

global trends in early childhood education: 2009

by Roger Neugebauer and Emily Goodeve

As early childhood professionals from 78 countries prepare to travel to Belfast for the 2009 World Forum on Early Care and Education, we surveyed a sampling of those who will be attending on the current trends in early childhood education in their country. Delegates from over 40 countries responded, and the following report is a summary. In reviewing the reports from every continent, we were struck by a number of items:

- A surprisingly large number of countries are engaging in implementing or finalizing ‘frameworks’ for early child development. This trend to organize early services into a coherent national policy is encouraging.
- We noted that there does not seem to be a direct correlation between countries where public recognition of the value of early childhood services is high and the funding of those services is high. It appears that advocates globally have their work cut out for them to translate public sentiment into government action.
- We tend to think that policy changes happen at a glacial pace. However, in looking back over the past five years, we have seen dramatic changes in policies and practices in the short term. Up until recently, Australia and

Canada were recognized for the high quality of their child care services. However, dramatic changes in governments have resulted in the serious degradations of child care services in both countries. On a different note, child care in the Netherlands up until about five years ago was almost entirely provided by non profit organizations, whereas today nearly all care is provided by for profit organizations — again a change in governments spurred this change.

- Finally, there is no direct correlation between the wealth of nations and the quality of their child care services. As you read through this report, you see pockets of quality at all levels of the economic spectrum.

What follows are a series of anecdotal country reports. The boxes throughout the article are the ratings by the trend watchers on support for early childhood services in their countries.

Austria: *Regina Egger*
Services for 3-6 year olds are free of charge for parents; an early years curriculum is in development; early years pedagogues’ training should be raised to university level, at least that’s the plan.

China: *Wei Li-Chen*

The central government is in the process of finalizing the long-term development plan toward 2020. Regarding the ECE provision, it will increase funding

Government Funding for Early Childhood Services

No funding

Qatar	Liberia
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Very little funding

Australia	Korea
Bangladesh	Lebanon
Belize	Nepal
Brazil	Pakistan
Cameroon	Rwanda
China	Swaziland
El Salvador	Tajikistan
Indonesia	Tanzania
Iran	Turkey
Iraq	United Arab Emirates

Modest funding

Azerbaijan	Moldova
Canada	Montenegro
Colombia	Nigeria
India	Russia
Jordan	Serbia
Kenya	United States
Malaysia	

Significant funding

Austria	New Zealand
Estonia	Singapore
Lithuania	Sweden
México	United Kingdom

significantly. The funding intends to add many more public early childhood programs. Special proportion will be allocated to the poor regions in the west part of China.

Colombia: *Alejandro Acosta*

The main trend is to solve coverage, quality, and inclusiveness by having a national policy on ECD and one on early education, in order to define responsibilities, standards, information, and M&E systems. Also, diversifying the alternatives and training human resources.

Swaziland: *Irma Allen*

There is a growing awareness of the importance of ECE for young children, and for the need to build capacity for qualified caregivers and preschool teachers. There is an increasing acceptance of the need to modify traditional preschool education to make it more informal, more accessible, and more relevant to culture and local conditions.

Sweden: *Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson*

More children in the groups, but still I think they are quite small compared to many countries. We are short of university educated preschool teachers, although more than 50% are. The nursery nurses have an education at the gymnasium level. But we have a Minister of Education saying that we should lower the teacher education to 3 years (from 3.5) to get more preschool teachers; this, of course, is totally wrong.

Iran: *Mehra Jalili*

I think the most important problem in my country is the wrongdoings of the people in charge. They should try harder and in much more creative ways to familiarize people in the society with the importance of ECE, but unfortunately they don't. We need to work harder to convince more people about the essential role of ECE in the success and well-being of the whole child. In my country

most people are willing to spend a lot of money for their children's education, even those who are not in a good status economically. The problem is that people are not aware enough and we, as child care providers alone, cannot do much.

Brazil: *Valéria Andreetto*

In my country, the general public understands that anyone is able to work with ECE. Therefore, I would say that the trend is to have better prepared professionals. Both government and private segments should invest in professional growth, improvement, teacher education.

Fiji: *Unaisi Vasu Tuivaga*

There is much pressure from parents, families, and communities for ECE teachers to provide structured programmes. Thus, ECE advocates continue to try and rise to such challenges by constantly organising community awareness programmes. In our quest to improve the provision of early childhood services in the islands, many governments, through outside funding, are developing their ECE teacher-training programmes; national ECE policies and curriculum guidelines. Unfortunately, many of our Pacific island nations/governments rely heavily on funding agencies, e.g. NZAid; AUSAid; EU; UNICEF to fund our ECE initiatives. Not many governments actually commit themselves to including ECE in their national budgets.

Korea: *Soonohk Hong*

Our ECE system is divided into two parts. One is the service from the Ministry of Education only for the kindergartens, the another is from the Ministry of Health and Welfare only for the children's center. This kind of system causes a little bit of disturbance for development of ECE in Korea. Currently we try to unite as one system, but I know it is not easy because of a crash of profits. We are looking forward

Changes in Government Funding in the Past Two Years

Declined significantly

Belize Cameroon

Declined somewhat

El Salvador Lithuania
Iran United States
Lebanon

Remained the same

Brazil Pakistan
Canada Qatar
China Rwanda
India Sweden
Indonesia Tajikistan
Iraq Tanzania
Liberia

Increased somewhat

Australia Moldova
Azerbaijan Montenegro
Bangladesh Nepal
Colombia Nigeria
Estonia Russia
Jordan Swaziland
Kenya Turkey
Korea United Arab Emirates
Malaysia United Kingdom

Increased significantly

Austria Serbia
México Singapore
New Zealand

to the combination of two systems and more effective and successful support from the government for ECE.

Tanzania: *Fortidas Rwehumbiza Bakuza*

In Tanzania the Early Childhood issues are looked at in a joint effort bringing different sectors (education, health, social welfare, community development, civil societies, and development partners) together to address young children's needs. Currently we are all together in a process of developing an ECD policy which intends to address the infants' and young children's needs across sub-sectors. The country also has a 'Joint Early Childhood Service Delivery Initiative' currently on pilot by all sectors mentioned above.

Singapore: *Lily Wong*

There are new requirements in the training of teachers for the preschool sections. The minimum language requirement has gone up significantly. The training hours have almost doubled for certificate requirements. The high standard of the teachers and caregivers came about from the research study that quality early childhood education depends on trained teachers. The new 2009 curriculum framework for kindergarten incorporates a new section on social-emotional learning in the early years.

Estonia: *Maria Jürimäe*

The new national curriculum (2008) hopefully helps teachers to plan the activities in a more child-centered way. (In the last few years our kindergartens slightly had become too much 'school-like' — sitting with a large group and filling hand-sheets.) There is also more attention to children whose mothers'

tongue is other than Estonian; we have many kindergartens with Russian instructional language already from Soviet time, but today in some of them teaching Estonian is already quite good (language immersion and other programs). Still there is a lot of work to do. The number of non-Estonian children who attend kindergarten with Estonian instructional language also increases; that challenges our teacher training (both pre- and in-service).

Liberia: *Evelyn F. Barry*

Presently, there is no policy on ECD in Liberia. Prior to the War, ECD was considered a part of Primary Education. The most important trend in the provision of ECD Services in my nation will firstly be the formulation and provision of an ECD Policy to include health, justice, gender, and cultural issues. Some organizations have expressed interest and have begun discussion for the formulation of an ECD Policy. But, not much has been done.

Montenegro: *Sasa Milic*

The most important is extension of initial (pre-service) education of preschool teachers and offering more and more possibilities for specializations at university levels (general preschool pedagogy, inclusive education, art and culture, intercultural education, civic education, management in ECE).

Pakistan: *Zohra Nisar*

A majority of public and private schools lack basic provisions such as materials, basic facilities (drinking water, latrines). Teachers' training is another important area that needs to be considered.

Rwanda: *Josephine Uwamariya*

Policies and strategies have been put in place to enhance Universal Primary Education in general and the ECE in particular. A special unit overseeing ECE services has been established in the Ministry of Education and offices responsible for social affairs including

health, education, child care, and family affairs established at district and sector levels. Through these decentralised Administrative structures, sensitisation and mobilisation for ECE services has been intensified in light of having the communities and other development partners play a big role in ECE services. The private sector has been encouraged to undertake initiatives in the ECE sectors through establishment of the day care centers and nursery schools. A number of private schools have established the preschool sections to enhance increased provision of ECE services. However this is mostly in the urban areas where the parents can afford payment of these services.

India: *Vrinda Datta*

The private sector is playing a major role. There is no regulation which invites all kinds of players in the field. So we have international schools and large franchise systems at the high end, and the small units run by individuals in cities and towns, and the school systems with their pre-primary sections at the other end.

Nepal: *Dhirendra Lamsal*

The ECE service seems to be an increasing trend in Nepal. Formulation of ECE curriculum shows progressive trends. Enrollment of young children in ECE and pre-primary classes (PPC) is increasing. Enrollment of girl children particularly in rural areas shows some increase. But there is a big gap between policy/planning and implementation in terms of consistency and quality. Nepal is in the process of political, economic, social, and cultural transformation after a decade-long armed conflict, which took the lives of around 13,000 people. The existing government may lift up ECE priority to other areas, if political unrest continues to thrive and a new constitution is not written within the stipulated time frame as provisioned under the interim constitution of the country. So it is too early to predict

Public Acceptance of Value of Early Childhood Services

Small minority recognizes importance

Azerbaijan	Lithuania
Bangladesh	Montenegro
Belize	Nepal
Brazil	Pakistan
Cameroon	Qatar
China	Russia
El Salvador	Rwanda
Indonesia	Serbia
Iran	Tajikistan
Iraq	Turkey

About half recognize importance

Australia	Moldova
Colombia	New Zealand
India	Swaziland
Korea	Tanzania
Lebanon	United Arab Emirates
Malaysia	United States
México	

Great majority recognizes importance

Austria	Lebanon
Canada	Singapore
Estonia	Sweden
Jordan	United Kingdom
Kenya	

what happens to existing ECE services because of this political shift.

Moldova: *Cornelia Cincilei*

A very considerable job migration has left many children in the care of relatives or elder siblings, as well as the lack of proper support to families with young children.

Turkey: *Ebru Aktan*

In Turkey, the significance being attached to early childhood education is increasing day by day, activities on family consciousness are being performed, and the studies on the elevation of teacher training quality and the expansion of early childhood education are being carried out as well. In our country, particularly social purposes are influential in opening preschool education institutions; in regulations and acts by Ministries of Labor and Health apart from Ministry of Education, it has been stated that preschool education is a special field. Throughout Turkey, present preschool enrollment rate is 32% for 5- to 6-year-old children.

Jordan: *Lara Hussein*

Jordan is currently focusing on provision of early childhood services for children 4-6 years. There are concrete efforts to give attention to quality issues, but there is room for more concerted work. The issue of continuity and transition between kindergarten services and the first three primary grades need to be tackled. Provision of early childhood services for children from birth to below four years is very modest. There is a strong national parenting program, but with limited outreach. There is a well-defined national vision that is depicted in the national early childhood development strategy and the national plan of action for children (2004-2013) that makes Jordan well ahead, compared to other countries in the MENA Region.

Indonesia: *Antarina Amir*

Cultural characteristics of Indonesian people that are so great in diversity. In some cultures it is easy to make people aware about the importance of early childhood education; in some cultures it is extremely difficult. Also the diverse attitude regarding gender varies, in addition to diversity in educational background.

Bangladesh: *Mahmuda Akhter*

In recent years, the government of Bangladesh is approving the work of NGOs, which have been providing ECE services in Bangladesh over the years and working with them. In March 2008, an Operational Framework for Pre-primary Education for the country has been approved by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh. Based on this document, Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) authorized National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) to form pre-primary curriculum development committees in collaboration with NGOs, INGOs, development partners, research and educational institutions, and ECD professionals and experts in 2009. They targeted 2010 for implementing this curriculum. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has initiated plans to develop a Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development policy in Bangladesh and formed a working group.

Australia: *Frances Press*

A number of private corporations in the business of child care provision have folded. ABC Learning, a major provider, has been placed in receivership with a number of centres closed. Australia does not have universal access to ECE. The new federal government has signalled some important changes in early childhood policy. A significant symbolic policy change has been the creation of a Federal Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care. This pulls together two early childhood programmes (preschool and child care)

Impact of Economic Downturn on ECE Funding

No impact

Austria	New Zealand
Azerbaijan	Pakistan
Canada	Qatar
Indonesia	Singapore
Nepal	

Small impact

China	Montenegro
India	Rwanda
Iran	Serbia
Korea	Sweden
Malaysia	Tanzania

Modest impact

Australia	Moldova
Colombia	Russia
Jordan	Turkey
Lithuania	United Kingdom
México	United States

Major impact

Bangladesh	Kenya
Belize	Lebanon
Brazil	Liberia
Cameroon	Nigeria
El Salvador	Swaziland
Estonia	Tajikistan
Fiji	

previously split in terms of Federal policy. Other changes include: the development of an Early Years Learning Framework for all early childhood services; and a promise of 15 hours a week preschool education for every child for 40 weeks in the year before school.

Belize: *Delfena Mitchell*

There is an effort to standardize preschool curriculum and upgrade and improve the governmental residential institutes that care for orphans and children.

Serbia: *Zorica Trikić*

Obligatory preschool preparatory program (minimum 6 months before school enrollment), free of charge for all children age 5.5 - 6.5. State is covering all the costs, that's why funding has

increased significantly. Still less than 40% of children age from 0 to 5.5 is in ECD provision. Children out of the system are children from most marginalized groups.

Bahrain: *Anisa Asad*

Currently ECE services for the children under 6 years is only provided by private establishments/preschools. The Ministry of Social Development monitors day cares for children 0-3, while the 3-6 age group facilities are monitored and licensed by the Ministry of Education, KG department. But again, there are no government run facilities; public school starts at 6 years old. There is an Educational Reform taking place, and work on the 3-6 age group is happening slowly. A national curriculum is going to be implemented by September this year, it is said. Also the Ministry of Social Development is looking into plans to set up and legalise Family Child Care in Bahrain. In terms of campaigns to build awareness in the general public of the importance of ECE, there isn't much happening. In my opinion the Ministries need to implement tighter and clearer regulations in terms of the quality of ECE that is being offered in the privately run day cares and kindergartens and guide facilities more on how to meet the high standards that are set forth by the Ministries. Also I believe a national campaign to raise awareness of ECE needs to take place for the general public and a training school, center, or program needs to be available in Arabic and English to train teachers in DAP and quality ECE practice. I'd like to add that unlike other countries, grants are not available here for centers that want to apply concepts and programs that will increase ECE quality. As a result, centers that run a model quality program that is developmentally appropriate and meets the cultural needs of its families get no help or support from government bodies or the private sector. Awareness needs to be raised here in Bahrain as to the social and economic gain that can come from

supporting and running quality ECE programs.

Cameroon: *Jamils Richard Achunji Anguaseh*

In Cameroon, early childhood education is delivered through preschool services. This is done by both public and private service providers. Those who benefit from it are city dwellers and the rich who are capable of paying for the services. Even though most Cameroonians live in the rural areas with limited access to modern communication opportunities, public authorities are still to notice the importance of extending preschool services to cover the rural communities. Parenting is still very traditional and back-up education at home is almost non-existent. The numerous economic crises that have plagued Cameroon recently have reduced the little government support to private institutions.

Bangladesh: *Md. Shah Alam*

In the field of ECE the most significant work going on here in Bangladesh is the Sesame Street Project, locally known as Sisimpur. As aired through the national television channel, it reaches all corners of the country with educational content for preschoolers. Over the last 4 years the show has become the most favorite show among the children. Research shows that children who had minimal exposure performed at levels equivalent on Math, Literacy, and Socio-cultural Skills to that of a child who is one year older who had no exposure. The project delivers content with fun. This program is a good blend of entertainment and education. Another significant area of this project is its Outreach component. Through Outreach intervention the project goes to the communities where children have the least or no access to television. The Sesame Workshop in New York is behind the project with Nayantara

Communications and is funded by the United States Agency for International Development.

Canada: *Dr. Wayne Eastman*

There is a lack of involvement of the Canadian government in the development of a national child care program.

Azerbaijan: *Ulviyya Mikayilova*

Move towards compulsory school readiness provision (for 5-6 year old kids) and move towards short-term play groups provision.

Kenya: *Henry Kemoli Manani*

Recently the Teachers Service Commission advertized over 200 senior positions at the teacher training level for District Centers for Early Childhood Education. The government will in 2010 start employing teachers for the ECD centers which are currently being undertaken by parents. There are more government training institutions at both the trainer and teacher levels and their evaluation is now being done by the Kenya National Examination Council.

India: *Amrita Jain*

1) Lack of awareness by the community on the importance of the age group leading to low participation. 2) With the increasing Public Private Partnership Policy the state is gradually moving out of service provision. Increased number of Private players in services without adequate regulation is excluding a vast majority of families with children who are unable to pay for the services. 3) Continuing discrimination of caste, gender, and religion. 4) Lack of adequate counselling services on child care practices and provisions. 5) Lack of political will, weak implementation of law, inadequate policies on ECE.

Nigeria: *Margaret Akinware*

Traditionally, ECE services were regarded as a community / family responsibility with the government primarily involved in policy issues,

training of professionals, and standard maintenance. In that regard, the available services catered more for the rich and highly privileged children at the expense of the disadvantaged and 'at risk' children. However in 1987, with the cooperation between the government, UNICEF, and other UN agencies, ECE services started receiving more attention using low-cost, community-driven/based approaches. Initially, ECE centers were established using low-cost facilities in the marketplaces, mosques, churches, under shady trees, and at long corridors of schools, etc. and with emphasis on play: through songs, dances, folklore, storytelling, using the mother tongue. Many of the caregivers who started the ECD programme in Nigeria had the opportunity to attend UNICEF/BvLF-sponsored training programmes in several countries. Since 1999, the ECE services have become a part of the basic education programme and according to the new Integrated ECD Policy, ECD is in close affiliation and linkage with the primary school so as to prepare children for school and school for the children. It is required that every primary school should have at least a classroom for preschool children under close supervision of caregivers and teachers. To effect this policy, in-service training is organized for the caregivers and teachers by the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) using the government, Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), and UNICEF-approved curriculum. Furthermore, in order to promote 'learning through meaningful play,' these categories of caregivers/facilitators are taught to make educational materials and toys by using low-cost, culturally appropriate, and educational materials in line with the newly approved ECD training and toy making manuals. Institutional capacity building is supported by SUBEB in cooperation with UNICEF, and such child-focused NGOs as the Early Childcare Develop-

ment and Training Initiative (ECDTI) and others. To prepare student-teachers for working with the preschool-age children, IECD principles, concepts, and practices are now being incorporated into the curriculum for Colleges of Education — a priority task by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and UNICEF. Universities such as the University of Lagos are at the forefront of teacher training for ECD services and their curricula take into cognizance the emergent issues in ECD. Their ECD tutors also participate in the training of caregivers and teachers in ECD/primary schools. The new IECD policy has also led to better integration among all the relevant Ministries: Education, Health, Water and Sanitation, etc. so that the child is no longer compartmentalized and treated as a total being in need of care, stimulation, good nutrition, health, safety, protection, and in her/his own right. In addition, ECD has brought the primary school closer to parents for their participation and close involvement to enable them to supervise their children's performance in school. Parental education has empowered community members and parents to see IECD as a way of socializing children in preparation for their future roles and responsibilities in schools. Parents are now beginning to associate more with the school rather than distance themselves from a place regarded as 'a high tower' beyond the reach of low-class parents. Lest we forget, the ECD in Nigeria was given a boost when 5 professionals from UNICEF and government establishments benefited from the Virtual University ECD Training at the University of Victoria, Canada. They participated in in-service, online training between 2001 and 2004 and obtained Masters' Degrees in Child and Youth Care. One problem in ECE services is that more often than not, low allocation stems from the wrong notion that low-cost is synonymous with low

financial support and that ECE is more of a family responsibility than the government's. Again, as in many African countries, children's rights are often compromised when the government funds are depleted and there are other pressing social ills and vices in the country. In the midst of other political upheavals, many children's issues get subsumed and neglected until peace and order prevail. Despite it all, it is gratifying to note that the ECE coverage has increased from 6% when ECE was initiated in 1987 to about 30%. Given the seriousness of SUBEB at training, provision of infrastructural facilities and educational materials/toys, the next few years will witness a higher coverage, particularly in the rural and urban poor areas of Nigeria. Growth monitoring

In Memory of Petra Luck



Petra Luck was one of the contributors to this article. Sadly, she died suddenly very shortly after sending in her comments. Petra had recently been appointed to the World Forum International Organizing Committee. She was a frequent presenter at eTeaching events during the World Forum on Early Care and Education. She was a pioneer in the use of technology for educating early years managers, and as a tool collaboration. Her EEEYMS project (European Enhancement of Early Years Management Skills) at Liverpool Hope University in the U.K., brought together a variety of partners including: the National Day Nurseries Association and the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses from the U.K.; Raseborg opisto, the public sector Trade Union KTV in Finland; Avans University in Breda, Netherlands; and two partners: Virtech and the Bulgarian Telemark Association, both from Bulgaria. Her vision for using technology to improve management practices leading to improved outcomes for young children, parents, and families will be missed.

and child assessment is also emphasized to promote health and development for better learning in preparation for the future.

Lithuania: *Elena Markeviciene*

Increased quality of early childhood education services; wider availability and variability of early childhood education services; increased salaries and improved qualifications of ECE pedagogues; better financing by the government for renovation of ECE facilities.

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