

# SUMMER PRESCHOOLS FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN

-A Practitioner's  
Guide for  
Improving the  
School Readiness-



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MOTHER CHILD EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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# AÇEV IN BRIEF

Ever since it was founded in 1993, ACEV has been developing and implementing early childhood and adult education programs for children and their families in need, in order to build “a stronger and healthier society for a better future” – a pillar of AÇEV’s mission to ensure equal opportunity in education. AÇEV analyzes the needs of its target group – children who lack developmental support due to their socio economic circumstances, their parents, and young women with low levels of education – through research studies, then develops programs based on these scientific evidence through various partnerships.

In addition to education programs and fieldwork, AÇEV also engages increasingly more in advocacy work to boost societal awareness and support on early childhood education.

AÇEV is determined to continue further its vision by contributing to the realization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals including inclusive and quality education in early childhood, role of family in young children’s learning, gender equality, and lifelong learning.

For more information [www.acev.org](http://www.acev.org)



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**for all their contributions during the development and implementation of the Summer Preschools for Syrian Children Project.**

# PREFACE



*In order to reach their highest potential, all children must be supported through education from early ages onwards. This is why from its inception to the present; ACEV has been developing intervention programs suited to the needs of disadvantaged children with limited access to preschool education. ACEV's Preschool Education Program (PEP) was developed with this purpose for our Summer Preschools in 2003, in regions where access to early childhood education remains low. Then, PEP was adapted in 2016 to meet the needs of Syrian children, and implemented as a pilot project in collaboration with the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education.<sup>1</sup>*

*This Practitioner's Guide draws from the Monitoring and Evaluation Report of the pilot project for the Summer Preschools for Syrian Children, prepared by Asst. Prof. Ersoy Erdemir. It addresses the various factors recommended for consideration in efforts to improve the school readiness of Syrian children via a short-term intervention program. The first section of the Guide contains information on ACEV's Summer Preschools Program, while the second section focuses on recommendations for consideration in future implementations based on the experiences gained in this project.*

*As ACEV, we hope this Practitioner's Guide will contribute to efforts to develop education policies and projects geared to Syrian children, who have different developmental and educational needs.*

<sup>1</sup> The Summer Preschools for Syrian Children Project was realized with the support of Plan International and Siemens Turkey.

## INTRODUCTION

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*“ISIS had come to where we used to live in Syria. There were no schools or anything else... There was nothing. My children stayed at home all day. I wanted them to go outside, see people; I didn’t want them to be deprived of an education. Our rights disappeared when we were in Syria; I want my children to get their rights back.”*

***(Excerpt from conversations with mothers)***

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Children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development is most rapid during early ages. Studies show that brain development in children is mostly completed before the age of seven. The aim of early childhood education is to support children’s development during this time. Education during early childhood has positive effects on school readiness (Ramey & Campbell, 1994; Bekman, 1998).

Vulnerable children exposed to risk factors in disadvantaged settings usually fall far behind their peers, and this developmental gap widens even more as these children grow older. Effective programs that give children equal opportunities during the early years not only help these children stay in school longer, but also reduce the need for remedial programs geared to students who fail and repeat grades (Meyers, 1992). Thanks to their preventive effect, early intervention programs are more cost-effective than programs geared to correcting problems that emerge in later years.

Refugee children are one example of children whose development is at risk. In 2014, the number of internally displaced people across the world reached the highest point in known history. According to figures provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2015, one in every 122 persons is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking



asylum. According to another UNHCR report published in 2010, while refugees spent on average seven years in exile in 1993, this figure had climbed to 17 years by 2003. This shows that host countries need to move beyond humanitarian aid and address the issue in a long-term and inclusionary approach. Inclusive education policies are absolutely key in this process.

Numerous studies show that humanitarian emergencies have significant negative effects, especially on children. Primary among the negative effects of long-term displacement is that refugee children fall behind normal development in terms of psychological wellbeing (Mollica et al, 2004; Saltzman et al, 2003). According to research studies, some psychosocial outcomes—prevalent among refugee children—can be reduced by participation in intervention programs (Dybdahl, 2001). Through these programs, positive effects leading to improved health and wellbeing in refugee children, such as a decrease in problem behaviors were also observed (Dybdahl, 2001).

As a result of the mass migration from Syria that began in 2011, the number of Syrians registered in Turkey had reached nearly 2,764,500 by October 2016. While 1.7 million of those registered are children, 860,000 of them are school-aged. According to UNICEF estimates, only 490,000 of these children are enrolled at a school (UNICEF, 2016).

Participating in education is crucial not only for children’s healthy development, but also for enabling refugees’ integration into the host country. While the Syrian population in Turkey is not granted “refugee” status, children have access to basic rights—such as education and healthcare—through a “temporary protection” status. Through the “Temporary Education Centers” established during the early years of the global refugee crisis, Turkey’s Ministry of National Education (MoNE) enabled Syrian children with a temporary protection status to be educated in Arabic, in line with the Syrian school curriculum. In addition, Syrian children can enroll at state schools attached to the MoNE and exercise their right to free education. However, because the majority of the Syrian students at state schools are not sufficiently ready for school, they are either unable to benefit enough from the education or leave school shortly after. With MoNE’s recent decision that Temporary Education Centers in Istanbul no longer provide schooling for Syrian refugee children in Arabic, children’s important right to school readiness is now an even more urgent matter.



# ACEV'S SUMMER PRESCHOOLS PROJECT FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN

Based on problems that Syrian children have been experiencing in adapting to school, ACEV began to work toward implementing a short-term intervention program that will improve their school readiness and make it easier for them to adapt to the culture. The Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children, implemented in collaboration with the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education in summer 2016, was realized with the support of Plan International and Siemens Turkey. It targeted Syrian children who would begin elementary school in September 2016, whose families had immigrated to Turkey due to the war in Syria and were living in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions in Esenler, Istanbul. It was implemented over nine weeks, between July and September 2016, in a total of eight classrooms in two schools with one Syrian and one Turkish teacher in each classroom (a total of 18 teachers); it reached 128 children.

Implemented as part of the Summer Preschools Program, it was developed by adapting ACEV's pre-existing Preschool Education Program (PEP) on the basis of scientific data pertaining to the needs

of Syrian children. The PEP is a program that makes it easier for children to start elementary school by supporting their physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development; it has been implemented in provinces in Turkey's Eastern and Southeastern regions over the past 13 years. In this section, the PEP's content will be described first, followed by information on how it was adapted to meet the needs of Syrian children and the results of the monitoring-evaluation study.

## 1. ACEV'S PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM (PEP)

The objective of early childhood education and care programs is to ensure children's survival, growth, development, and care. These programs cover the ages 0 to 6, and most importantly support children in all developmental areas—cognitive, physical (fine and gross motor skills), socio-emotional, self-care, and language development. Consequently, programs must be designed

with children's characteristics in mind, such as age, interests, and the socio-cultural environment they live in. Studies show that quality early childhood education and care services developed with these objectives, support children in terms of nutrition, health, and cognitive and social development. As a result, children are better prepared when they start school and adapt to school better, while in the long-term, these programs contribute to increasing children's educational levels and preventing inequalities in opportunity.

ACEV's Preschool Education Program (PEP) is a pioneering program that has been implemented since 2003 and aims to reach areas in Turkey where early childhood education rates remain low. In the early 2000s, it was observed that while only 14 percent of the early childhood population (5-to-6-year-olds) had access to center-based preschool education, this rate was much lower in Southeastern Anatolia. It was found that due to socioeconomic hardships, families were neither able to sufficiently support their children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development nor enable them to receive preschool education, as a result of which the children were falling behind their peers who had access to such opportunities.

Once these basic facts were determined, efforts were initiated to develop a program

that would prevent this state of events, offer children more equal opportunities, and prepare them for schooling. A needs assessment study was carried out to determine the extent of the needs, and the problems bilingual children encounter when they enter the formal education system. The program's fundamental features and principles were determined following the study (Aksu-Koç et al, 2002). The program was geared to 5-and-6-year-olds in Southeastern Anatolia, who lived in either monolingual or multilingual environments and were unable to benefit from preschool education services. Its main objective was to enable children to start school ready by supporting all aspects of their development. In summary, the PEP was developed to address regional needs; an intensive preschool education program to support the development of children unable to benefit from preschool education (Şenocak et al, 2015).

## 1.1. Program Content

The program content, developed to meet these objectives, includes a daily routine divided into nine time slots, beginning with "Preparing for the Day" at 9 am and ending with "Reading Time." The program includes weekly themes and topics, goals and objectives and concepts.

## The Daily Routine

08:45-09:00 Arrival Time  
09:00-09:10 Preparing for the Day  
09:10-09:35 Large Group Time  
09:35-10:10 Outdoor Time  
10:10-10:40 Clean up- Breakfast – Clean Up Time  
10:40-11:05 Literacy Time  
11:05-12:20 Play Time  
12:20-12:50 Clean up- Snack – Clean Up Time  
12:50-13:10 Cognitive Training Program Time  
13:10- 13:30 Music and Movement Time  
13:30- 13:55 Reading Time  
13:55-14:00 Departure Time

### 1.1.1. Themes, Topics, and Concepts

The program was structured on the 10 most prevalent themes in early childhood programs. These themes were My School, My Family, Me and Myself, Healthy Living, Seasons, Animals We See around Us, Plants, The Place where I Live, Nature and Life/the Environment, and Preparing for Elementary School, and subtopics related to these themes were distributed across five days of the week.

Activities presented under these thematic headings were specifically designed to not only be relevant to children’s lives, but interesting, meaningful and novel, as

well. These themes and topics were mostly covered during Circle Time in the daily routine, and also during other times.

Additionally, there is another component of the program—namely the Child Education Program (CEP) a set of structured exercises developed by ACEV (Bekman & Şenocak, 2003) preparing children to learn preliteracy and prenumeracy concepts critical to acquire before 1st grade. The “CEP (Child Education Program) Time” support children’s learning about basic cognitive concepts such as geometric shapes, dimensions, location, and space, while strengthening the application-based cognitive skills related to these concepts such as matching, sorting,

grouping, classification, and understanding the relationships in patterns. The concepts targeted by the program are large-small, geometric shapes, long-short, thick-thin, colors, above-below, front-back, left-right, directions, high-low, wide-narrow, next to-between, up-down, number recognition (0 to 9), addition, subtraction, seriation, and classification.

### 1.1.2. Gains and Indicators in Developmental Areas

In planning program activities, the five developmental areas and relevant gains and indicators were taken into account, and effort was spent to focus on each area equally. The five developmental areas covered by the program are the cognitive, physical (fine and gross motor skills), socio-emotional, self-care, and language development areas.

**In the cognitive development area**, the aim was to support children's learning of concepts and numbers and prepare children for school.

**In motor development**, the aim was to support large and small muscle development through working the small muscles, movement, and exercise.

**In socio-emotional development**, the aim was to teach children to recognize and

express their emotions appropriately, develop positive relationships with their peers and adults, and the ways to engage in social interaction.

**In self-care**, the aim was to support self-help skills such as hygiene and eating a healthy diet, meeting the body's needs, and adhering to safety rules.

**In language development**, the aim was to strengthen children's vocabulary and language structures.

These activities aim to support all of these developmental areas as a whole and are included in the program because they enable children to start school ready. Each activity includes information on which developmental area is supported and which skill is involved (in terms of gains and indicators). These gains have been distributed among the nine time slots that make up the daily routine. One or more developmental areas and gains were targeted in each time slot.

### 1.1.3. Program Implementation Structure

The most important factor in implementing the PEP is the teachers. Teachers are chosen from people who hold a degree in preschool education or child development, and all teachers receive program implementation

training from ACEV trainers prior to implementing the program. A field consultant is assigned to each school throughout the summer preschool period to ensure the PEP implementation is consistently of the highest quality. Field consultants have detailed knowledge and experience about the PEP and program implementation; they work with the classroom teachers on program implementation individually and as a group throughout the summer preschool period, and work one-on-one with teachers on various issues (classroom management, doing an activity, etc.) to ensure program quality, if it is determined they need support. This system contributes to the professional development of the teachers by regularly providing them with feedback on a daily basis in areas they need support, throughout the entire process.

## 1.2. Program Impact

The Summer Preschools Program was first implemented at five schools in Diyarbakir in 2003, where 320 children were reached via 20 classrooms. It has reached over 7,000 children to date, in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education. The program's evaluation study was carried out in 2004 (Bekman et al, 2004). Study results showed that compared to children who did not attend the program, children who did participate:

- had better verbal skills,
- had better mathematical skills,
- had better language development and story-telling skills,
- gained self-care skills, and
- enrolled in primary school education at a rate of 91 percent (this rate was 54 percent for children who did not attend the program).

## 2. ADAPTING THE PEP TO MEET THE NEEDS OF SYRIAN CHILDREN:

After determining the need to improve school readiness for Syrian children, holding temporary protection status in Turkey, with programs sensitive to their language, culture, and psychosocial needs, ACEV adapted the PEP—a program with proven impact. The main objective of the adaptation process was to improve children's school readiness through a program that enabled children to gain targeted skills, reached them effectively, and ensured they benefitted from the program at the highest possible level. The adaptation process took place prior to and during program implementation, and focused on the three basic factors noted below:

**Language Adaptation:** The main objective here was to offer children the opportunity for education in their mother tongue in addition to Turkish and help make the transition to understanding and learning Turkish—the target language—gentler and more developmentally appropriate. This would prevent children from resisting learning Turkish due to any negative attitudes they might have toward the new language. Accordingly, certain time slots in the daily routine were set aside and the activities in these time slots were carried out by Syrian teachers in Arabic, the children’s mother tongue. Thus, the children’s mother tongue, which they were still in the process of learning, was supported in the context of the program.

In order to determine which time slots would be in Arabic or Turkish throughout the program, a framework was developed on the basis of language-related factors, such as how frequently and to what extent each language would be used over the course of nine weeks, and the instances where Turkish-speaking and Arabic-speaking teachers could switch between the two language. In addition, teachers received detailed feedback and supplementary training throughout program implementation on the ways to support the development of both languages in the classroom setting. Moreover, to boost the children’s perceptive and expressive competencies in using the Turkish

language—one of the main objectives of the program—the language of the activities focused on teaching and improving Turkish language skills were simplified according to the children’s level of knowledge of Turkish.

**Cultural Adaptation:** The objective here was to ensure the program was in line with and sensitive to the children’s cultural identity. To this end, certain cultural elements of Syrian society suitable to children’s developmental levels were added to the program content, so as to enable them to preserve their cultural values within the context of the project and raise their awareness. For example, popular children’s games in Syria were identified and on certain days of the week, these games were played with the children in Arabic during outdoor time. Afterwards, the games were repeated on other days as well. Children’s songs in Arabic, again from Syrian culture, were taught to the children during classroom activities, and in the following weeks, were sung as classroom songs during different time slots and when transitioning from one activity to another. In addition, during the Culture Board activity that the Syrian teachers did together with the children every Friday, the children viewed visual materials that reflected elements of their cultural wealth and as a classroom, engaged in discussions and role play activities.

**Psychosocial Adaptation:** It was foreseen that the Syrian children’s psychological and physical integrity might have been threatened by having to flee the civil war in their country and migrate to Turkey (giving rise to feelings of fear, terror, and desperation, and anxious, fearful, and reflexive behaviors, etc.); teachers were educated on these matters prior to program implementation. The education they received focused on ways to work with children who have been exposed to violence and trauma. In addition, various components that could alleviate the damage from possible trauma were added to the program. For example, therapy-based art activities that focus on expressing emotions and experiences were developed and included in the program to be implemented on a weekly basis. Rather than waiting for children to express their emotions verbally, activities that would make it possible to reach and understand them on the basis of their drawings and paintings were included in greater numbers in the program. In addition, having a psychologist present and ready at the school to work with this age group, during the project was also added to the program framework, to provide psychosocial support to children on an individual basis when needed.

### 3. PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation studies based on empirical data were carried out throughout the implementation of the Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children (Erdemir, 2016). The monitoring and evaluation study had two targets: (1) to ascertain whether the program adaptations met the Syrian children’s needs in the process of program implementation, and design new adaptations to the program content if necessary, and (2) to collect the views of program stakeholders—teachers and parents—on changes they observed in the program and the children.

For the first target, a number of observation forms were developed and administered to evaluate the quality of the teachers’ work and the differences observed in the children over the nine-week implementation process. The Monitoring and Evaluation Team and ACEV’s Team of Experts from the Early Childhood Education Department conducted full-day observations in project classrooms at least three days of the week. In addition, regular meetings were held with the field consultants to share and discuss the data and impressions related to the program’s effect on the children. Lastly, weekly or bi-

monthly evaluation meetings were held with the project psychologist to support efforts to determine children's social and emotional adaptation to the classroom, their peers, and their teachers, and any relevant needs in these areas.

In the context of the second target of the monitoring and evaluation study, a qualitative study was conducted that assessed the program's effects on preparing the Syrian children for primary school and children's integration into society. This part of the study was based on the statements by direct and/or indirect stakeholders relevant to the program; namely, the teachers, children, and parents. In this context, (1) children's statements about their Summer Preschool experiences, (2) teachers' experiences and statements related to program implementation and work with the target group, (3) mothers' statements about how the program changed their children in the home environment and in social relationships, and (4) children's and mothers' statements concerning children's and parents' thoughts about perceptions of social and cultural identity were analyzed and studied.

## 4. RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM

A total of 128 children attended the Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children; 52 percent were boys and 48 percent were girls. While 71 children were born in 2011, 39 were born in 2010, seven were born in 2012, and two were born in 2009. Of the children, 47 percent migrated to Turkey in 2012 and 2013, while 53 percent migrated in 2014 or later. Thirty-five percent of the children lived in households with three to five people; 51 percent, six to nine people; and 11 percent, 10 to 13 people. Sixty percent of the children had two or three siblings. Of the children's mothers, 31 percent were at least middle school graduates.

Observations conducted over the duration of the project reflect an improvement in the children's school readiness, and in their language, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills over the course of the program.

It was observed that after the first three weeks, the children began to communicate more in Turkish with their Turkish-speaking teachers and friends. This change in their learning and speaking Turkish is significant, as improving children's school readiness is the program's main goal. However, the children's level of language development was still below levels that would allow them to benefit from primary school services without support.



In terms of cognitive gains, it was observed that over the course of the Summer Preschool, children learned basic cognitive concepts such as colors, geometric shapes, dimensions, locations, space, and amounts and answered questions/talked about them correctly; they also gained cognitive skills such as matching, sorting, placing, grouping, seriation, and understanding the relationships in patterns. Towards the end of the program, it was observed that many children had begun to grasp cause and effect, another cognitive skill. This was observed especially during Reading Time, in the answers they gave to questions about the story.

In terms of socio-emotional development, it was observed that the children acquired various verbal and non-verbal communication skills, created a positive field of interaction with their teachers and friends based on trust, and increasingly adapted to and participated in the program more over the course of the program. It was also observed that the children developed basic positive socio-emotional behavior, such as recognizing and expressing basic emotions, setting up games, sharing, helping, and taking on tasks and responsibilities.

Statements from the mothers also reinforced observation findings. Their self-reports indicated the change in their children's social and emotional development: *"My child became a social person. I can see this in our*

*home environment. Before, she was afraid to leave me, afraid of going to school. But now, she wants to go to school. When we go to the park, for example, she is now able to move away from me a little, and play on her own. She used to never do that."*

Another mother expressed the change in these words: *"His relationships with his friends changed so much. He used to be very aggressive. He would hit his younger siblings. But now, he shares his toys. He teaches his siblings the things he learned here. Now, when I'm sad, he says, 'What's wrong, mom? Don't be sad!' and comes and gives me a kiss."*

Another mother, whose daughter had been traumatized by past experiences said: *"My daughter wouldn't talk to anyone. She wouldn't go outside much. She wouldn't see new people. At home, she wouldn't even talk to other family members much. But she came here, she became a bit more social, she made friends. Now she talks to the family and to other people; she is better now."*

Mothers also pointed out that their children's language skills were improving and that they became more willing to learn: *"His Turkish improved, he understands more now. He likes learning. He wants to talk about the things he learned here with his older brother and friends. When he wants to play a game, for instance, he wants to play "school". He teaches his brother the games he learned here. He*

*has become very enthusiastic about learning. When he comes home, for example, he tries to learn Turkish on the internet. We try to teach him as well.”*

All these findings reflect the changes that resulted from a nine-week program over the short term. Regarding school attendance— one of the most important expected outcomes of the program—121 of the 128 children who took part in the program completed the program; 72 of them enrolled in primary school and 19 in preschool. The remaining 30 either did not enroll in a school due to language barriers that came up during registration, delays in registration or personal reasons, or were sent to special centers specifically geared to Syrian children. The children’s school attendance will be followed in the days to come.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS ADDRESSING SYRIAN CHILDREN

This section builds on the lessons learned during the implementation and monitoring-evaluation of ACEV's Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children, and involves a number of recommendations related to developing and implementing preschool education programs geared to improving Syrian children's school readiness.

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO PROGRAM CONTENT:

- In an education program, having a regular and consistent daily routine and knowing what they will be doing in each time slot makes children feel relaxed, eliminates uncertainty, and enables them to feel safe. Having a regular daily routine also makes it easier for teachers to follow when they will be doing what. Accordingly, the time slots in the daily routine should begin and end at the same time every day and always follow the same order.
- It is very important to have activity times in the daily routine that allow children to spend time doing different things. These activity times can include active and quiet times; large group time, small group time, and solitary play time; play times indoor and outdoor; self-selected and teacher-guided activity times; and transition times. Outdoor play time can also be held inside the school/building if there is no outdoor area like a garden. In such cases, however, keep in mind that children will not be able to benefit from fresh air.
- The program should include activities that support children's cognitive development and help them acquire pre-literacy and pre-numeracy knowledge and skills, such as concept development, eye-hand coordination, general abilities, classification, and seriation. The aim of these activities should be for children to recognize objects or entities in various conceptual dimensions: by name, color, shape, size, length, sound, smell, material content, taste, amount, use, weight,

width, volume, and number. Working on these concepts plays an important role in enabling the children to develop the relevant cognitive skills throughout the program. While specific times must be set aside for these concepts to be learned, it will also help to frequently reinforce the learning during different times as well (by using balloons of different sizes and colors during music and movement times, for instance).

- The program should include pre-literacy activities geared towards developing children's skills in understanding and using various language structures in Turkish. These activities will expand children's vocabulary; the more words children know and the more language structures they can produce, the less difficult it will be for them to read and write. This will enable them to start school better prepared and leading to greater success.
- Programs should also include reading times where children listen to stories, ask questions, answer questions, and learn new words, to help enhance their early literacy skills prior to entering the formal education system. In programs geared to Syrian children, it is important to set aside time to read books in both Turkish and Arabic. Should finding children's books in Arabic prove difficult, developmentally

appropriate Turkish books can be translated. To expand the children's knowledge of Turkish words, care must be taken to teach children words during Reading Time that they can match to the pictures in the story.

- The program must include time for play. When children are given opportunities to play, they use all their sensory organs—sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smell—to discover and learn to recognize the objects they are playing with, and observe the interaction between objects and their senses.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND ADAPTATION:

- Having activities in the program that include elements both from their own culture and the host culture makes it easier for children to adapt to the program.
- Time should be set aside to enable children to express their emotions and relax. At the start of the day, finding opportunities to understand the emotion children came to school with is important. Spending

personal time with and talking to children who have experienced problems at home should be an integral part of the program. In addition, effort should be spent to include activities geared to reinforcing this objective during the day.

- The program should include large group time, where children will get to enjoy doing things all together, share experiences. For example, planting a flower in a flowerpot and watering it all together will enable children to share and enjoy the experience, think about it as a group and come up with ideas together.
- Having a wide range of toys in the classrooms makes it easier for children to set up games and thus facilitates peer interaction. During Play Time, teachers alternatively play the role of mediators in cases of problems and conflict, become participants in children’s play, or only observe. It is important for teachers to know what each role requires and act accordingly.
- In program implementation, ensuring children take turns in classroom tasks, such as distributing napkins during snack times, is crucial in terms of their social development. Taking on and doing a task enables children to acquire a sense of responsibility, and makes them feel important and well. In addition, if there

are children in the classroom who would not willingly assume responsibility for such tasks due to their personal characteristics, this can be a way to encourage them and support their self-confidence in a social setting.

### 3. RECOMMENDATION RELATED TO CHILDREN’S NUTRITION AND SELF-CARE:

- It is important to include to mealtimes in the program, such as breakfast time and snack time. To ensure all children consume the same foods, meals should be provided by the center. It is important to plan these meals in such a way that it comprises of age appropriate food and meets developmental needs. By making sure all children consume nutritious foods, it can be ensured that they regularly eat healthy food at least twice a day.
- The program should also include times when children wash their hands and brush their teeth, so that they can improve their self-care skills and develop good hygienic habits. For children in this target group, it is psychosocially helpful for these times to always be planned, never be skipped, and become routine. Also,

children must be provided materials such as a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, and a towel in order to gain these habits.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE SELECTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS:

- Having teachers with degrees in either preschool education or early childhood development implement early intervention programs is even more important when working with children who have been exposed to risk in disadvantaged conditions. Yet care must be taken to ensure teachers working with such target groups—even if they hold degrees in these fields—receive training in working with children who have been exposed to violence and trauma.
- The way teachers communicate with children, both individually and in a group, is very important. Consequently, it must be made sure to select teachers who have these skills. It is important to support teachers with supplemental training on topics needed to implement the program effectively in the classroom setting.
- To provide the training in both languages, care must be taken to work either with a teacher who is equally competent in both languages or with two teachers in a team, where one teacher’s mother tongue is Turkish and the second teacher’s mother tongue is Arabic and second language is Turkish. It is helpful to provide teachers with training in bilingual development, including how teachers can support it, and employ body language/role play, dramatization in language, and gestures/ facial expressions in the education process.
- When working in a team of two,, teachers can alternate between “active teacher” and “support teacher” roles depending on whether an activity is Turkish-intensive or Arabic-intensive. In order for the program to run effectively throughout the day, it is very important that duties of the teachers are defined and distributed beforehand, so that they can make the necessary preparations prior to the activities. If working with two teachers in a team, it is also useful to provide them trainer training prior to program implementation on topics such as why they are a team, what is their common goal, the responsibilities of each in the classroom setting, task distribution, the communication between them, and collaboration.

- When working with a bilingual teacher, teachers can model being a “bilingual speaker,” which is something expected of the children over the long-term. When a teacher sets such an example, this contributes to children’s development of a sense of awareness about perceptions related to “bilingual speakers” and “being bilingual.” However, it must be kept in mind that it will be cognitively very tiring for a single teacher to constantly translate between the two languages.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE LANGUAGE OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM:

- In the first few weeks, giving instructions and information in Turkish followed by their consecutive translation in Arabic during all time slots in the daily routine—without exception—ensures the program reaches the children in a way that is more “understandable” while also making it easier for them to adapt. The translations should be simple and match the instructions in Turkish. Importantly, the translation process must be “early childhood-friendly”, and mot-a-mot translation should be avoided.
- In program implementation, moving away from consecutive translation after a while and applying the T-A-T model (Turkish-Arabic-Turkish) enables children to require gradually less Arabic translation support. According to this model, in cases where there are indicators that the children have not understood the instructions in Turkish, the sentence in Turkish must be translated into Arabic and the sentence in Turkish must be repeated one last time immediately afterwards. Carrying out some of the program activities solely in Arabic is important in terms of the children’s mother tongue language development. For example, the program’s mother tongue component can be strengthened by having Outdoor Time or Reading Time in Arabic and Culture Board activities on certain days of the week.
- Variables that are important in enabling children to transition from receptive language to expressive language in Turkish include teacher skills that support program implementation, such as speaking much slower when speaking in Turkish, articulating distinctly, and enunciating each syllable if necessary; maintaining eye contact with the children while communicating a key word/concept, and articulating the word/concept slowly, clearly, and with emphasis; repeating the word/concept at least twice before getting

the children to repeat it; ensuring their mouth movements are clearly visible to the children, sometimes even exaggerating these movements, so the children can model them; and using body language effectively, in ways that complement the topic being discussed.

- In addition to the classroom setting, a supportive environment must be created where the children can further improve their gains in the Turkish language outside the classroom. Accordingly, it is important to simultaneously provide language education to their mothers to meet the needs of both the mothers and the children.

## **6. ISSUES TO WATCH OUT FOR IN PLANNING THE OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK PROCESSES:**

- To ensure program quality, experienced field consultants should support the teachers during program implementation. At regular intervals, field consultants can observe how activities are carried out in the classroom, then come together with the teachers in meetings at the school and provide capacity-building feedback related to program implementation.

- It is important to develop observation forms that will guide the field consultants during the observation visits, based on the quality of the teachers' application of the material, children's gains from the activity, and program content. These forms are tools that will also contribute to program monitoring-evaluation. This can help standardize and clarify what to look out for during the activities, in terms of both the teachers and the field consultants.
- In the early phases of program implementation, having field consultants hold sharing/feedback meetings with the teachers at the end of each day and carry out the preparation work for the next day will help teachers adapt to the implementation process and improve the quality of their program implementation skills throughout the overall process.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO PARENTAL PARTICIPATION:**

- The Preschool Education Program is much more effective when implemented in conjunction with an education program geared toward the mothers. It has been scientifically proven that the positive effects of the PEP are strengthened



when children and their families are reached simultaneously via two different programs. Accordingly, implementing a mother support program suited to the needs and expectations of Syrian mothers can be highly beneficial for both the children and the mothers. In a similar vein, should circumstances allow, reaching fathers through father support programs is very important in terms of both child development and improving democracy in the family.

- To ensure the participation of parents, the program to be developed will have to meet their needs. Accordingly, in addition to education to improve their parenting skills, it would be beneficial for the program to include basic issues such as Turkish language education and how parents can benefit from the health and education systems.

## IN CLOSING...

Efforts to develop an appropriate and effective education policy that will meet the developmental and educational needs of Syrian children and those of their peers from Turkey must take these three basic factors into account (Erdemir, E.; 2016):

- (1) The language barrier that prevents Syrian children, whose mother tongue is Arabic, to benefit from the education system in the Turkish language;
- (2) A curriculum that emphasizes cultural elements (language, history, social values, etc.) related to Turkey, a school/classroom culture different to that in their own country, and cultural differences that they might experience in their peer interactions within the school community;
- (3) Considering that the majority of the children migrated to the host country after fleeing the civil war and environment of conflict in Syria, and that this might have caused harm in the different developmental areas (leading to post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, social withdrawal, etc.), the need for educational services to support the psychosocial development of this population.

With the Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children, ACEV developed a program to improve children's school readiness that took these issues into consideration, and implemented it as a pilot program. The aim of this report is to share our experiences in its implementation with others working with Syrian children in the field.

Although the Summer Preschools Project for Syrian Children was a pilot study rather limited in scope, the insight ACEV gained from it was rather extensive. The fact that a relatively short early intervention program could improve the Syrian children's school readiness is a significant outcome. Another output as important as this outcome is that the project provided an opportunity to compile lessons learned to ensure quality during the design and implementation processes of education programs that will be developed in the field, and generate the most benefits for children.

Such efforts are naturally open to improvement in many aspects. To ensure the equal participation of Syrian children in the education system, it is not only important for children to be ready for school, but for schools, teachers, and parents to be prepared for them as well. Accordingly, mechanisms that account for Syrian parents' language barrier during school enrollment, equip teachers with the necessary skills to educate Syrian children with different educational

needs and inform other children and parents about inclusive approaches in these processes are all vital in terms of a well-rounded education policy.

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