



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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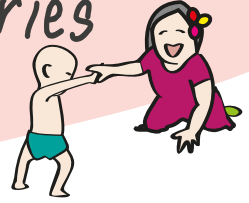
UNESCO Bangkok
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau
for Education

Learning
begins at



Early Childhood Care and Education
(ECCE)

Comprehensive ECCE is a right of all children and an investment for countries



What is ECCE?

Learning begins even before a child walks through the classroom door. Comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE) aims to foster holistic growth, development and learning of children from birth to eight years of age.

"Care" includes attention to health, hygiene and nutrition in a nurturing and safe environment. "Education" in the early childhood years is much broader than pre-schooling, capturing learning through early stimulation, guidance and a range of developmental activities and opportunities. Young children's experiences in the first years create the foundation for subsequent learning.

Why is ECCE important?

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that children have the right to survival, full development, protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and participation in family, cultural and social life.
- The connections of cerebral neurons are formed during the first years of life. The child's brain structure and emotional, social and physical development are influenced by his/her interactions with caregivers and home environment.
- Good nutrition, health and positive stimuli in early years support children's development and learning. The lack of these combined with a high level of prolonged stress due to neglect, abuse, etc. could cause abnormalities in brain development and lead to developmental delays and health problems.
- Cost benefit analysis indicates that the highest return on investment in human capital occurs during early years. Investment in ECCE programmes is cheaper and brings long-term benefits that outperform investment in later stages of education and remedial skills development programmes.
- Participation in good ECCE programmes prepares children for primary school and facilitates the home-to-school transition. School readiness helps reduce dropouts and repetition rates, and improves children's learning outcomes.

- ECCE programmes for children in disadvantaged and vulnerable situations help ensure all children start school on an equal footing.
- ECCE programmes lay foundation for gender equality. Research in developing countries shows that girls who attend ECCE programmes are more ready for primary school, cope better and stay longer than girls who do not. Maternal education has the potential to act as a powerful lever for progress in child health and nutrition. Children born to more educated mothers are more likely to survive and less likely to experience malnutrition.

What is the international commitment on ECCE?

“Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children”

[Education for All (EFA) Goal 1, adopted at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000]

Although no specific targets were set at the global level, this EFA Goal 1 provides three policy directions in ECCE for countries:

1. “Expanding” indicates expansion of access, number and types of services, and availability of resources for ECCE to all children, regardless of their geographical location, gender, health or nutritional status, disabilities, or any discriminatory criteria.
2. “Improving comprehensive ECCE” refers to improvement in quality of existing and new programs and services.
3. Lastly, “Especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged” refers to the issue of equity and ensuring that ALL children, especially those children living in disadvantaged circumstances, are served.

Recommendations to Policy Makers in the Region for reaching the EFA Goal 1 on ECCE

- Formulate a holistic national ECCE policy for children from birth to eight years, specifying the responsibilities and budgetary commitments across relevant sectors and levels of government.
- Establish a formal co-ordination mechanism among key ministries and agencies and designate a lead ministry or agency to implement and budget for ECCE programmes.

- Integrate ECCE into national policy strategies for young children.
- Increase public spending on ECCE because investing in ECCE is more cost effective than remedial programmes in later life stages.
- Provide national quality standards covering both public and private provision for all age groups.
- Develop culturally relevant and age-appropriate curriculum guidelines for stimulating young children's learning.
- Upgrade the professional training of the ECCE workforce and provide skills training and incentives for staff working in rural areas, conflict or post-conflict and emergency situations.
- Increase and better target public funding of ECCE with particular attention to poor children, children living in rural areas and those with disabilities.
- Strengthen community- or home-based ECCE programmes and provide parents and families with parenting skills training and family support.
- Provide bilingual ECCE programmes for children whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction in primary schools.
- Collect and use disaggregated data related to ECCE in order to improve monitoring of its effect on primary school enrolment, repetition and completion rates.



Our Regional ECCE Programme

UNESCO Bangkok's ECCE programme for the Asia-Pacific region focuses on the following strategies:

Advocacy: UNESCO raises awareness and advocates for promoting comprehensive ECCE among policy-makers, civil society and various other stakeholders. UNESCO also promotes parenting education to support parents and families to be effective caregivers and educators.

Technical assistance: UNESCO also provides technical advice and assistance to its Member States in developing and reviewing ECCE policies.

Capacity development: UNESCO supports the countries in Asia-Pacific in meeting the EFA Goal 1 on ECCE by identifying, documenting and sharing good practices as well as constraints and challenges in policy development and implementation. The Parenting Education Programme aims to improve the quality of non-formal ECCE by supporting parenting education offered at Community Learning Centres (CLCs).

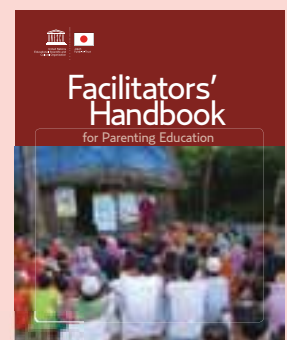
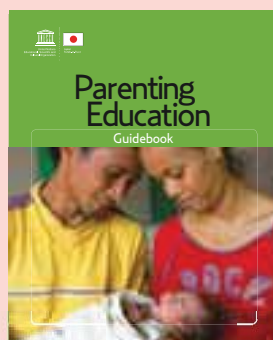
Research: UNESCO, together with UNICEF, supports countries to undertake policy research. Currently, research on two interrelated topics on the quality of ECCE is supported: the status and professional development of ECCE practitioners and the quality standards of community-based ECCE programmes.

Partnerships: UNESCO is one of the founding member organizations of the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC). UNESCO supports ARNEC's work in advocacy for policy change, knowledge generation, capacity building, information management and dissemination, and partnership building. More information about ARNEC is available at www.arnec.net

Recent Publications

The Parenting Education Guidebook provides practical information about ECCE for all caregivers, including parents, grandparents, siblings and community members.

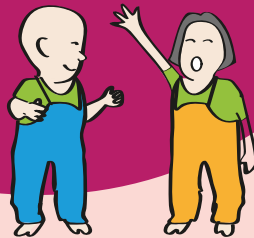
The Facilitators' Handbook for Parenting Education is for the facilitators who will guide the Parenting Education Programme.



Did you know?

- 80% of the brain develops in the first three years of age. These years are the most important and are considered as sensitive periods.
- Malnutrition is one of the greatest causes of death and illness for children under 5 years of age. It weakens children and makes them vulnerable to many diseases.
- 1.8 million children die from diarrhoea each year.* Many common diseases facing children are preventable with low-cost actions.
- 443 million school days are lost globally due to water-related illnesses.*
- Children who attend good quality early childhood programmes do better at school.
 - Integrated ECCE (combined health, nutrition and stimulation) yields greater benefits for children's health and development than health and nutrition alone.

* Human Development Report, 2006



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