Early childhood education

A mix of centre- and home-based early childhood education programming, focusing on the holistic development of the child while supporting parenting skills, can help young children develop a strong foundation for learning.

Early childhood education (ECE) is an investment in the immediate health and well-being of young children and in their subsequent learning and development. In making programming decisions, planners should be conscious of the long-term outcomes of ECE programmes, of widely-encouraged ECE practices, and of the different options of centre-based and community-based ECE programmes. It is also important to be aware of the need for resource-mobilization to fund ECE services, and the planning involved in coordinating, advocating, and monitoring ECE services.

Issues and Discussion

Long-term outcomes of ECE programmes: Interventions for infants and very young children, including during pregnancy, provide the foundation for early childhood development during the formative years of brain development and can significantly improve children’s short-term cognitive, behavioural, socio-emotional, physical, and motor development. Children aged 0-3 years who are enrolled in ECE programmes have demonstrated cognitive, language, and social-emotional improvements in development while parenting skills and parent well-being also improved. Positive effects are even greater if children receive a mixed-approach of home visits and centre-based instruction and if families are enrolled in ECE programmes that provide parenting support during pregnancy.

Widely-encouraged ECE practices: Widely encouraged approaches to ECE programming focus on child and parent relationships, have gender-neutral curriculums, and incorporate stimulating activities that focus on literacy and providing parents with home instructional strategies. Programmes that have greater outcomes for children and families tend to be longer in duration, greater intensity to build up children’s skills for primary school, and provide a mixed-approach including home-based and centre-based services. Planners should develop training strategies that promote a continuum of practitioner development, beginning with pre-service and continuing with ongoing in-service training that is maintained throughout the careers of ECE professionals.

Centre-based ECE programmes: Quality centre-based ECE programmes—including pre-schools and day-care facilities that follow an educational curriculum—promote parental engagement, use pro-
Inclusiveness and Equity
Early detection of disabilities: Quality ECE is useful in promoting healthy development and providing early detection of disabilities in children, which can support educational professionals to deliver necessary and appropriate interventions. Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education has been challenging for many school systems around the world.(9) Earlier inclusion of children with disabilities to learn and play alongside their peers in mainstream ECE programmes promotes transitions into primary school, reduces stigma and isolation for the child and their parents, and has positive socio-emotional and academic benefits for students of all abilities.(9)

ECE for families of ethnic and racial minority background: Families of ethnic and/or racial minority should receive culturally-relevant ECE programming that is delivered in the local language, with resources coming from within the community, and from a model that integrates local identities and knowledge.(3)(8) To improve the access of minority parents to existing ECE and parental support and programmes, initiatives should be culturally-sensitive to parents’ child-rearing beliefs and practices.(3)(4)(8)(9)

Policy Examples

- Bosnia/Herzegovina [PDF]
- Ghana [PDF]
- Malta [PDF]
- United States of America [PDF]

References and sources
