

National ECCD Centre Program Impact Evaluation: Bhutan 2016

International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA)

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs ensure that young children fulfill their right to healthy development, including engaging education, to help them reach their full potential. There is mounting evidence from around the world proving that the first years of life are critical to the development of the child because they shape cognitive, social and language skills, as well as lifelong approaches to learning.



Background

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and other national partners, Save the Children in Bhutan

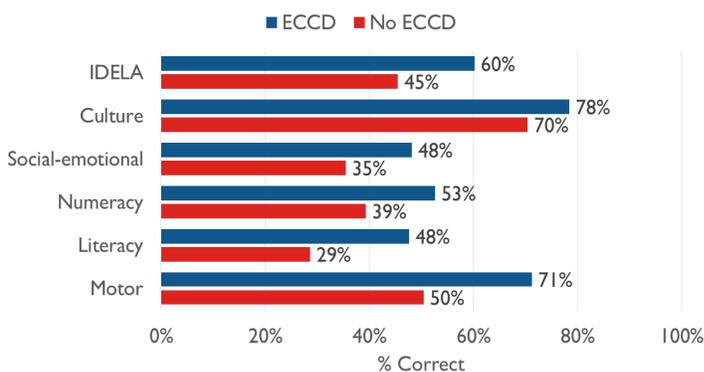
completed an impact evaluation of the national ECCD center program. ECCD center programming has been steadily expanding in Bhutan, in accordance with *Realizing Vision 2020: Education Sector Strategy* which states that “All children aged 0-5 years will be supported to enhance their intellectual, emotional and physical development through a program that enables them to grow in their familiar and natural environment.” However, no systematic evaluation had ever been completed to gauge the most impactful and sustainable model(s) for the country. The findings of the study allow for data-driven decision making at various levels from community to national policy making, as well as informing and improving ECCD centre programming, and creating advocacy about the importance of early childhood education programs.

Methodology

A baseline assessment of children’s learning and development was undertaken at the beginning of the school year (March 2015), and a follow up endline assessment with the same children was conducted at the end of the school year (November 2015). The International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) was used to measure children’s learning and development across six domains (Motor, Literacy, Numeracy, Social-emotional, Executive function, and Spiritual/moral/cultural), and a caregiver questionnaire was used to gather information about parenting practices and home environments. In order to be able to directly relate program inputs to child learning and development, quality information was also collected during the school year through the Quality Monitoring Tool for ECCD Centres (QMTEC) with additional items adapted from the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS).

The final sample included 1,189 children and parents from 120 sites across 9 districts in Bhutan. Three districts from each region were chosen based on the prevalence and diversity of ECCD programming in each district. To understand the impact of various types of ECCD program models across the country a random sample of different types of ECCD centers was chosen (CSO, Community, Private, Corporate), as well as sample of non-formal education (NFE) parenting programs and a comparison group of children who have no access to any ECCD programming.

Figure 1. IDELA learning and development at Endline for 5 & 6 year olds



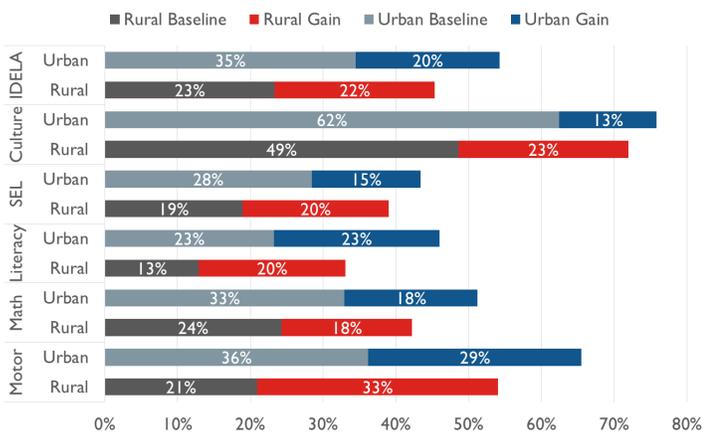
Results

Learning and Development Gains

This study finds that having access to ECCD center programming supports stronger learning and development gains for children than not having access to ECCD, and better prepares them for primary school. Children in Community and CSO ECCD centers gained significantly more skills than children in without access to ECCD. Children in Private centers maintained higher average scores at endline, but there were no significant differences between the gains made by children in Community and CSO ECCD centers and those in Private ECCD centers. Children in rural areas learned as much from ECCD center programming as children in urban areas despite many disadvantages and attending lower resourced centers.



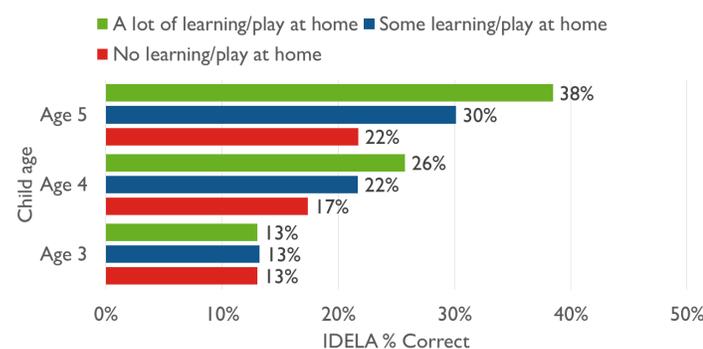
Figure 2. IDELA learning gains from the beginning to end of the school year, by location



Home Learning Environment

Having an interactive home learning environment (e.g., parents playing, singing and reading with children) was found to be a strong predictor of children’s early learning and development at baseline. Further, multivariate regression analyses found that the amount of learning and play activities happening in a child’s home remained a stronger driver of learning gains at endline, compared to gender, socio-economic status and parental education. In addition, study results found that more negative discipline at home (hitting, spanking, yelling) was associated with weaker learning and development gains in all areas.

Figure 3. Relationship between child development and home learning activities

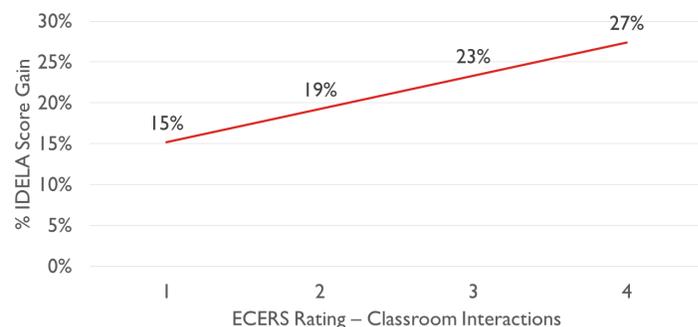


Classroom Quality

This study also found important relationships between classroom environment and children’s learning. Enrollment in higher classroom quality was significantly positively related to children’s learning gains, indicating that children were learning more in higher quality classrooms. This relationship was largely driven by the interaction quality within the

classroom (facilitator-child and child-child). This highlights the need for targeted investment in facilitator training and in-service support as their interactions with children, and the environment they foster in a classroom, are critical for children’s early skill development. In addition, weaker gains in social-emotional gains were associated with larger class sizes.

Figure 4. Predicted learning gains and quality of classroom interactions (adapted ECERS) in Community ECCD centers



Recommendations

Results of this study suggest that increasing access to ECCD programming, both center and home-based, should be a priority in the government's development plans. However, more support is suggested for Corporate ECCD centers and the NFE parenting program. In addition, this study highlights the importance of investing in the quality of ECCD programs, especially focusing on improving per-service facilitator training and continued in-service support. Regarding the quality of parenting programs, this study indicates that positive parenting messages should be included in all program curricula. To improve equity, a focus on reaching the most disadvantaged and rural families with quality parenting programming would strengthen the learning and development on the neediest children in Bhutan, and help to better prepare them to be successful in primary school and beyond.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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