PROMISING APPROACHES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Early Childhood Development
Interventions from Around the World

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Introduction

This guide was prepared by the Early Learning Partnership (ELP) team at the World Bank as a resource for policy makers and development professionals interested in improving access to high-quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) services. It brings together a selection of approaches to ECD that have been implemented with promising results in low- or middle-income countries (or both). The list of programs and approaches highlighted here is by no means exhaustive; rather, those cited have been selected based on (i) some evidence of their positive impact or documentation of their results and (ii) their relevance to common needs and questions posed by governments and World Bank staff working in ECD. This is intended to be a living document, and additional promising approaches will be added over time, as will descriptions of programs that missed their intended impact but nonetheless offer important lessons for ECD policy. This first edition includes some brief descriptions of a few such “cautionary tales” as an appendix.

This guide should be considered a starting point for generating ideas about approaches that may be worth considering in a given country context. Each profile includes a description of how each approach was implemented and financed; a summary of results as measured through impact or process evaluations or program administrative data, as available; and a discussion of the key factors that likely contributed to those results. Readers who might be interested in replicating a particular approach are encouraged to consult the references to gain further insights.

Following are important questions to consider when exploring potential adaptations of these approaches:

- Is the problem that this approach seeks to address similar to the problem in the new context? (e.g., low take-up of ECD services, poor nutrition, lack of stimulating home environments for disadvantaged children)
- Does the capacity exist to implement this approach in a similar manner, or would significant modifications need to be made?
- On what types of background infrastructure (physical, human, legal and regulatory, etc.) does this approach depend? For example, does the approach require that there be a workforce with a particular skill set? Does it assume a certain method of delivering child care?
- Is the cost per beneficiary likely to be similar in this new context? Is this a good value for money given the available resources?
- What type of monitoring, and possibly evaluation, would be needed? Are they feasible?

Feedback, corrections, and suggestions for approaches to be profiled in future editions of this report are welcome and may be sent to earlylearningpartnership@worldbank.org.

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**Implementation Arrangements**

Teams of promoters—made up of teachers, educators, and health professionals—engage with communities and mobilize resources for this program. These promoters train “facilitators,” who are professionals such as family doctors but may not be familiar with pedagogical techniques. The training equips the facilitators to provide pedagogical advice to families, whether in their homes or in community centers. Families with children below age two receive weekly individual home visits and are guided through games, conversations, and other activities to enhance their babies’ development. Children between the ages of two and six and their families go on weekly group outings to parks, cultural facilities, and sports centers with counselors trained in child development and family participation.

**Cost and Financing Arrangements**

The Educate Your Child program is estimated to cost approximately 0.26% to 0.32% of Cuba’s gross domestic product (GDP). The cost is difficult to quantify because of the wide range of actors participating in and funding the program. After its 20 years of implementation, the model has proven to be inexpensive and sustainable.

The Ecuadorian adaptation of the Educate Your Child program, called “Growing with Our Children,” costs US$121 per child per year to implement one session per week.

**Results**

**Child development:** In experimental studies in 1987, 1992, 1994, and 1999, children who participated in the Educate Your Child program showed better results in all areas of development (cognitive, emotional, communication, motor, and habits) compared to children in a control group.

**Parental behavior and knowledge:** Families that participated in the Educate Your Child program showed increased knowledge and positive attitudes towards child development.

**What contributed to the program’s success?**

**Communities and families share responsibility for child development:** Promoters, teachers, educators, professionals, women’s groups, and community members educate and encourage families to support their children’s development.

**Comprehensive training and monitoring:** The program includes an intensive training program for promoters and facilitators offered at national, provincial, municipal, and local levels. The program also receives constant monitoring to identify improvements and monitor children’s growth.

**Multisectoral approach:** The program’s trainings and child development strategy include content for child and maternal health, nutrition, sports, and cognitive development. The ministries of Health, Education, Culture, and Sports coordinate and provide holistic support to maximize children’s development.

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Implementation Arrangements
The program facilitates new Madrasa preschools in mosques, in Quranic schools, or as independent centers:

1. Community Sensitization and Mobilization: In the first stage, the program assesses community needs and available resources, raising community awareness of ECD.
2. Contract and Implementation: Two groups are formed: a School Management Committee (SMC) to oversee the implementation of the project, and a Community Resource Team (CRT) to assume responsibility for constructing or rehabilitating classrooms, training, monitoring and evaluation, operations, and financial support of the preschools. Parents can become CRT or SMC members.
3. Graduation and Post-Graduation: Programs graduate after they have met a set of criteria regarding community involvement, teaching and learning environment, and management. Upon graduation, programs continue to receive support and training in order to ensure their sustainability.

Cost and Financing Arrangements
The program is funded by the Aga Khan Foundation along with a wide range of community contributions.

• All communities receive an initial US$1,000 grant from the Aga Khan Foundation to assist with the rehabilitation of school structures and to purchase teaching and learning materials.
• The total annual community contribution per center ranges from US$1,800 to US$8,000 (in kind and monetary), depending on the number of children served and the extent of services provided.
• Communities contribute between 20% and 50% of the costs of the centers (including set-up and recurrent costs).

Results
Child development: Participating children had significantly higher cognitive development and school readiness compared to children who attended other preschools.
Teacher quality: The quality of teaching and the learning environment in the Madrasa preschool was higher than in comparison preschools.

What contributed to the program’s success?
Community ownership: The program encourages each community to reflect on its needs, resources, and responsibilities to improve the lives of its children. This system helps creates an economically, socially, and culturally appropriate program.

Comprehensive training and monitoring: Because the program relies on community volunteers or low-wage preprimary teachers, training arrangements are critical to ensure quality. Teachers receive both theoretical training and practice in the classroom under the regular guidance of a mentor trainer.

Transitional support for teachers and children into primary school: Training activities also address the transition from preschool to primary school and the transition from home to school. Preschool and primary school teachers discuss transition issues in joint workshops.

**Implementation Arrangements**

As a precondition to receiving this program, communities commit to providing a space to construct the classrooms as well as some construction materials and labor for construction, and they commit to creating a committee responsible for managing and supervising the preschools. Communities receive materials necessary for the construction of up to three classrooms that can each hold up to 35 students. The committee mobilizes parents and caregivers to enroll their children and to participate in meetings, construction, and maintenance activities.

Each class is staffed with two volunteer teachers, who receive training. The training focuses on developing an understanding of child development, teacher-child interaction, and implementation of the daily routine, including emergent literacy and mathematics activities. Parents and teachers participate in parenting meetings. Facilitators are present in the preschools during the first day of school and conduct monthly visits where teachers are coached and mentored on their teaching practices.

**Cost and Financing Arrangements**

The Ministry of Education and Save the Children provide the resources for the initial years of the program and work with each community so it can sustain the preschool(s) after funding ends. Each teacher receives a stipend (US$10 per month), while the community decides how much each household will contribute. Program cost per year per student ranges from US$20 to US$30, depending on the number of months the preschool is open.

**Results**

Preschool participation: Among children ages 3 and 4, the program led to a 43.9 percentage-point increase in preschool enrollment.

Child development: Children enrolled in the program showed a 14.6 point increase in cognitive development on the Ages & Stages Questionnaire II (ASQ).

Transition to primary school: Children who attended preschool were 10.2 percentage points more likely to enroll in primary school at the appropriate age, compared to students who did not attend preschool.

Adult caregiving and labor supply: Parents who attended monthly parenting meetings and had children enrolled in preschool were 21 percentage points more likely to practice daily routines with their child and were 6.2 percent more likely to have worked in the past 30 days.

**What contributed to the program’s success?**

Communities build capacity: This preschool model is based on communities being responsible for managing and sustaining the centers, including providing space for the construction of schools, building materials, and all associated labor costs, as well as creating a preschool supervisory committee. The committee’s responsibility is to help mobilize resources and draw in the support of parents through school meetings and activities.

Comprehensive and continuous training: Each classroom is staffed with two volunteer teachers, who must first pass a written literacy exam and math exam, interview with the committee, and deliver a classroom simulation. The program provides foundational training for teachers as well as ongoing mentoring and support. Facilitators and government partners help provide regular teacher support through monthly visits. Learning Circles are designed to enable knowledge sharing among teachers working in different districts.

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For more information, please consult: Sebastian Martinez, Sophie Naudeau, and Vitor Pereira, Promise of Preschool in Africa: Community-Based Preschools in Rural Mozambique (Washington: Save the Children and World Bank, 2012).
Implementation Arrangements

The Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) project provided facilitation and block grants to communities to implement community-based early childhood education services for poor children. With the assistance of a technical advisor, communities chose from a list of service options, including playgroups, formal kindergartens, health posts, community centers with integrated ECE services, and outreach services, such as home visiting or mother-child meetings. Communities could combine more than one type of service.

The programs were implemented by one teacher and one community development worker, who each received 200 hours of training in early child development, nutrition, and community-driven development. The grant also funded training of community-based teachers and advocacy activities to sensitize the community about the benefits of ECE.

Cost and Financing Arrangements

- The total project cost was US$127 million (World Bank, US$67.5 million; the Netherlands, US$25.3 million; and Government of Indonesia, US$34.9 million).
- The ECED provided villages with block grants averaging US$18,000 for up to two services, which covered startup and operational costs over 3 years.

Results

**Enrollment**: Children in the program were 7.5 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in any preschool.

**Socio-emotional outcomes**: The program significantly increased measures of social competence, emotional maturity, and language and cognitive development among the poorest children, as measured by the Early Development Instrument (EDI).

**Quality**: On average, the centers opened under the program provided higher quality services than other types of preschools in the targeted communities, as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R).

What contributed to the program's success?

**Flexible delivery model**: Within certain program requirements, villages were able to make decisions about the scheduling, physical setting, and implementation features of the services.

**Community involvement and education**: The program was designed to help increase the capacity of poor communities to engage in participatory planning that would result in new or improved ECE services. Villages were sensitized to the importance and benefits of ECE and provided with technical support. Technical advisors helped villagers assess existing services and unmet needs, submit a proposal for a block grant, establish a team to manage the grant, and identify people to serve as teachers and child development workers.

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Implementation Arrangements
The Releasing Confidence and Creativity (RCC) program includes two main activities. First, the program identifies and trains local women in the community and lower-primary school teachers to serve as preschool teachers and caregivers. Once training programs are completed, the program supports the establishment of ECE classes in government primary schools with support from a local NGO partner.

Cost and Financing Arrangements
The program is funded jointly by USAID and the Aga Khan Foundation. The six Pakistani NGOs involved in the program also provide some staff time and the use of equipment for program development and delivery. Specific information on costs is not presently available.

Results
Child development (note that these are not causal estimates of impact):
• Compared to baseline data, children’s cognitive development improved during the RCC program.
• RCC participants performed better in primary grades 1 and 2 than peers who did not attend the program, according to teacher reporting.

Teacher training: RCC teacher training, follow-up, and ongoing mentoring contributed to better classroom practices. Teachers engaged children in small groups and worked one-on-one with students.

What contributed to the program’s success?
Parental and community involvement, education, and dialogue: The program ensures coordination among parents, communities, and government officials to promote ECE through sessions with local government leaders and community events.

Training for teachers, schools and government officials: Teacher trainings emphasize child-friendly approaches that focus on young children’s cognitive and socioemotional development. Training programs also guide teachers in developing strategies for easing children’s transition from home to school. Teachers meet to discuss new teaching techniques or talk about classroom experiences, and school administrators participate on a limited basis. Training programs are also provided for local government and school officials.

Quality assurance through NGOs: Teacher training and preschool programs are managed through a cluster approach, in which local NGOs are responsible for supporting schools. NGOs provide each cluster (of 27-55 schools) with professional development training, including arranging study tours and program implementation support, providing learning materials, and coaching. NGOs also help organize community campaigns, advocacy efforts, and related health interventions.

Implementation Arrangements

This program seeks to improve outcomes in education and health by providing cash transfers every two months to selected households with children below the age of 22. The transfer is traditionally awarded to mothers on the condition that families send their children to school (from primary to high school) regularly and attend health check-ups. The education-based transfers are awarded per child for up to three children per household and vary depending on the child’s gender and school grade level. Girls receive more money than boys, and the transfer increases with grade level.

The health component consists of providing nutritional supplements for all infants between 6 and 23 months, for undernourished children between the ages of 24 and 59 months, and for pregnant or breastfeeding women. Since 2010, beneficiaries have also received a direct cash transfer, called Child Benefit for a Better Living, for every child ages 0 to 9 years to support nutrition and development. Parents are also expected to attend parental talks on the importance of nutrition, education, and health investments for their children.

Cost and Financing Arrangements

As of 2012, the Chamber of Representatives authorized US$5.3 billion for the program. In 2006, the budget for the program (then called Oportunidades) was 0.4% of Mexico’s GDP.

Results

- Children 3 years old and younger in participating families had fewer socio-emotional and behavioral problems and greater language and speech development skills.
- By 2007, anemia incidence in beneficiaries younger than 2 years old had been reduced by almost half compared to the incidence in 1999, dropping from 61% to 35.8%.
- In rural areas, preventive and curative health visits of beneficiary families increased by 3%.
- The program reduced sick days by 20 percent among children 0–5 years old in rural areas.

What contributed to the program’s success?

**Effective targeting:** Prospera applies a rigorous beneficiary identification system using socioeconomic and demographic criteria. Selected families receive transfers based on poverty and vulnerability. Continued payment is conditional on regular attendance at school and for medical appointments.

**Constant evaluation and monitoring at national and international levels:** Since its inception, the program has included an evaluation to assess impact and improve program design. This early data-collection stage resulted in a number of papers by renowned international organizations and social policy experts. Constant evaluation has also helped with the program’s transparency and accountability. The Chamber of Representatives receives an annual report on the program. It is noteworthy that this program was continued (though with a different name) through three presidential administrations.

**Women-oriented transfers:** One of the program’s key design features is that money is transferred directly to the mothers within each household to achieve a higher impact on the children’s education and nutrition.

Implementation Arrangements

Traditional Community Welfare Homes (abbreviated as HCBs in Spanish) are led by a “communitarian mother” (MC), who is a home-based childcare provider. Each home serves up to 15 children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years on part-time or full-time schedules during weekdays. Services provided in the HCBs include childcare, food supplements, monitoring of nutritional status, psychosocial development activities, and the development and promotion of health and disease prevention. Parents also receive support to strengthen their relationships with their children, with their families, and with the community.

Most MCs have a high school education, though roughly one in six providers has some higher education and another one in six has only an elementary education. All are required to attend 40 hours of preservice training in childcare and development. MCs also receive subsidized loans from the National Institute of Family Welfare to improve the childcare spaces in their homes.

Cost and Financing Arrangements

The National Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) budget represents 0.3% of Colombia’s GDP and is funded by 3% of payroll taxes. Participating parents are required to pay a monthly fee not higher than 25% of the daily minimum wage, which goes directly to the MC’s salary. As of 2009, the annual budget for the program was estimated to be US$435 million.

Results

Child development: After at least 15 months of exposure to the program, children scored higher on tests of cognitive development (0.15 to 0.3 of a standard deviation) and socio-emotional skills (0.12 to 0.3 of a standard deviation), compared to similar children who entered the program later.

Nutrition: Evidence on the program’s impact on nutritional status is mixed. One study finds no significant effect, while another finds a 2 percentage-point decrease in the probability of chronic malnutrition for children between the ages of 2 and 4 (see “For more information,” below).

What contributed to the program’s success?

Comprehensive approach: The program is intended to improve all aspects of a child’s development, including cognitive, behavioral, and physical development. It achieves this by having a qualified and prepared MC; providing per-child payments for food and annual payments for pedagogical materials to the HCBs; and engaging parents and the community in the child’s development through support, meetings, and building of networks.

Training: All MCs receive training on health and nutritional monitoring and child development. MCs also receive the necessary materials to teach and care for participating children.

Implementation Arrangements
Through group discussions and learning exercises, mothers receive training in cognitive development, childrearing, conflict resolution, reproductive health, early literacy, and child health. The training is provided in Adult/Public Education Centers (A/PECs) by a network of teachers and social workers who are trained by the Mother-Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). AÇEV provides trainers with ongoing and on-the-job follow-up training, mentoring, and supervision in order to enhance program effectiveness. Program facilitators also conduct home visits to provide further individualized literacy learning assistance to participating families and to consolidate mothers’ gains in parenting and literacy skills.

Groups of 15 to 25 mothers attend weekly three-hour sessions for a period of 25 weeks (six months). Sessions cover three core components:
- **Mother support program:** Provides mothers with the skills to support the cognitive development of their children and prepare a positive mother-child home environment.
- **Reproductive health and family planning:** Mothers learn about keeping their family healthy and about reproductive health.
- **Cognitive education program:** Helps mothers prepare their children for school by going over pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities to be practiced with their children.

Cost and Financing Arrangements
Funding for MOCEP comes from the Ministry of Education and is found to cost US$15 per mother trained.

Results
- Trained mothers talked to their children more and were less punitive and more responsive to their children.
- 86% of the children in the mother-trained group were still in school, compared with 67% of the nontrained group.
- Children in the mother-trained group showed better school performance than the nontrained group during the first 5 years of primary school.

What contributed to the program's success?
**Role of mothers as first educators of children:** The program emphasizes the role of mothers as first teachers/educators of children.

**Comprehensive training:** The program focuses on many dimensions of child development. It provides training in a number of important areas that can have an impact on parents’ relationships with their children as well as children’s overall development. Trainers are also provided with continued support through mentoring and supervision.
Implementation Arrangements
RISE staff, in coordination with MoEVT, designed, produced, and distributed interactive audio material (radio, video, kits, and story books), provided the necessary equipment (including MP3 players and solar radios), and conducted trainings for teachers (both formal and informal facilitators), school management committees, district officials, and district coordinators in how to use the materials and effectively use interactive audio instruction (IAI) for classroom instruction. Throughout the program, RISE built the capacity of MoEVT staff in the design, development, and production of IAI programming and training programs. The project was based on an operational manual, which established clear institutional and implementation responsibilities and financial procedures to allow for efficient flow of funding.

Synergy between government and development partners: The project was based on existing partnerships in ECD services between the government and development agencies. Rather than starting completely new partnerships, the project built upon the Government of Zanzibar’s current engagements with partner agencies.

Cost and Financing Arrangements
The RISE program was funded by USAID. After its 10 years of implementation, the model has proven to be inexpensive and sustainable. Generally speaking, IAI costs can be significantly lower than those for other models of teaching training and instruction, especially if the materials are used over several years. Programs can include cost-recovery mechanisms like user fees, but considering that IAI aims to reach the most vulnerable in remote areas, this may not be feasible.

Results
Teaching training: Over 800 formal teachers and non-formal facilitators were trained, providing learning opportunities for 35,000 Zanzibari children.

Learning outcomes:
- Children that participated in RISE outperformed control students by 7.5 points out of 75 total points (or 10%), overall. Learning gains were higher among girls than boys.
- Six years later, there was evidence of better mastery of grade-level concepts among RISE students in formal schools compared to control students in formal schools and to RISE students in nonformal schools or in some combination nonformal/formal schools.

Institutional transfer and sustainability: Both the use of interactive radio instruction and community preschools were institutionalized within the government, and a distance learning division was created.

What contributed to the program’s success?
Approach well suited to the challenge: IAI was well suited to meet the objective of reaching vulnerable children in remote areas.

Community engagement: RISE undertook community sensitization to engage the community before starting the community preschools. School management committees were trained and worked to support the centers.

Capacity building for the ministry: Building capacity in the MoEVT to design, develop and produce IAI programming and materials contributed to the ministry’s ability to take over the implementation and institutionalize the approach after just a few years of implementation.

Implementation Arrangements

Mexico's National Council for Education Development (CONAFE) targets parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 4 to improve their competencies and practices in caring for children, in order to contribute to the children's development and school readiness. Using existing public spaces such as preschools, a network of local volunteer women teach parenting skills and activities for caregivers to use with children. The program has been implemented in several states across Mexico.

Facilitators are local individuals who receive 2 weeks of annual training, educational materials, and a small stipend. They run weekly information sessions with parents, caregivers, and children through a curriculum-based program 9 months of the year, with limited monitoring by a full-time supervisor. The curriculum follows a competency-based approach focusing on (1) language and communication, (2) protection and care, (3) personal and social skills, and (4) exploration of one's environment. The intervention includes the introduction of early stimulation practices to promote children's cognitive development, and it emphasizes the participation of men in the training practices. Each session consists of four phases: reflection, sharing ideas, practice, and closing, supported by program materials provided by CONAFE. Evaluations are integrated throughout the program cycle.

Cost and Financing Arrangements

Implementation costs were estimated at roughly US$112 per child per year, including training, stipends and salaries, and materials. Program costs vary significantly between urban and rural areas.

Results

Improved parenting behaviors: According to preliminary data, 80 percent of teachers and 76 percent of school directors reported that participating parents provided greater parental attention and support. After the first year of the program, participants improved on an index of 9 observed parenting practices by 0.34 standard deviations (statistically significant at the 5% level). Children in the program were also more likely to have more than one book and watched fewer hours of television.

Improved child development outcomes: Preliminary results indicate that children in the younger age groups (0 to 3 years of age) had improved outcomes in the areas of communication and gross motor skills.

What contributed to the program’s success?

Strong institutional backing: The program had a strong foundation in the National Constitution and a series of plans, laws, decrees, and regulations providing a legal basis for the program.

Community-based approach: The program relied primarily on existing community resources, including local community members, volunteer trainers, and community infrastructure for its implementation. A community-based model may reduce costs, increase accountability of all participants, and be more sustainable.

Implementation Arrangements

The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) program has been running since 2009. In 2015, for the first time, the program launched a new training stream, focused on training preschool teachers and childcare business owners. The program is managed by the Ministry of Gender and implemented by a local service provider. In the pilot, 60 young women were trained as preschool teachers and caregivers. Training components on life and business skills were also included to equip these women to potentially become entrepreneurs and run their own early learning centers.

Cost and Financing Arrangements

The one-off cost to develop the program (curriculum, intensive monitoring and evaluation during pilot phase) was US$135,000. The cost per trainee during the pilot was US$1,700 for three months of classroom training (including provision of childcare for trainees who had their own children), plus a three-month job placement.

Results

Early results from the pilot phase are encouraging. Demand for the program was strong with 361 applicants going through the recruitment process for the 60 places; all 60 women enrolled, completed the classroom training with an attendance rate of 98% and 92% of trainees achieved more than 85% on the assessment. Currently the trainees are performing well in the job placements – 97% are performing above expectations and 50% have already received assurances of employment after the program. The final impact evaluation will be ready in April 2017. Based on earlier evaluations of other EPAG training streams, the initial investment in training is recovered through increased income of participants within 1-2 years.

What contributed to the program's success?

Designed to address constraints of women's participation: Childcare services were available to help remove barriers to employment for young mothers, as well as ensure children were in a safe and stimulating environment. Interviews with the women before the training indicated that almost 30% of the participants’ children (under 5 years) had been left completely alone at some point in the previous week.

Careful matching of employment demand and unemployed women: A feasibility study identified sufficient demand for employment in the relevant regions before launching the training. Job placements were carefully chosen, taking into account the capacity and needs of the institutions. This increased the potential for the placements to lead to future employment.

Tackling three issues with one investment: This project effectively tackles women’s empowerment; women’s employment; and increasing the workforce to deliver quality childcare and preschool services for one cost-effective investment with a return that is multiplied.

Challenges at Scale in Cambodia

Moving programs from the pilot stage to a larger scale brings challenges, including maintaining adequate participation and quality. In 2009 – 2011, with assistance from the World Bank and other development partners, the Government of Cambodia scaled up three pilot ECD programs: formal preschools staffed by government teachers, informal preschools staffed by trained community members, and home-based programs run by trained women from the community. Researchers worked with the government to evaluate the programs by randomly assigning the formal preschools and the two community-based programs to respective eligible communities.

Across all three of the scaled-up programs, enrollment was low. Interviews with parents suggest that the costs of supplies, inconvenient timing of the school day for work schedules, and a lack of information contributed to low enrollment in formal preschools. Community preschools experienced difficulty retaining teachers (due in part to low stipends) and finding space, while the home-based programs often were not even implemented. Researchers found that the three programs by and large had no impact on children’s development or school readiness, and a subset of children in the formal preschools actually did worse than children in the control group on cognitive skills important for school readiness. Cambodia’s experience underscores the importance of working closely with communities to enroll children in ECD programs and of ensuring that quality does not become diluted at scale.

Expanding Access Without Commensurate Emphasis on Quality

In South Africa, public preschool, or “Grade R” (Reception Year), is designed to prepare 5-year-old children for primary schooling. In 2001, the government introduced the ECD Conditional Grant in order to expand access to Grade R for children from low socio-economic status households. In 2001, less than 40% of 5-year-olds in South Africa had access to pre-primary education. By 2011, this figure had risen to over 80%, and as of 2015 preschool participation is nearly universal. While the country saw substantial increase in access, it faced challenges in ensuring program quality; and in many cases, learning outcomes have not improved.

A recent impact evaluation (see “For more information”) found that Grade R did not have a significant impact on learning outcomes in mathematics or language for children from the three poorest wealth income quintiles. This suggests that the quality of preschool, particularly for low-income families, is critical to achieve the desired outcomes. The government is currently implementing an improvement plan to address the system's shortfalls. This includes development of Grade R regulations, improved pre-service and in-service training for Grade R practitioners, and culturally relevant teaching and learning materials for children and their parents or caregivers.


FOR MORE INFORMATION about the Early Learning Partnership and/or to be added to the Early Learning Partnership’s Mailing List, please write to earlylearningpartnership@worldbank.org