

Driving early childhood education quality in Indonesia

ACER has developed a 'road map' for quality pre-primary education and support for parental education programs throughout Indonesia. **Dan Cloney** reports.



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Research undertaken in the fields of neuroscience, health, education, culture and even economics shows that early childhood is the most important developmental phase of the human lifespan, with high-quality preventative early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs yielding higher returns than later remedial ones, according to James Heckman.

Quality universal early childhood education is one of the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4.2 states that all nations of the world should, by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Work by ACER is contributing to the achievement of this goal in Indonesia.

Indonesia has already made significant progress towards achieving SDG 4.2, with more than 12 million children enrolled in ECCE services. The focus of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture is now not only on providing ECCE services for children from 16 000 mostly remote and poor communities who are currently without access, but also on ensuring the quality of all services across the nation.

To support this, the Indonesian Education Sector Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership (ACDP) engaged ACER to conduct research to contribute towards the development of evidence-based policies and strategies for the universal provision of holistic, integrated,

affordable, sustainable, high quality and equitable ECCE programs in Indonesia, particularly for marginalised populations.

ACER's work involved developing a 'road map' for a one-year 'Quality Pre-Primary Education for All' program throughout Indonesia. ACER modelled the cost of ensuring that all villages have at least one ECCE service of sufficient quality, taking into account a minimum teacher salary and other non-salary operational costs including teaching-learning materials, equipment and resources, teacher training and additional teacher incentives.

Three case studies were carried out in Kota Jambi in Jambi Province, Banyuwangi District in East Java, and Kupang District in East Nusa Tenggara. These districts were selected to represent a range of experience with



and commitment to ECCE. Eleven researchers visited the education offices of the selected district and their province to gather data and conduct interviews, before splitting into teams to gather further information through focus groups and onsite visits in two sub-districts.

Through data collection and a review of literature, ACER explored the challenges to the ECCE system in Indonesia related to policies, access, quality, costs and financing, and developed a set of recommendations to address these challenges.

Recognising that high-quality universal early childhood education cannot be achieved without the active and positive involvement – and therefore education – of parents, other caregivers and the community as a whole, the

ACDP also sought ACER's expertise in developing a supporting road map for a 'Quality Parenting Education' program. Designed for parents and caregivers of children from birth to six years, the program aims to provide communities with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to support children's growth, protection and development.

ACER identified cooperation and synchronisation between the departments providing parenting programs, improving the quality of parenting facilitators and the development of standards for parenting materials as necessary elements of the roadmap towards more comprehensive, systematic and effective parenting education.

While the most disadvantaged children experience the most dramatic gains

from ECCE programs, they are also the least likely to be enrolled. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture is unique, at least in Southeast Asia, for understanding that its national agenda and the SDGs around ECCE cannot be achieved without also supporting the involvement of parents and caregivers. ■

LINKS

To read James Heckman's research on the lifecycle benefits of an influential early childhood program, visit <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/research-summary-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program>

To read the Sustainable Development Goals, visit <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>