development partners can assist government partners to expand and enhance ECD. In the context of COVID-19 and at all times, ECD is a critical priority.

It is recommended that staff complete the *Early Childhood Development: Foundation Level* module as background information to this Practitioner level module.

2 WHY FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD?

Two major developments in Early Childhood Development

Two major developments in the area of early childhood development (ECD) over the last decade have made it an essential component of a quality education system and a determinant of good quality learning.

The first is the ever-more accepted definition of ‘early childhood’ as encompassing the period from conception to eight years of age. This includes:

- the critical period of pregnancy when the health (both mental and physical) and nutrition of the mother are important in the development of the child
- the sometimes difficult period of transition from the home environment or the pre-school to the primary school.

The second development has been the increasing evidence from a wide range of fields – neuroscience, genetics, economics, health, education – showing that early childhood is the most important developmental phase in the human lifespan. Early learning is the foundation for all later learning, and realising basic capabilities (e.g. pre-literacy) facilitates the development of later capabilities. Positive early interventions yield higher returns compared to later remedial or ‘catch-up’ services.

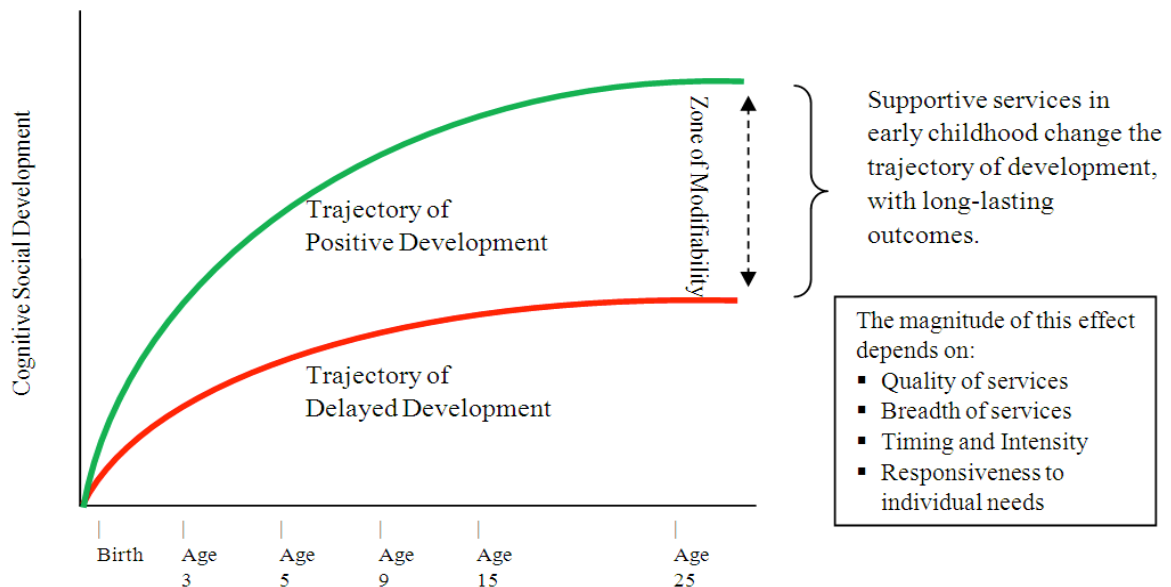
Source: [Center on the Developing Child, 2016, From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts.](#)



ECD is both an outcome and a process

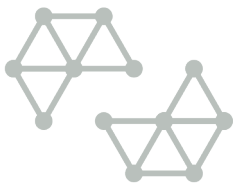
The graph below (Figure 1) shows the impact of early intervention. Supportive services in early childhood change the trajectory of development, with long-lasting outcomes.

Figure 1 – The Case for Early Intervention



Source: Ramey & Ramey 1999, *Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life*, p.18.

Early childhood development is both an **outcome** that defines a child's status as being 'physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally sound, socially competent and ready to learn', and a **process** that covers the period from conception/pregnancy to the early grades of primary school.



What does the research show?

More and more research shows that ECD interventions have sustainable, long-term effects on the development of human capital, social cohesion, and economic success.

Meta-reviews of early interventions have indicated that one reason for ECD effectiveness is that as children grow, the disparity between an average ('normal') growth trajectory and a delayed trajectory widens (shown in Figure 1). Intervening earlier requires fewer resources and less effort with greater effectiveness.

Source: Lake, 2011, *Early Childhood Development – global action is overdue*.



The case for ECD

The brain argument

The ‘brain argument’ is that the most rapid period of brain development occurs in the first few years of life.

The influence of a child’s early environment, and the child’s experience-based brain development, is long lasting. A nurturing, stimulating, and stress-free environment helps promote quality early experience that supports brain development. Stressful and tedious environments, however, may hinder children’s brain development.

Early brain development is important because cognitive capabilities (e.g. working memory and fluid reasoning) precede later capabilities (e.g. reading or mathematics). A child cannot develop complex skills and capabilities until they have achieved earlier, fundamental, capabilities. In this regard, early cognitive ability is related to later growth in academic performance that is, in turn, related to adult capabilities.

Sources: Kaufman et al., 2012, *Are cognitive g and academic g one and the same g? An exploration on the Woodcock-Johnson and Kaufman tests*; McGrew et al., 1997, *Beyond g: The impact of Gf-Gc specific cognitive abilities research on the future use and interpretation of intelligence tests in the schools*; Watkins, Lei, & Canivez, 2007, *Psychometric intelligence and achievement: A cross-lagged panel analysis*.

The economic argument

The economic argument is that returns on investment in ECD accumulate and help offset disadvantage and inequality. Investment in ECD is one of the most effective economic actions leading to the mitigation of poverty.

A longitudinal study that included a cost-benefit analysis of the [High/Scope Perry Preschool Project](#) showed that by age 27, \$1 invested in pre-school programs resulted in a return of \$7; by age 40, the return had increased to \$17. This figure was revised down slightly in later reanalysis (to between \$7-12). Importantly, though, even under more stringent assumptions the rate of return was still strongly positive.

Research published by The Lancet (2011) indicated that increasing pre-school enrolment in low- and middle-income countries would result in a benefit of between US\$10-\$34 billion. For each \$1 invested, a benefit-to-cost ratio of between \$6 and \$17 would be gained (depending on the percentage of children enrolled).

A 2011 simulation of potential long-term effects of higher pre-primary enrolment estimated that raising the pre-primary Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 25 per cent in countries such as Ethiopia would create a future stream of wage income 6.4 times higher than the cost per capita of accessing pre-school.

Source: Engle et al, 2011, *Strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for young children in low-income and middle-income countries*; Heckman et al, 2010, *The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program*; Schweinhart et al., 2005, *Lifetime effects: the High/Scope Perry preschool study through age 40*.



The Heckman Curve

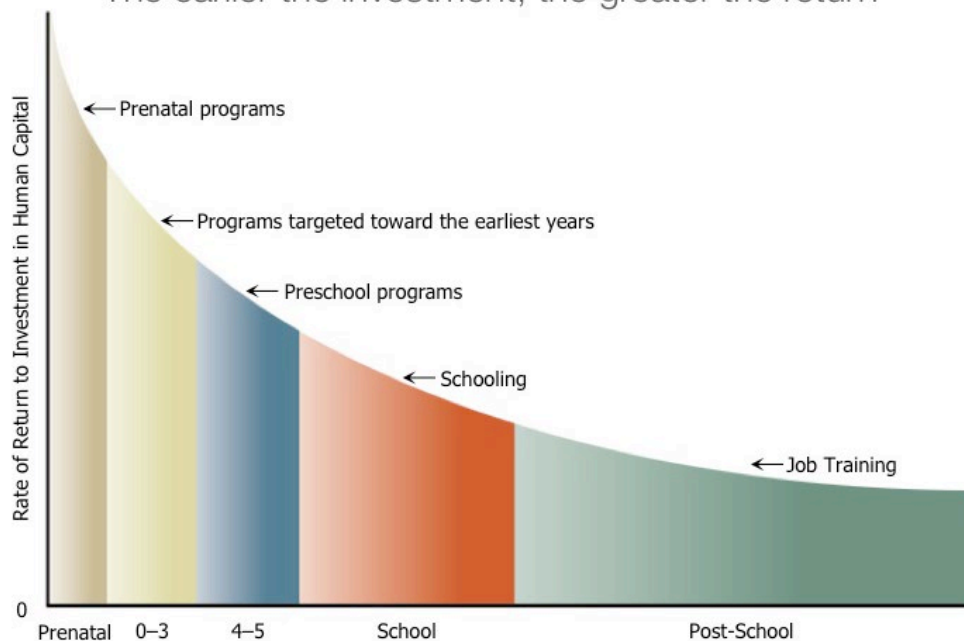
The graph shown in Figure 2 is commonly known as the ‘Heckman Curve’, named after Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman. The Heckman Curve shows schematically that investments in early childhood have high (and positive) rates of return. Interventions at later ages (e.g. school and up) cost more, and yield lower returns. Post-school investments – for example, job training initiatives for adults – tend to cost a lot to implement, and yield the lowest results. The implication of the curve is that the optimal time to invest in human capital is in the early years.

Source: Heckman & Masterov, 2007, *The productivity argument for investing in young children*.

Figure 2 – ‘The Heckman Curve’: Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: Heckman, 2018, *The Heckman Curve*.

The health argument

The health argument contends that health care and nutrition investments for mothers and young children have enormous pay-offs.

These include: reductions in maternal and under-five mortalities; fewer low birth-weight and pre-term infants; fewer developmental delays and disabilities; reduced costs of nutritional rehabilitation services for children aged zero to three; reduced stunting and underweight children; and positive long-term health benefits.



The gender, disability and cultural equality argument

Evidence suggests that ECD can help reduce gender and other forms of social discrimination.

Early childhood development offers several pathways through which gender and disability equality can be achieved. The first pathway is through programs that directly and actively include girls, and girls and boys with disabilities, such as childcare and development, early learning, and pre-school programs. This pathway improves outcomes for the child herself. A second pathway is through the benefits of inclusive ECD programs for the other female members of the family. ECD programs reduce gender inequality in caring roles by enabling mothers to participate in the labour force or other social institutions. Further, in contexts where mothers are at work or otherwise unavailable, ECD programs allow older sisters (who are often substitute carers for younger siblings and siblings with disabilities) to fully participate in school education. Culturally inclusive ECD helps to build understanding between children and their families on the linguistic, cultural and socio-economic diversity within their society.

Source: Ramey & Ramey, 1999, *Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life*; Vasileva, 2018, *The educator's role in supporting non-gendered play in early childhood education settings*.

The impact of early childhood programs on gender inequality

The impact of early childhood programs on gender inequality depends primarily on availability. This refers to whether or not families can access the kinds of quality ECD programs that facilitate participation in wider society and assist with more equitable participation in early education. The extent to which gender equality is promoted within programs depends on: how children are socialised in ECD programs; teaching approaches; curriculum relevance; and the learning environment, including learning materials. Even where equal access exists, early childhood programs often promote gender-specific expectations. Teaching materials may promote gender-specific roles, for instance portraying male characters as powerful and active and females as passive or subservient. Game playing can often conform to stereotype, with boys encouraged to play with blocks and girls guided to the 'housekeeping corner'. Girls may have less access to the larger and more active toys and playground space.

The impact of early childhood programs on disability inequality

Children with disabilities are among the most stigmatised and excluded groups. Some experience greater exclusion and stigma due to other factors, for example gender, socio-economic status, geographic location or ethnicity. The early years are vital for the development of all children. When children with disabilities are isolated from their non-disabled peers, children are denied the opportunity to understand disability as part of human diversity while children with disabilities and their families are subject to continued isolation and stigma. Further, because women and older girls are generally assigned caregiving responsibilities for family members with disabilities, the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs enables female household members to participate in education, work and social activities.



Teachers' influence concerning inequality

Teachers' treatment of boys and girls can perpetuate inequalities. Boys in ECD programs often receive more attention from their teachers than do girls. Teachers are more likely to listen and respond to boys, ask boys more questions and give them more individual instruction. Boys often receive more acknowledgement, praise, encouragement, corrective feedback and opportunities to answer questions.

By contrast, teachers tend to praise girls for being neat, following instructions and raising their hands. Moreover, teachers discipline boys and girls for different kinds of misconduct, accepting aggression by boys but not by girls. These are ways that stereotypical attitudes and behaviours can be inculcated in girls and boys.

Teacher lack of expectation of children with disabilities underestimates the ability and potential of children with disabilities and further marginalises girls and boys with disabilities, placing barriers to their learning, development and social participation. Lack of expectation or exclusion of children from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds can reinforce disadvantage and marginalisation.

Learning materials, the ECD workforce and inclusion

Changes to the curriculum and learning materials to support gender, cultural and disability equality are effective only if accompanied by changes in ECD teacher attitudes and behaviour. These in turn require changes to the teacher training curriculum, including training in gender, cultural and disability sensitivity and awareness, and approaches that help teachers become more reflective about their practices and the environments in which they work.

An equality focus also require changes in staffing policies and practices in early childhood programs. Women are predominant in the early childhood professions. Taking care of young children has long been identified with motherhood and thus considered a female activity, associated with low pay and low status. It is often assumed that no specific training is needed to work with young children. Introducing minimum standards for training and qualification can help develop a culture of learning within the ECD sector. Explicit statements in national or sub-national frameworks or curricula of the purpose of ECD programs to promote gender and disability equality and learning for all can help to change local perceptions. Conversely, men working with young children often evokes suspicion or prejudice.

However, women tend to be underrepresented in administrative and leadership positions. It is important, therefore, to support gender balance in the management of ECD programs, and in government and bureaucratic bodies that oversee them, including the regulatory and monitoring authorities.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

1. What training is provided for ECD teachers, and does it involve gender sensitive training? Disability inclusion training? Cultural awareness training?
2. Does the government collect sex and disability disaggregated data on enrolment, participation and learning outcomes for children in ECD?

The education argument

The education argument contends that early learning begets later learning and early success links with later success – just as early failure can lead to later failure.

For example, girls who participate in ECD programs are much more likely to enter school at the appropriate age than girls who do not. Ultimately, good quality ECD results in cost-savings and increased efficiency in primary education: higher attendance, lower repetition and drop-out rates, less remedial education, and higher educational attainment. Children with disabilities who participate in ECD programs are also more likely to enter school at the appropriate age than children who do not.

Participation in ECD pays off for learning. The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) – which assesses reading, writing and mathematics in Grade 5 students – found that children who attended at least one year of preschool education consistently performed better than children who had not. Similar results are found in the Pacific. The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) found significantly higher literacy and numeracy performance in Year 4 and 6 students who had attended early childhood education.

Sources: Pascua-Valenzuela & Benavides, 2021, [What the first ever large-scale assessment in Southeast Asia tells us about learning in the region](#); Pacific Community, 2019, [PILNA Regional Report 2018](#).

The human rights argument

The human rights argument contends that there is a right to a child's development.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of child development. Article 6 states a child has the right to develop to 'the maximum extent possible', and in Article 27 'States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. For children with disabilities, Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities notes that 'States Parties recognize the rights of persons with disabilities to education' ensuring 'an inclusive education system at all levels' directed to the their development 'to their fullest potential'.



Sources: UNICEF, 2013, *Why early childhood development?*; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*; United Nations, 2006, *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*.

What is the impact of ECD throughout the life course?

Strong evidence from around the world shows the positive impact of ECD throughout the life course. Children who participate in quality ECD programs have higher cognitive development and overall school readiness at primary school entry, lower repetition and dropout rates in the early grades, greater learning in school, and higher school completion rates.

Some examples are included below.

- In Bangladesh, children who received centre-based pre-school education outperformed their peers in the control group by 58 per cent on a standardised test of school readiness.
- In Colombia, children who received a comprehensive community-based ECD intervention were 100 per cent more likely to be enrolled in third grade, indicating lower dropout and repetition rates for program children than for those in the control group.
- In Argentina, one year of pre-school was estimated to increase the average third-grade test score in mathematics and Spanish by eight per cent.
- In Jamaica, high-quality ECD interventions have been documented to improve children's cognitive development, and boost the earnings of those with developmental delays by 25 per cent.
- In the United States, children who received high-quality, comprehensive ECD services scored significantly higher in standardised testing for mathematics and reading by grade four with higher attendance rates and less behavioural issues.
- In South-East Asia and the Pacific, students who participated in early childhood education programs demonstrated higher literacy and numeracy standards at grades 4, 5 and 6.

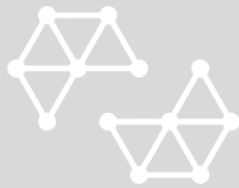
Source: World Bank, 2015, *Give all children the same chance*; Bakken et al, 2016, *Early childhood education: the long term benefits*; Pascua-Valenzuela & Benavides, 2021, *What the first ever large-scale assessment in Southeast Asia tells us about learning in the region*; Pacific Community, 2019, *PILNA Regional Report 2018*.

Many of these results rely on not only participation in ECD programs but in getting the right balance right of program quality (e.g. staff training), right age entry to ECD programs, community buy-in, and exposure (e.g., sufficient contact hours within ECD programs, longer duration). Evidence from the US, for example, suggests children from vulnerable backgrounds benefit from participating in ECD programs from the age of one to two years and that there is substantial benefit in ensuring at least 450 hours of exposure per year.



Research also suggests that participation in child-focused ECD programs may offer a protective effect on learning in later years, even where the quality of primary schooling is low.

Sources: Gilley et al, 2015, Too late and not enough for some children: early childhood education and care (ECEC) program usage patterns in the years before school in Australia; Schweinhart et al., 2005, Lifetime effects: the High/Scope Perry preschool study through age 40; Coley et al 2014, Long-Term Implications of Early Education and Care Programs for Australian Children; Jackson et al, 2019b, Effective child-focused education and nurturing care interventions.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

1. Which arguments (brain, economic, health, gender equality, education, rights, other), if any, are most visible in the ECD discourse?
2. Which are largely ignored?
3. Which of the arguments would be most useful in convincing governments and other stakeholders to develop more systematic and better-resourced ECD programs?



3 WHY DEVELOP EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT POLICIES?

Effective policies

With the positive outcomes of well-targeted early childhood investment that is supported by evidence, there is a need for early childhood development policies and strategic plans to guide investments. The most effective ECD policies are evidence-based, multi-sectoral, gender-sensitive, inclusive, comprehensive, integrated, and developed through the widest possible consultation of stakeholders.

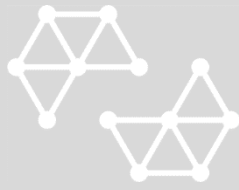
Note: The content on ECD policies are adapted from and informed by the guidelines developed by Vargas-Barón (2005).

Source: Vargas-Barón, 2005, *Planning Policies for Early Childhood Development: Guidelines for Action*.

Why nations should develop systematic early childhood development policies

There are many reasons why nations should develop systematic early childhood development policies.

- From a **rights-based perspective**, nations should ensure that their policies uphold the rights of their youngest girls and boys.
- From an **economic perspective**, the development of early childhood policies and the provision of early childhood services significantly lower later costs for education, health, nutrition, welfare, and justice systems.
- From a **social development perspective**, integrated and comprehensive early childhood services create a convergent, common vision and language across sectors. A multiplier effect can be achieved, enhancing child development, attaining education for all, reducing poverty, increasing national productivity and improving equitable inclusion (e.g. gender, disability, ethnicity, remoteness).
- From a **social policy perspective**, well-prepared ECD policies create organisational frameworks and strategies appropriate for complex situations and make planning for ECD programs easier, as they promote coordination among key stakeholders and establish systems of standards and quality assurance.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

1. Is there an ECD policy or policy framework – or plans in place to develop one?
2. If yes, is it a separate policy focusing on the young child or chapters in larger sectoral policies related to education, social development or health?

Nations and policies

Nations whose policies for education, health, nutrition, sanitation, and protection pay inadequate attention to early childhood – or that have major gaps in services for parents and for children from conception to age eight – should prioritise preparing comprehensive early childhood policies.

Countries that already have a complete set of multi-sectoral and sectoral policies for education, health, nutrition, sanitation, and protection – but lack a strong national ECD system to ensure that all children, and especially vulnerable girls and boys, develop well – should be encouraged to develop ECD policy frameworks. These ECD policy frameworks should reinforce existing policies, harmonise conflicting policies, fill policy gaps, and provide a system of ECD governance and accountability for essential ECD services.

International benchmarks for a high-quality, integrated ECD sector have been established by UNICEF in the [Innocenti Report Card](#).

Source: UNICEF n.d., [Innocenti Report Card](#)

What should all nations be encouraged to do?

All nations should be encouraged to:

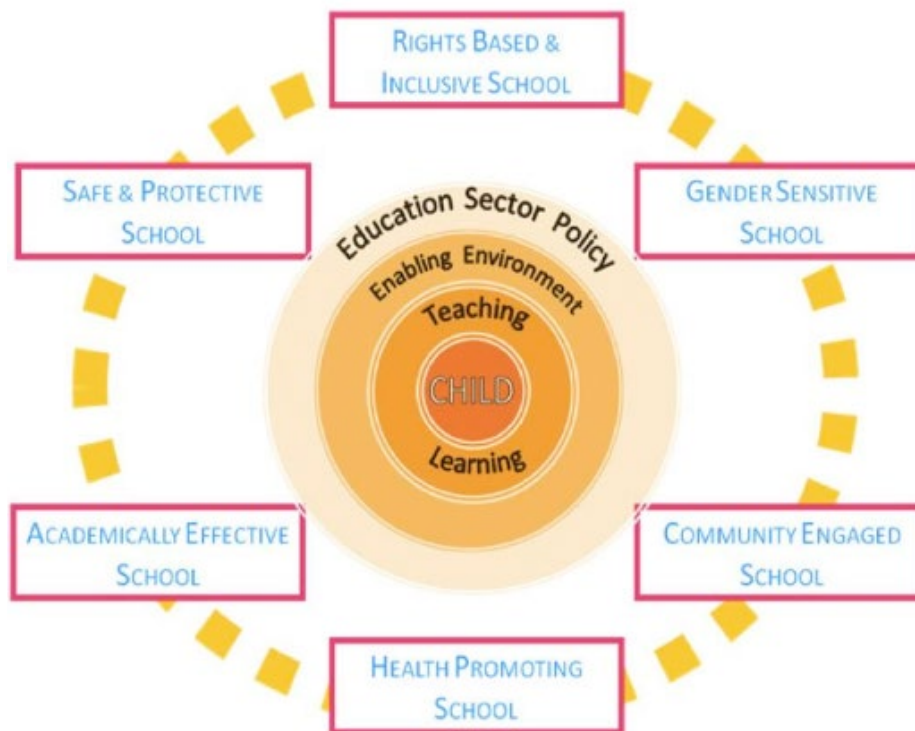
- develop multi-year national ECD strategic plans, with associated annual operational plans, identified budgets and specific performance measures
- prepare ECD legislation, codes, standards, guidelines, and regulations
- establish national targets and indicators for ECD including gender responsive and socially inclusive goals
- include ECD in all relevant sectoral and multi-sectoral policies and plans.



What is an example of a comprehensive, integrated approach to education?

An example of such a comprehensive, integrated approach to education – appropriate to ECD programs as well as primary schools – is the UNICEF-initiated Child-Friendly Education model shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Child-Friendly Education approach (UNICEF)



Source: UNICEF's n.d, Child Friendly Education.

The Child-friendly education model goes beyond academic effectiveness to describe a range of dimensions necessary for good quality education, including pre-school. Although schools may be built and operate differently from country to country, the model reflects what an education institution based on the [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) looks like. This Convention acknowledges that schools and pre-schools should operate with the best interest of the child as their core principle. Child-friendly education focuses on a learning environment which is safe, secure, stimulating and child-centred.

Source: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990, [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#).

Child-friendly education is:

- **Inclusive** – encourages all children to enrol and remain in pre-school and school irrespective of gender, ethnicity/language, social status, disability, and geographic location.



- **Academically effective** – trains teachers to provide children with knowledge relevant to them and their communities and that they will need to master in the future.
- **Non-genderised** – promotes equality and equity in enrolment and achievement through the elimination of gender stereotyping.
- **Safe, healthy, and protective** – ensures children can learn in environments which are supported by violence-prevention strategies and promote the physical and emotional health of children through health checks, immunisation, and codes of conduct for teachers, school meals, and related initiatives.
- **Participation focused** – encourages partnerships among parents, teachers, children and the community.



4 WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO DEVELOP ECD POLICIES OR POLICY FRAMEWORKS?

Essential actions

Most nations that develop ECD policies or policy frameworks involve the following core sectors in the process:

- education
- health
- nutrition
- sanitation
- social welfare or protection
- justice

Involved ministries include planning, finance, women and human development, education, health and urban and rural development. Some nations have taken an inter-sectoral and integrated approach to ECD policy planning. Active participants to be included in intensive consultation should include representatives of civil society and private sector institutions such as: universities; non-government, faith-based and cultural organisations; professional associations; ethnic and linguistic groups; parent and community groups (including women's organisations and disabled people's organisations).

What are the essential actions needed in the development of an ECD policy or policy framework?

Essential actions include:

1. **A situation analysis** to assess:
 - ECD needs
 - existing institutional, human, financial, and training resources and coordination mechanisms between these resources
 - the current policy context
 - A gender analysis.
2. **Baseline data** from a situation analysis can help to form the basis of an ECD management information system. Data needs to be sex-disaggregated.
3. The development of **a national ECD vision**, goals, and objectives, with policies and strategies for each main objective.



4. Under each strategy, the design of **priority programs** or services for the following subgroups: prenatal to age three, three to six, and six to eight, with special attention to vulnerable children, including children with disabilities.
5. The establishment of **policy monitoring**, evaluation, and research systems with disaggregated indicators, measures, and targets.
6. The formation of an **ECD governance structure** for implementing, coordinating, and evaluating the results of the ECD policy; some entity, whether it be one of the collaborating ministries or a separate coordinating body (e.g. under the President's/Prime Minister's office), should be clearly defined as the lead agency.
7. The development of **program standards** related to content (ECD curricula and materials), methods (teaching practice and supportive media), and pre- and in-service training systems for professionals, para-professionals and volunteers.
8. The establishment of effective and **independent regulatory and monitoring authorities** to ensure program standards are met and a culture of continual quality improvement is developed.
9. The development of **policy advocacy** and social mobilisation plans.
10. The development of an **investment and financing plan** that includes cost projections and simulations to optimise the use of current resources and identify new ones.
11. The promotion of **partnerships and on-going dialogue**, coordination, and commitment among representatives of government, civil society, the private sector and international development partners. This includes engagement with the international community, for example, reporting against the Sustainable Development Goals – particularly SDG 4.2: *“By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”*.

Source: United Nations, 2019, Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Is there a standardised approach to ECD policy or policy framework development?

There is no standardised approach to what an ECD policy or policy framework should look like – only suggestions as to what might be included. Every country – even those with similar political and financial constraints and a similar demographic context – will likely end up with different options in regard to issues such as:

- age ranges for different types of early childhood services
- the mix of public, private, and community ownership and funding of these services
- the extent to which (and how) the equitable supply of services to marginalised populations (including girls and children with disabilities) is guaranteed
- the areas in which the central government attempts to assert quality control over these services (e.g., standards regarding facilities, curriculum, and staff)



qualifications)

- the extent to which pre-school services focus on academic preparation for primary school or on the overall development of the child's personality, values, and skills
- the special attention paid by governments to successful early learning.

Source: Vargas-Barón, 2005, *Planning Policies for Early Childhood Development: Guidelines for Action*, especially Annex VIII and IX.



5 WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT CAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES PROVIDE TO HELP GOVERNMENTS EXPAND AND ENHANCE ECD?

Depending on the situation of children in a given country and the nature (and financing) of any ECD policy and resulting programs, there is a range of actions which development agencies can take to support expanded investment in and the provision of ECD programs.

Developing policy messages and mechanisms

Often because of a lack of political will, limited government financing for ECD, and a lack of attention paid to improving overall system quality, there remains a major need for strong and continuing policy engagement with two essential messages.

1. The first message, directed at the system level, is the critical importance of ECD in both individual development and national development. Development partners can usefully advocate for the need to place integrated, holistic, disability inclusive ECD programs higher on the agenda, due to the long-term development benefits and cost-effectiveness of such investments. Policy engagement around this message could be done in several ways:

- the adaptation, translation (into national and local languages), and targeted dissemination of existing tools (e.g., the ‘Four Cornerstones’ of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development; ‘General Comment 7’ of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; tools associated with SDG 4.2, the [Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development](#)).

Source: World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Bank, 2018, [Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential](#).

- support the development of ECD-related legislation, including towards the provision of free and compulsory pre-primary education
- engagement with the Ministry of Education on the importance of early learning outcomes. This should be linked to the expansion of pre-primary education and improved coherence in the pre-school/early primary grades interface while supporting child friendly (play-based), family focused early childhood learning
- support the expansion of the supply of good quality publicly and privately provided inclusive pre-primary education spaces, early intervention services for children with disabilities and activities to increase demand for these spaces (e.g., public communications and conditional cash transfers related to pre-primary enrolment).



2. The second message, directed to parents and the community, is the critical importance of ECD for children’s well-being and for getting children ready for school and successful learning. Actions may include parent education, support, and empowerment programs that strengthen understanding, resilience and capacity related to the family’s role in the care and development of their children (with targeted support for parents of children with disabilities and in vulnerable circumstances); actions for children’s participation in available ECD programs with a special focus on pre-school attendance; and the promotion of the use of mother tongue in pre-primary education and in the early grades.

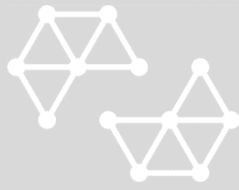
Exploring affordable and practical models to expand inclusive pre-primary education

Given the sometimes limited and often inequitable supply of pre-primary education in some countries, more effort must be directed at expanding access, with priority given to inclusive, equity-focused ECD policies and programs. These should have a special focus on expanding good quality pre-primary education to those most marginalised from the system, including girls, children with disabilities and children from communities marginalised due to poverty, ethnicity or other circumstances. This emphasis on inclusion is important to ensure that good quality ECD services reach the most marginalised.

Possible areas of investment

Below is a list of possible areas of investment.

- The identification and evaluation of existing models (or the piloting of new models) which attempt to extend the benefits of ECD to all families, including the financing required for scaling up to system wide implementation.
- Trial a 'down and out', and then 'up and in' approach to expand inclusive pre-primary education. That is, run counter to the usual logic of expanding ECD services from relatively affluent, better serviced urban areas to rural and then remote areas. Instead, provide new services in the poorest ('down') and poorly serviced ('out') areas. Having learned from service delivery challenges in the hardest areas, expand ECD to better resourced ('up') and less challenging rural and urban areas ('in').
- The evaluation of, or experimentation with, alternative models of shorter-term, less intense pre-primary education where longer, full-time programs are not feasible. Care should be made to not reduce the duration programs below recommended levels (at least 450 hours per year).
- Support the relevant authorities in setting ECD quality assurance standards for public, private and community-based ECD services.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

3. Are there promising ECD models that could benefit from further piloting, assessment and scaling up?
4. Does the Australian development program have the capacity to collaborate in the further development of such models?

Including ECD data in education management information systems

Many education management information systems (EMIS) ignore or inadequately cover pre-school services. Efforts could be made to improve this coverage through:

- assistance to ministries of education to integrate ECD/pre-primary data (disaggregated participation rates by gender, disability, urban/rural; numbers and nature of classrooms/programs, teachers, and materials; financial data; gender parity for students and teachers; flow-through numbers from pre-school to school; percentage of school students who have participated in some form of ECD; leadership positions disaggregated by gender) into the existing national EMIS
- capacity-building within ministries of education to ensure effective data collection (including disability and sex disaggregated data), analysis, dissemination, and use in determining priorities and budgets
- engaging in capacity building through international agencies such as UNICEF, which has the remit for SDG 4.2, and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, which has the remit for education statistics, focused on ECD.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

Does the current EMIS adequately cover early childhood education services, including assessments of early grade learning?

Helping ministries of education to develop learning standards and assessment and monitoring tools

In the expansion of pre-primary education, there are several different sets of standards and tools required. These include:

- culturally-relevant, gender sensitive early learning and development standards (ELDS) and tools to assess the age-appropriate achievements of children
- the development of competencies expected of children in pre-school classrooms, such as pre-literacy and numeracy skills and social development. Identified competencies need to be developmentally appropriate and accompanied by curriculum, learning materials, and assessment approaches that take into account varying learning support needs of students
- development of individual learning support plans for children with specific learning needs.

Systematic and repeated early grade assessments of literacy and numeracy achievement, such as the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), the Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA) and other tools (e.g. the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)) are supported by a number of agencies. New tools are being developed to align with SDG 4.2 and these include the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes project (MELQO) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). For further insights, refer to the [scoping review](#) on the measurement of young children's learning, completed under the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Centre, an ACER–DFAT partnership.

Sources: ECD Measure, 2018, History of MELQO; UNICEF, 2019, MICS; Jackson et al, 2019a, Measurement of young children's learning for program evaluation.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

1. Have early learning and development standards (ELDS) been developed? If so, how are they being used?
2. Have any early grade literacy and numeracy surveys been done? If yes, what has been the reaction of the Ministry of Education to the results?
3. Is the country planning to report against SDG 4.2?



Helping ministries of education to enhance the quality of pre-primary education

There are a number of ways through which relatively small investments could have considerable impact, both on the quality of pre-primary education provision itself, and in support of children's transition to – and success in – primary school.

What are important areas in the transition from pre-school to primary education?

Curriculum

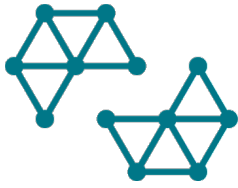
Learning and development standards will have little impact if they are not appropriate to children's developmental stages. The curricula for the pre-school/early grades should be developmentally appropriate, coherent, integrated and continuous. Regular measurement (e.g. age- and stage-appropriate classroom assessment) is important for tracking how students are doing, for guiding the pace at which new material is introduced, and determining the need for targeted revision. This all requires collaboration between curriculum developers, learning material writers, assessment approaches, and teacher pre- and in-service training for both pre-primary and the early grades.

Teaching and learning materials

The teaching and learning materials prepared for pre-school and the early grades should be developed to match expected learning standards and need to be culturally appropriate. They should be gender responsive, disability inclusive, and fun and interesting to young learners.

Comprehensive pre-primary teacher management and development policies and systems

An essential part of enhancing the quality of pre-primary provision is supporting the pre-primary teacher. This requires a systematic teacher management and development policy that specifies the minimum qualifications and competency standards required for a pre-primary teacher. Also required are mechanisms and processes of recruitment, pre-service training, certification, school placement, in-service training/ongoing professional development, and career progression.



Case study: South Africa – The Partnerships Achieve Literacy (PAL) Project

The project on Partnerships Achieve Literacy (PAL) in South Africa has the primary objective of increasing the reading achievement levels of children up to Grade 3 through the development of research-based literacy curricula and materials relevant to the children and teachers in the local context.

The project offers a differentiated literacy curriculum to increase children's reading skills, motivation and abilities. The project makes large numbers of texts available in classrooms to support reading instruction. Digital cameras, a computer, printer, paper and a laminating machine are used to create student authored texts. Picture books, big books, and community produced resources, writing journals and other print materials are available.

Key elements of the project include:

- the provision of strategies, including learning stations and other technologies, to deliver research-based practices designed to address the differentiated needs of children
- the use of a professional development model that is collaborative, learner centred, and related to practice
- the involvement of university and school faculties in analysing student performance data to determine appropriate curriculum and professional development experiences
- the expansion of awareness of project activities to other grades (4-6) and additional sites through professional development activities and pre-service field experience placements.

Source: Project PAL, n.d., [About Project PAL](#).

Helping ministries of education to enhance the quality of early grades of primary education

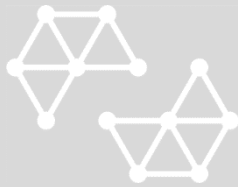
Ministries of education seldom analyse the nature or quality of different levels of the primary school system – for example, the early grades versus the later grades. Formal student assessments usually come at the end of the primary cycle rather than in the early grades. At this point, it is often too late to identify children with educational delays and who might be at risk of failure or drop out.

Assistance could be provided to ministries of education through:

- the detailed analysis of existing data (or new data) clearly examining fundamental differences between the early and late grades in terms of inputs and outcomes,
- support to develop a pre-service specialisation in the early grades and in-service upgrading of practicing early grade teachers,



- formative assessment techniques (in-class assessments of performance to check for understanding), and
- support to implement early grade literacy and numeracy assessments to assess children’s achievement in the early grades and to identify learning difficulties that require further assessment and support.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

Do teachers assigned to the early grades receive any specialised training focused on child development and early literacy?

Promoting research and evaluation to provide sound evidence for sound decision-making

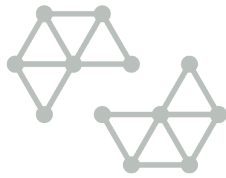
Often missing from the plethora of interventions related to ECD – whether externally-funded projects or more established government programs – is systematic, longitudinal assessment, both formative and summative, of the processes, mechanisms, and impact of these interventions. Such analyses can help identify models that work best, provide evidence for further investment in ECD programs, assist with systems of early assessment for disability and delays, and provide evidence on the use of mother tongue for initial literacy.



An activity for you

Consider your country program or a country known to you and answer the following questions.

1. What kinds of monitoring and evaluation are most needed in relation to ECD programs?
2. Who, if anyone, is doing analyses – the Ministry of Education, universities, the NGO community?



6 TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Assessment questions

Answer the following questions by ticking 'True' or 'False'. Once you have selected your answers to all the questions, turn the page to 'The correct answers are...' to check the accuracy of your answers.

Question 1

It is better to provide targeted interventions later in life than to spend too much effort and money in early childhood.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 2

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds experience the most dramatic gains from good quality ECD programs.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 3

Brain development occurs most rapidly in challenging environments characterised by little social interaction, nurturing, or stimulation.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 4

The Heckman Curve demonstrates that the greatest return to human capital investment occurs in higher education.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False



Question 5

There is clear evidence that good quality ECD programs result in cost-savings and increased efficiency in primary education.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 6

The development of any national ECD policy or framework should start with the development of a national ECD vision, goals, and objectives, with policies and strategies for each main objective.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 7

An essential part of any ECD governance structure is an entity clearly defined as the lead coordinating agency.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 8

Advocacy around ECD should be focused at: (a) the system level, to government decision-makers, and; (b) parents and communities.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 9

An essential part of any good ECD policy is the creation of culturally-relevant, gender sensitive, disability inclusive early learning and development standards (ELDS), with tools to assess their achievement.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False

Question 10

It is important to have one set of curriculum materials and teaching methods suitable for the non-formal nature of pre-schools and another set appropriate to more formal primary schools.

Is this statement true or false?

True

False



The correct answers are...

Question 1

It is better to provide targeted interventions later in life than to spend too much effort and money in early childhood.

This statement is false. Providing age appropriate and well-targeted interventions in early childhood are cost-effective and result in long-lasting benefits.

Question 2

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds experience the most dramatic gains from good quality ECD programs.

The statement is true. Children from vulnerable backgrounds, when they participate in high quality ECD programs, can not only keep up with their more advantaged peers but can catch up. This is one way of closing income-related inequality gaps.

Question 3

Brain development occurs most rapidly in challenging environments characterised by little social interaction, nurturing, or stimulation.

The statement is false. Social interaction, nurturing and stimulation should be provided as early as possible as key inputs to rapid brain development.

Question 4

The Heckman Curve demonstrates that the greatest return to human capital investment occurs in higher education.

The statement is false. The Heckman curve demonstrates that investments in human capital starting at birth generate the greatest return on investment.

Question 5

There is clear evidence that good quality ECD programs result in cost-savings and increased efficiency in primary education.

The statement is true. Later remediation of development delay costs more than earlier interventions in capacity of skill development. Earlier skills are essential pre-conditions for the development of later capabilities.



Question 6

The development of any national ECD policy or framework should start with the development of a national ECD vision, goals, and objectives, with policies and strategies for each main objective.

The statement is false. The development of a national ECD vision, goals, and objectives is very important. As with any policy framework, though, the critical first step is a situation analysis to assess: (1) ECD needs; (2) existing institutional, human, financial, and training resources; and (3) the current policy context.

Question 7

An essential part of any ECD governance structure is an entity clearly defined as the lead coordinating agency.

The statement is true.

Question 8

Advocacy around ECD should be focused at: (a) the system level, to government decision-makers, and; (b) parents and communities.

The statement is true.

Question 9

An essential part of any good ECD policy is the creation of culturally-relevant, gender sensitive early learning and development standards (ELDS), with tools to assess their achievement.

The statement is true.

Question 10

It is important to have one set of curriculum materials and teaching methods suitable for the non-formal nature of pre-schools and another set appropriate to more formal primary schools.

The statement is false. The teaching and learning materials prepared for pre-school and the early grades should be developed for use across various settings, be gender responsive and be developmentally appropriate, continuous and integrated.



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Learn more about...

- ✦ *The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)*, found at: <http://www.asercentre.org/>
- ✦ *The 'down and out', and then 'up and in' approach*, found at: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/scaling-up>
- ✦ *EGRA and EGMA*, found at: <https://www.epdc.org/node/5355.html>
- ✦ *The Global Child Development Group*, found at this website: <https://www.hifa.org/support/supporting-organisations/global-child-development-group>
- ✦ *The Heckman Equation*, found at: <http://www.heckmanequation.org/>
- ✦ *Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO)*, found at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248053e.pdf>
- ✦ *UNICEF's Child-Friendly Schools Manual*, found at: <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-friendly-schools-manual>
- ✦ *Measuring Child Development: A Toolkit for Doing It Right*, found at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/publication/a-toolkit-for-measuring-early-child-development-in-low-and-middle-income-countries>