
Early childhood education

BRIEF 2

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.(1)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7) 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.(10) 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.(10)

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.(1)(3)(4)(5)(9) 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.(1)(3)(4)(5)(9) 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.(3)

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-

gramme activities to connect to the home environment, and help develop children's habits, attitudes, and commitment to learning. These characteristics prepare children to better receive teacher instruction in primary school.(1)(10) Formal day care initiatives like [Catco Kids](#) in Pakistan, promote basic pre-requisite needs of health, nutrition, good eyesight, social and emotional health, and self-esteem before the child enters formal school.(1)(9) Centre-based ECE programmes are generally more costly than community-based programmes due to costs associated with resourcing a physical space and providing ECE staff.(9) However, the benefits of ECE experience for children, including in the long-term lower rates of incarceration and welfare assistance, have been shown to far outweigh the costs.(1)(5)(7)(9)(10)

Community and home-based ECE programmes: Community-based ECE programmes may take several forms. The international [Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters](#) (HIPPY) programme, for example, provides home visits and curriculum for parents and children to engage in together which can address the social and emotional needs of at-risk children during their early years.(1)(10) Although home visits can generally be more costly and time consuming for programme deliverers, this type of ECE relieves financial burden on the lives of low-income families who are unable to afford to send their children to centre-based facilities. Building the capacity of parents and other volunteers to act as facilitators can decrease the costs associated with this model.(9) [Pratham Balwadi](#) in India is an example of a different community-based model, which reduces costs by using existing community spaces such as temples, the teacher's home, or the home of one of the children, to offer quality ECE services. Effective community-based ECE, just like centre-based ECE, can lead to greater gains in cognitive and language development and higher lifetime income among low-income children compared to children without ECE experience.(1)(2)(5)(7)(10)

Resources mobilization to fund ECE services: [Economic analyses of ECE investment](#) have shown significantly greater positive long-term effects on the productivity and returns in later adulthood above and beyond other educational investments.(10) However, the immediate costs can seem daunting. Comprehensive cost assessments have estimated that an average of US\$11 billion annually from internal and external funding sources is needed for low-income countries to provide for all necessary educational resources from ECE to secondary schooling.(10) Spending per student in low-income countries should increase, on average, more than three times what is currently spent, with prioritization towards ECE.(4)(10) This financial need requires greater pooling of resources through coordinated cross-sector committees represented by education, health, family welfare, and other ECE-related services.(3) Requiring parents to make contributions to ECE services may be feasible for higher-income groups, but can shut out the disadvantaged children who most need ECE programming. Planners should therefore develop other funding strategies to build a coalition of donors comprised of community, local, national, NGOs, and private funding sources.(3)(10)

Action plans for coordinating, advocating, and monitoring ECE services: Because of the multi-sectoral nature of ECE interventions, high-level cross-sector committees require action plans that ensure ECE policies are carried out effectively and procedures are in place for coordination between agencies.(3)(10) Action plans should embed communication strategies that utilise media and public relations groups to effectively promote and advocate on behalf of child development and education nationally.(3) High quality monitoring and evaluation activities can be carried out through evaluation departments and universities.(3)

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](#)]

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