THE EFFECTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

SUMMER SCHOOLS ON SYRIAN AND LOCAL CHILDREN

Assessment Report Summary

T.C. SANAYİ VE TEKNOLOJİ BAKANLIĞI
GÜNEYDOĞU ANADOLU PROJESİ
BÖLGE KALKINMA İDARESİ BAŞKANLIĞI

TÜRKİYE KALKINMA VAKFI
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AÇEV – Mother Child Education Foundation

ECD – Early Childhood Development

ECE – Early Childhood Education

GAP – Southeastern Anatolia Project (Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi)

PEP – Preschool Education Program

TKV – Development Foundation of Turkey

UNCHR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Scientific research reveals that early childhood covers a period from birth to eight years of age in which children have the fastest rates of cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. However, children at these ages who live under poor conditions and are exposed to environmental risk factors often fall far behind their peers, with developmental differences also increasing at later ages. Effective programmes that provide children with equal opportunities at an early age do not only help them stay at school for longer, but also reduce the need for compensatory education programmes for students who fail and repeat grades (Camilli et al., 2010; Wachs et al., 2013). Moreover, with their preventive effects, early intervention programmes are known to be less costly than programmes targeted at solving problems that occur later in life (Heckman, 2006). Therefore, providing Syrian children in Turkey, who are among those most at developmental risk, with access to early intervention support programmes is of critical importance to increase their school readiness and facilitate their adaptation to the local culture.

To contribute to the efforts aimed at ensuring increased access by Syrian and Turkish children to community- and home-based early childhood education (ECE), the *Supporting the Access of Syrian and Turkish Children to Community and Home-based Early Childhood Education Services* programme has been running since 2016. The programme is implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the South Eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Regional Development Administration through facilitative support extended by the Development Foundation of Turkey (TKV), and with technical support from the Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV).

Providing Syrian children in Turkey, who are among those most at developmental risk, with access to early intervention support programmes is of critical importance to increase their school readiness and facilitate their adaptation to the local culture.

Having reached almost 30,000 at risk children aged 4 to 5 years in 10 provinces of Southeast Turkey[1], the programme involves the following components (see Figure 1):

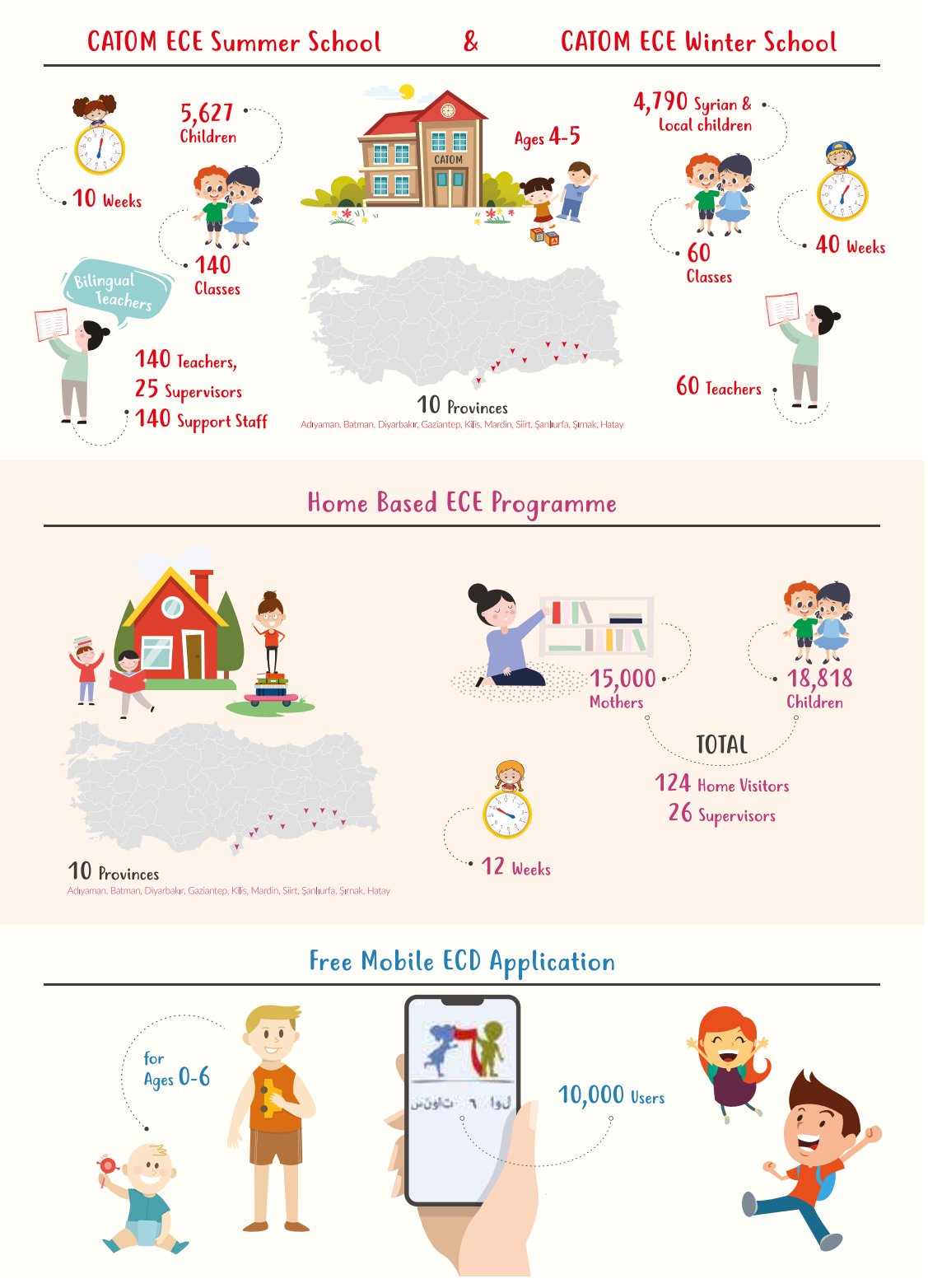
1. GAP Administration Multi-Purpose Community Centres Early Childhood Education (ECE) Summer and Winter Schools

2. Home-based Early Childhood Education Programme

3. Free Mobile Early Childhood Development (ECD) Application

1 Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa and Şırnak.

Figure 1: Components of the Supporting the Access of Syrian and Turkish Children to Community and Home-based ECE Services Programme. Number of classes and staff in ECE schools is per year.



In 2017, a research study was conducted by Assistant Professor Dr. Ersoy Erdemir, methodologist Ayşesim Diri and the SAM Research Team in an effort to assess how the ECE Summer Schools programme, implemented within the framework of a Programme Cooperation Agreement, affected the skills of participating children in three developmental areas. Developed as a complementary resource to the original research report, the *Assessment Report Summary* has been drawn up in an effort to share the key findings and conclusions of the research with relevant organizations and agencies working in the field. We hope that the promising results from the assessment study will inform further efforts in Turkey and other countries to support at-risk children with early intervention programmes.

2 EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN AT DEVELOPMENTAL RISK

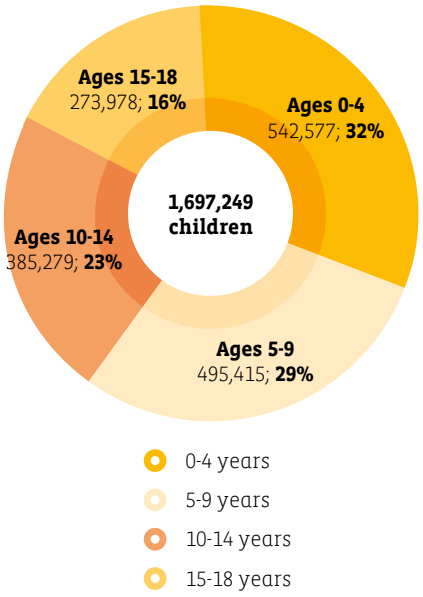
Recent findings in neuroscience suggest that a significant part of brain and language development is completed during early childhood years – a period marked by the fastest progress in linguistic, social-emotional and physical development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). The intensive configuration of synaptic connections during these critical years, where children start to acquire thinking, learning, speaking, questioning, self-regulation and social interaction skills, is of significant importance for both growth and development. In order for these connections to not only be established, but also to become permanent, children need to be exposed to cognitive and social stimulation (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). However, not all children can enjoy equal opportunities and environmental conditions that help maintain their development and achieve their actual potential.

Studies indicate that children growing up under negative circumstances arising from socio-economic conditions, ethnicity, access to educational services, language policies and social adversities are at risk in terms of their mental, social-emotional and linguistic development (Eisenbruch, 1988; Evans, 2004; Hess, 1970; Lazar and Darlington, 1982). Poverty, violence, abuse, neglect, migration, forced displacement, lack of access to educational services, language of school instruction differing from their mother tongue, lack of a supportive household environment and lower education levels among parents were identified as the main environmental factors that have a negative impact on the mental, social-emotional and behavioural development of children (Angel, Hjern and Ingleby, 2001; Hodes, 2000; McEwen, 2001; Papageorgiou et al., 2000). The inequalities created by these conditions lead children to fall behind the development level that they are capable of achieving in their early years (Schweinhart et al., 1985; Lee and Burkman, 2002; Pehrson and Robinson, 1990) and place them disproportionately at a disadvantage in terms of academic success (Briggs and Potter, 1999). Developmental differences that emerge in and persist throughout the early childhood years may also exacerbate development challenges in the future. Compensating for such differences later in life becomes costly in economic terms when compared to tackling such issues earlier in life. Children should, therefore, be provided with conditions equal to that of their peers who have grown up in environments with little or no unfavourable conditions, or with compensatory opportunities that can put in place similar conditions, in order to reach their full potential (Heckman and Masterov, 2007).

Studies indicate that children growing up under negative circumstances arising from socio-economic conditions, ethnicity, access to educational services, language policies and social adversities are at risk in terms of their mental, social-emotional and linguistic development

"It is safe to say that today the development of refugee children is at risk due to their environmental conditions and the difficulties they have encountered. Since the year 2011, millions of Syrians have fled the conflict environment to take refuge in other countries in the region. According to the latest data, more than 3.6 million registered Syrians are under temporary protection in Turkey. Almost half of the 3.6 million registered Syrians are children, and 31.97% of them are aged between 0 and 4, 29.18% between 5 and 9, 22.7% between 10 and 14, and 16.14% between 15 and 18. (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2019).

Figure 2: Syrian Children in Turkey and their Distribution by Age Range.
Source: Developed using data from the Directorate General of Migration Management (22 August 2019).



"Compared to 1,151,703 Syrian children in the school age range of 5 to 18, the number of children enrolled in schools remains as low as 643,058 (UNICEF, 2019). Schooling rates published by the Department of Migration and Emergency Education using the data from the Information Processing System for Foreign Students and e-Okul (E-school) system as well as Directorate General of Migration Management imply a substantial improvement. Nevertheless, around 400,000 school-aged Syrian children continue to remain out of formal education. Moreover, MoNE data suggest that, only 39% of 5-year-olds have access to preschool education which is critically important for their primary school orientation and academic achievement." (Tüzün, 2017)

There are many studies indicating that early intervention programmes help children acquire skills that support their transition from vulnerability to resilience. In order for them to prove effective, these programmes should focus on mitigating the factors that place children's development at risk, while maximizing protective factors. Furthermore, they should address the developmental needs of children who are disadvantaged compared to their peers (Guralnick, 1998, 2004; Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2009; Shonkoff, 2000; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). In the specific context of refugee children, the planning of such programmes in a way that supports learning the local language in a manner compatible with the culture of their country of origin, is important for facilitating the integration into their host country (Bodegård, 2005; Koury and Votruba-Drzal, 2014).

Intervention activities for refugee children have shifted from a traumatological and psychopathological focus towards factors important for settling in and adapting to a new country, which include learning the host country's language, cultural

adaptation, internalization of social identity, peer relations, sources of social support, linguistically and culturally responsive and inclusive education, and basic academic skills (Vostanis, 2016). From this perspective, the most suitable institutions for the implementation of prevention and intervention programmes in countries hosting a large number of refugee children appear to be schools or related institutes (Gümüşten, 2017; Hodes, 2000). Formal or informal education interventions designed to fit their needs provide refugee children with a sense of purpose and stability in the host country and offer them an opportunity to build their social capital.

However, there is a shortage of interventions designed specifically to target refugee children at the preschool stage. There is a need for scientific data pertaining to specific intervention programmes which can be employed in the early development of such children and in the qualifications of school systems which can meet their needs (Cameron, Frydenberg and Jackson, 2011; Waniganayake, 2001). That is why the present study, which provides a comparative assessment on the effects of ECE Summer School education for Syrian and local children aged 5-6 years who face high levels of environmental risk factors (delivered as part of a leading intervention in Turkey), will hopefully play a key role in meeting the need for scientific data in this area.

3 ECE SUMMER SCHOOLS

Preschool enrolment rates among children in Turkey exhibit significant differences depending on age group and region. For example, with a schooling rate below 30 per cent for children aged 4-5 years, the Southeastern Anatolia region is at a disadvantage in terms of children benefitting from preschool education services when compared with other regions throughout Turkey (Development Analytics, 2016). This border region has received intensive influxes of Syrian refugees, resulting in its demographic structure changing in recent years so as to include the Syrian community. The limited access to preschool education services and the socio-economic conditions observed jeopardize the development and primary school readiness of both Syrian and local children in this region living in poor households. The situation calls for more outreach to these children before primary school through a high-quality preschool early intervention programme.

Implemented since the early 2000s across the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia region, the Preschool Education Program (PEP) was formulated as an evidence-based intervention programme to be delivered to children aged 5 and 6 years in areas with a low socio-economic level amongst families and limited access to preschool services (Bekman, Aksu-Koç and Erguvanlı-Taylan, 2002).[2] The aim of the programme is to support targeted children in all developmental areas, equipping them with basic educational skills and getting them better prepared for primary school. Delivered to children right before they start primary school as part of the 10-week ECE Summer Schools programme, PEP has so far reached more than 7,000 vulnerable children through a set of partnerships. The impacts of the programme was examined in a scientific research paper and it was concluded that the programme helped developmentally disadvantaged children acquire some basic skills by supporting them in multiple developmental areas (Bekman, Aksu-Koç and Erguvanlı-Taylan, 2012). The positive differences created by the programme in improving children's primary school readiness and encouraging them to attend primary school have been supported by evidence-based data.

Formulated with consideration of the prospective gains of basic development areas in early childhood, PEP was designed to support children in acquiring various skills in five areas: cognitive, social-emotional, linguistic, motor and self-care development (Bekman et al., 2012). These skills and behaviours targeted in the five development areas were designated specific time slots within the day-to-day PEP schedule. Selection of these time slots was inspired by the "High/Scope" ECE approach (Weikart and Schweinhart, 1987).

PEP starts at 9 a.m. (with the children arriving at their classrooms around 8:30 a.m.) and ends at 2 p.m. The programme proceeds in line with a daily agenda divided into nine structured time slots within those hours. Each time slot and all activities carried out in them are designed to holistically support children's development in a number of areas.

PEP implementation starts prior to the opening of ECE Summer Schools with a 10-day teacher training programme involving theoretical and practical training. In addition to teacher training, the ECE Summer Schools implementation process involves an in-service support system for teachers, which is operated through supervisors and field experts. As part of the in-service support system, supervisors visit the classrooms to observe and support the development of teachers. Field experts, on the other hand, work directly with both supervisors and teachers to monitor their development and offer support. This system contributes to PEP implementation skills and the professional development of teachers

2 Distinct from formal preschool education programmes, it is an early intervention programme developed by AÇEV based on the needs of children at developmental risk. It was not designed as an alternative to formal education or other forms of formal education programmes.

by offering them daily feedback throughout the process in areas requiring support, while aiming to secure "staff quality assurance through regular in-service support" as one of the basic principles to be observed during a high-quality and effective early intervention system (Reynolds, 1998).

In view of the growing need for early intervention programmes for Syrian children, PEP was adapted in 2016 to address the linguistic, cultural and psychosocial needs of these children. The adapted version of the programme was assessed for the first time as part of a pilot implementation carried out in the district of Esenler in Istanbul. The pilot intervention in Istanbul was delivered to 128 Syrian children in eight classes and was assessed using qualitative methods (Erdemir, 2016). The results have shown that the children demonstrated progress in areas of cognitive, social-emotional and Turkish language development throughout the course of the programme.

Based on the positive results obtained from the research study (Bekman, Aksu-Koç and Erguvanlı-Taylan, 2004) conducted during the initial years of implementation for local children and with the pilot intervention delivered to Syrian children, PEP was scaled-up across the Southeastern Anatolia Region to include Syrian and local children in 2016 and 2017. Details of the implementation of 2017, when the research was undertaken, are provided below:

- ***Target group reached:*** 2,620 children completed the 10-week ECE Summer Schools programme. The number of Syrian children who completed the programme was 1,988 while for local children it was 632. According to these figures, of the children who completed the entire programme, 76 per cent were Syrian and 24 per cent were local. The programme reached out to children born in 2011 (63.1 per cent) and in 2012 (35.5 per cent). However, a small number of children born in 2010 (1.4 per cent) who were delayed in starting school were also included in the programme as they would be starting primary school in September 2017 as well.

- ***Language of implementation:*** The content and implementation language of the PEP is Turkish and the ECE Summer Schools were also conducted in this language. To make sure that both the Syrian and local children went through a smooth transition in learning Turkish, could properly adapt to the ECE Summer Schools and take part in programme activities, bilingual teachers provided interpretations in the children's mother tongues and certain time units were conducted in the Arabic language. However, in accordance with the language planning of PEP, these interpretations were systematically decreased and the use of Turkish increased over the 10-week period.

- ***Implementation geography, number of classrooms and staff:*** Implemented between 3 July 2017 and 8 September 2017 when the research was conducted, the ECE Summer Schools programme was delivered in the province of Hatay, in southern Turkey, and in nine other provinces in the Southeastern Anatolian region: Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa and Şırnak. A total of 140 ECE Summer School classrooms were opened, including 106 classrooms for Syrian children and 34 classrooms for local children in both central and other districts of each province. These 140 classrooms were located in the children's play rooms/kindergarten classrooms and were run by regional administrations, governmental organizations and agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations operating in the region, with infrastructural support provided by the GAP Administration as the main implementer of the project. The physical equipment and materials required for ECE Summer School practices in 140 classrooms were provided by UNICEF. A total of 140 teachers were employed, one

for each classroom, and were provided with support by 31 supervisors and six field experts throughout the programme. Figure 3 provides a summary of the organizations and officials involved in the ECE Summer School implementation and the responsibilities they assumed as part of the process.

Figure 3: Organizations and responsibilities in the ECE Summer School implementation

UNICEF Partner	TKV Partner	GAP Administration Partner and beneficiary	AÇEV Programme Technical Consultant
• *Providing technical support for the programme* • *Providing financial support for the programme (cash and supplies)* • *Capacity building for programme partners*	• *Managing the financial, legal and human resource aspects of the programme*	• *Providing venues for programme implementation* • *Facilitating local partnerships and service provision with local stakeholders operating in the regions (including the beneficiaries, local administrations, Ministry of National Education and health care organizations)* • *Managing human resources for teachers, field specialists, supervisors and provincial officers*	• *Providing content, quality standards and a monitoring and evaluation framework for the educational programme* • *Providing training to the teachers and supervisors* • *Monitoring the implementation through classroom observations and supporting teachers, supervisors and field specialists*

4 IMPACT OF ECE SUMMER SCHOOLS

4.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

The main purpose of the research study – the key findings of which are summarized in this report – was to examine the short-term effects of the ECE Summer Schools as an intervention programme on children's development. The study explored how ECE Summer Schools affected the primary school readiness of children and, in particular, their cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional development. While groups of children who were involved and not involved in the ECE Summer Schools programme were the two main groups used for comparison purposes, the research pattern employed in the study also helped identify the discrepancies between Syrian and local children.

- ***Research design:*** The research design involved a quasi-experimental method with a pre-test – post-test control group. Pre-tests provided baseline data about the pre-programme levels of the children who would and would not be participating in the programme. The post-tests carried out at the end of the programme were designed to find out about the progress made by participating and non-participating children throughout the implementation period. This method compared the developmental differences between children involved in the intervention and their non-participating peers in the same age range and with similar socio-economic backgrounds.

- ***Research sample:*** The research sample consisted of 711 Syrian and local children who did and did not attend ECE Summer Schools. Of the participating children, 53.1 per cent were Syrian and 46.9 per cent were local, while for non-participating children, 51.8 per cent were Syrian and 48.2 per cent were local. The three provinces used for the research were Diyarbakır, Mardin and Şanlıurfa. For both groups, the parents who took part in the study were asked to provide consent/approval on behalf of their children. To make sure that a confidence interval of 80 per cent was achieved in terms of sample representation, the minimum number of participants who were involved and not involved in the research was calculated as 151 for Syrian children and 127 for local children. It was agreed that the number of individuals selected to be part of the research sample would reliably reflect and represent the change/progress of 2,620 children from 140 programme classrooms.

- ***Scales:***[3] In line with the research objectives, a set of scales was applied in an effort to assess children's cognitive, Turkish language and social-emotional development. To identify the progress in cognitive development, a Pre-literacy Skills Scale and Pre-numeracy Skills Scale were applied in the mother tongue of each child. In the same vein, the Turkish Early Language Development Test, designed to assess children's progress in Turkish language skills, was also applied individually to each child. The Emotion Regulation Scale aimed at evaluating the social-emotional development of children was applied – mostly individually – to the mothers of children included in the research sample by test implementers who spoke their native languages. Finally, the Social Competence and Behavioural Assessment Scale was exclusively applied by teachers to children in the intervention group attending the programme classrooms. The sub-tests applied under each scale provided an extensive perspective to assess all relevant developmental areas by measuring their skills in each of them. In line with research objectives, the scales associated with children's cognitive and Turkish language development were directly applied to children, whereas the scales

3 For further information about the scales employed in the research, please see the main assessment report Effects of Summer Preschools on Children: Assessment Report (Erdemir and Diri, 2018).

used for assessing their social-emotional development involved face-to-face practice with their mothers and teachers.

- ***Limitations:*** Research design, data collection tools and procedures were not reviewed by an external ethical review board. However, safeguards in relation to data collection with children were adequately upheld by the team. Data collection personnel were specifically trained on data collection with children, interacting with children, ethical consideration in data collection with children and how to identify signs of distress.

- ***Demographics:*** To identify the demographics of the target groups selected for this study, children's ages, their parents' average ages (as well as their educational and employment backgrounds and monthly household incomes), and the number of children's books and toys in each household were collected. A comparison of the demographics with the data on children aged 0-6 years across Turkey yielded a substantial consistency between these two sets of information (Development Analytics, 2016). It was, therefore, found that the demographic data of the research sample could accurately represent the general demographics of Turkey.

  Furthermore, no meaningful difference was observed between participating and non-participating children from the research sample with regards to children's sexes and dates of birth, their parents' average ages, number of siblings, children's books and toys in each household, as well as monthly household incomes and parents' employment backgrounds. Similarly, participating and non-participating children's assessed developmental areas yielded no meaningful difference in the pre-programme implementation period. It was concluded that the research sample was more than suitable for conducting an impact assessment.

  - Regarding the average ages of the parents, it was found that the age range of mothers was between 30-35, while the range for fathers was between 35-40. The minimum number of children in a household was one and the maximum was 15. When the number of children participating in the study was added to the number of siblings, it was found that the average number of children per family was 4.35. The reported monthly household income of most families was 750 TL (equivalent to approximately US$218 in August 2017) and below. All in all, the data from the research sample are consistent with the fact that poor families across Turkey are also households with greater numbers of children (Development Analytics, 2016).[4]

  - The educational backgrounds of the parents in the sample revealed that the majority of mothers were women who never went to school, while the majority of fathers were men who had only finished primary school or who had dropped out of middle school. From a countrywide perspective on the educational backgrounds of parents in Turkey, it was noted that the highest academic degree among a majority of parents with children aged 0-6 years is a middle school diploma (Development Analytics, 2016). Furthermore, 71.5 per cent of mothers and 60.1 per cent of fathers hold a middle school degree or lower, and one out of four mothers who has a child aged 0-6 years does not speak Turkish as her native language.

  - It was observed that almost all mothers were unemployed, whereas more than half of the fathers in both groups worked in part-time or full-time jobs.

4 When households are divided into 10 groups according to per capita income, the number of children aged 0-6 in the poorest households is three times higher than that in the wealthiest ones (1.5 million children to 0.5 million children) (Development Analytics, 2016).

◊ The average number of toys and books per child in households included in the study was found to be less than one. In the same vein as the research sample, most households in Turkey are known to lack a supportive home environment to foster children's development and accommodate only a very limited number of activities designed to facilitate a child's cognitive development (Development Analytics, 2016).[5]

4.2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to measure the progress achieved throughout programme implementation, pre-test scores of all scales used for the study were subtracted from the post-test scores, and a difference score was obtained. This way, the effects of participating in the programme and cultural affiliation (Syrian versus local families) were analysed simultaneously with regard to the developmental areas. The results from these areas of development and related figures are as follows.

4.2.1.Cognitive development results

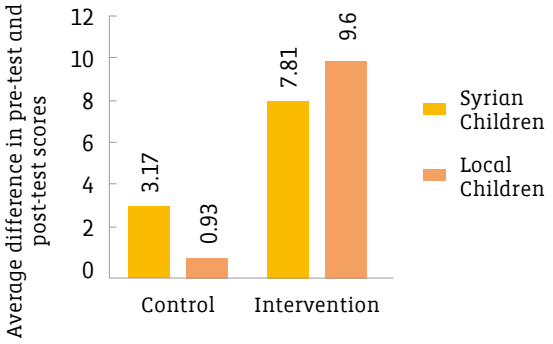
It is evident that ECE Summer Schools had a significant effect on participating children's pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills (which are associated with children's cognitive development and regarded as indicators of their school readiness) for both Syrian and local children. However, the progress in the cognitive development of local children who took part in the programme appears to be greater than the progress observed in the Syrian children.

- Pre-literacy (see Figure 4) and Pre-numeracy Skills Scales (See Figure 5), designed to test children's early literacy and early numeracy skills, and which lay the groundwork for developing literacy and numeracy skills in formal education, indicated that Syrian and local children who participated in the programme both achieved substantial improvement in these skills compared to those who did not attend the programme. Moreover, the progress in literacy and numeracy skills made by local children who completed the programme within a period of nine weeks was greater than that of Syrian children.

- The increase in verbal skill scores of children who completed ECE Summer Schools (see Figure 4) points to the fact that discerning letters, objects, shapes and details of complex pictures became easier for the children due to the improvement of their visual memories and their heightened phonological awareness, as well as their ability to better distinguish between sounds. In addition, the findings suggest that by virtue of the development of their auditory memories, children came to better understand and follow verbal instructions. They also became more skilled at placing events in chronological and causative order, as well as their pencil grip, drawing and copying skills, and their ability to focus their attention.

- The increase in pre-numeracy skills scores (see Figure 5) shows how children were

Figure 4: Pre-literacy skills: Difference in scores

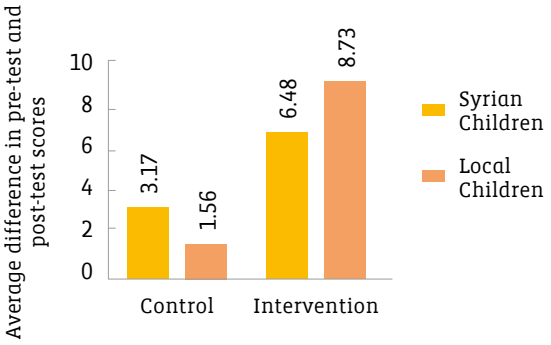


5 About 67.2 per cent of households with a 3-year-old family member do not have three or more children's books. This figure is 31.4 per cent even among wealthier households (Development Analytics, 2016).

able to better distinguish between basic concepts of quantity (less-more, big-small, long-short, thick-thin) and quality (same-different, under-over-next to). The children in the intervention group also became more competent in recognizing and naming geometric shapes and counting from 1 to 10 after learning about numbers and figures. Furthermore, this increase indicates that children became more proficient in distinguishing between pieces of serial information such as numbers and digits, while their cognitive skills, which involve grouping, matching and sorting, as well as comprehending and interpreting part-whole relations, also improved.

- It was predicted that the development of children's cognitive skills would support their learning process upon starting primary school. Pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills measured as part of this study happen to be the basic academic skills that play an active role in children's school achievement in the early years of formal education, and the results of the study show that participating in the programme contributes to laying the necessary foundation children need when they start primary school.

Figure 5: Pre-numeracy skills: Difference in scores



- In conclusion, the cognitive development outcomes of children who completed ECE Summer Schools in nine weeks contributed to their school readiness and arguably constitute an important basis for academic success in the short term.

4.2.2. Turkish language results

ECE Summer Schools were observed to have a significant effect on the Turkish language skills of Syrian and local children. Moreover, the language development of Syrian children who completed the programme was found to be higher than that of local children.

- A key result of the study is the progress made by children in the area of Turkish language skill development. Results from the Turkish Early Language Development Test scale for testing Turkish comprehension and speaking skills in early childhood point to a major improvement in receptive[6] (see Figure 6) and expressive[7] (see Figure 7) language skills of the children who completed the programme in comparison to those who did not attend the programme. The improvement in Syrian children's receptive and expressive language skills, in particular, appears to be greater than that of their local peers.

- The statistically significant increase (see Figure 6) in the Turkish receptive language skills of children who completed ECE Summer Schools indicates that the children were able to better follow the complex instructions given in Turkish. Their vocabulary improved, they became more proficient in comprehending complex sentences and their mastery of Turkish grammar increased.

6 Receptive language skills refer to the extent to which a language is comprehended.

7 Expressive language skills refer to the ability to generate messages, such as words and sentences, in a given language.

Figure 6: Turkish receptive language skills: Difference in scores

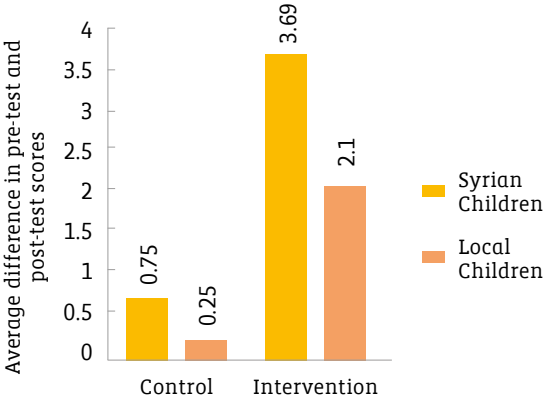
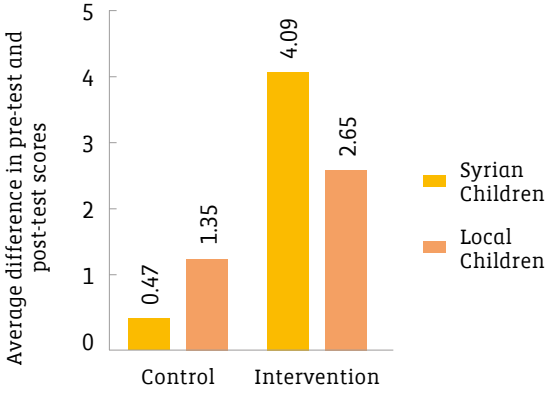


Figure 7: Turkish expressive language skills: Difference in scores



- The improvement in Turkish receptive language skills of children who completed ECE Summer Schools means that the children are likely to be more competent in understanding the instructions given by their teachers when they start primary school, as well as recognizing or guessing the meanings of the words used during lessons or in the books they read. They will also be able to follow the conversations of their classmates and other people, and understand what others mean or are requesting.

- Moreover, the statistically significant increase (see Figure 7) in the Turkish expressive language skills of children who participated in the programme shows that these children became more competent in conveying their messages verbally to others by speaking Turkish, giving better and more cohesive answers to the questions they were asked, and becoming more frequently involved in mutual conversations. In addition, we understand that they started using more words in their verbal communication, with the words being more diversified and enriched in terms of quality. With regards to verbal communication skills, such as generating increasingly complex sentences, the children made considerable progress compared to their pre-test scores.

- The improvement observed in the participant children's expressive language skills suggest that they will be better at answering questions asked by their teachers in primary school, engaging in verbal interaction with their peers, being more confident in speaking in front of a crowd, and being able to more effectively meet their needs by expressing them verbally with their teachers or friends. In addition, improvements in verbal description, discourse building and story narration skills mean that their cognitive skills will be further reinforced. These benefits are expected to help enable learners to have stronger self-esteem and higher motivation as they become better at expressing themselves in such contexts.

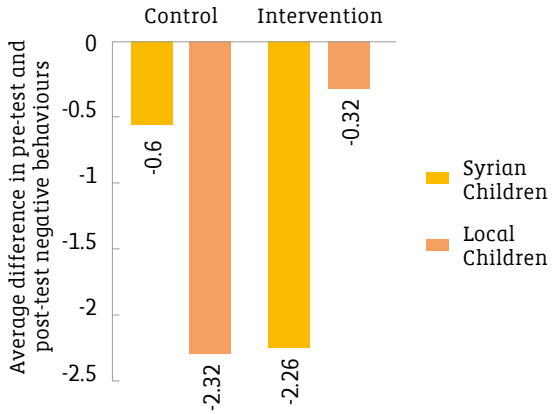
- It is predicted that better understanding of and expression in Turkish by children who participated in the programme – especially Syrian children who showed greater progress than their local peers – will not only contribute to their learning in primary school, but also make a positive impact on their social skills. Thanks to the improvement in their language skills, Syrian children are more capable at socializing with their peers and are likely to have a greater capacity to promote a culture of friendship.

4.2.3. Social-emotional development results

It is evident that ECE Summer Schools had a positive effect on children's cognitive and language development, as well as their social-emotional development. Children who attended the programme gained improved emotional regulation skills,[8] as well as social competence and decreased behavioural problems. In all of these skills, Syrian children showed greater progress compared to their local peers.

- It was observed that Syrian and local children who completed ECE Summer Schools made progress in their emotional regulation skills. Compared to local children, Syrian children attending the programme displayed fewer negative behaviours from a social-emotional aspect (see Figure 8). This finding suggests an improvement in children's emotional regulation skills, as reported by the children's mothers, referring to major progress in their behaviours associated with establishing positive relations with peers and adults, such as sharing, helping and playing, which they need for comprehending and properly conveying their emotions.

Figure 8: Emotional regulation skills: Difference in scores

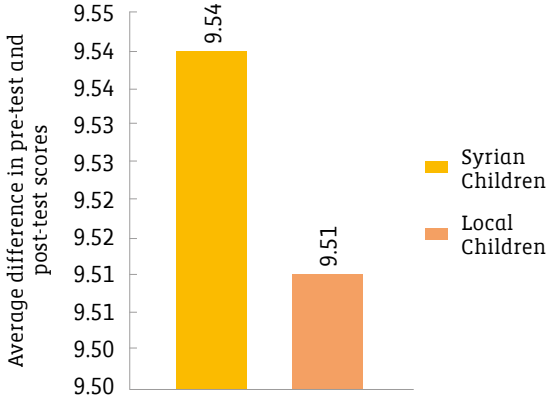


8 Emotional regulation skills refer to children's ability to recognize, comprehend, make sense of and express both their own emotions and those of others around them.

- In addition to the improvement in the emotional regulation skills of Syrian children attending ECE Summer Schools, it was observed that the children also made progress in their social competence, which suggests an increase in their level of social-emotional maturity and a decrease in their tendency to demonstrate maladaptive behaviours (see Figure 9). Progress in this domain by Syrian children appears to be greater than that of their local peers.

- According to feedback from teachers, this finding suggests that positive social interaction behaviours displayed by children around their peers, such as cooperation, solidarity and looking for ways to settle disputes, continued to increase throughout the programme's implementation.

Figure 9: Social competence: Scores in the intervention group



- As for problematic behaviours, which stand out as another area addressed within social-emotional development, a decline was observed in the tendency of Syrian and local children attending ECE Summer Schools to exhibit negative behaviours such as anger, anxiety and introversion (see Figure 10). Compared to local children, Syrian children seem to have made greater progress in terms of displaying fewer problematic behaviours. This finding, supported by the teachers' reports and indicating a decline in

Figure 10: Problematic behaviours: Scores in the intervention group

children's problematic behaviours, also suggests that the development of positive behaviours was reinforced, which might positively affect social adaptation and academic achievement in future.

- The major progress observed in children's social-emotional development throughout the programme implementation is critical to their adaptation to academic life. Stronger emotional regulation skills and social competence upon starting primary school can positively contribute to better integration with the school community and broadening children's areas of socialization. In addition, the decrease in the pre-disposition for problematic behaviours stands out as a key social-emotional gain. It is strongly suggested that the advantage of the classroom setting in contributing to reduced problematic behaviours and increased social competencies is the interaction between teachers and children, as well as children's improved sense of belonging to a "classroom community" that acknowledges their language and cultural diversity in a learning environment. Furthermore, children can transfer these positive gains beyond schools, such as to their home environments and neighbourhoods, where they can continue to improve their emotional, behavioural and social wellbeing.

5 DISCUSSION

- The demographic data of this study indicate that the ECE Summer Schools reached children whose families were from low socio-economic backgrounds and lived in home environments with no access to key elements that would support their development.
- The demographic data included a wide range of variables such as parents' socio-economic and educational backgrounds as well as the number of siblings, children's books and toys in each household. These data can demonstrate whether the children involved in the intervention are deprived of a supportive home environment that would foster their development. By keeping track of this information, ECE Summer Schools are also able to reach out to poorer households.
- The results from the study suggest that when children whose development are at risk are offered programmes that can support them in fulfilling their potential, their level of development increases compared to their peers who do not have the same opportunity.
- According to the results, ECE Summer Schools have made a positive impact on the fundamental ECD areas (cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional) of children who were at developmental risk associated with living in unfavourable conditions and exposed to environmental risk factors. This positive difference will almost certainly facilitate participant children's primary school orientation and improve academic achievement levels. As such , the study provides substantial evidence about the need for and impact of ECE, as well as the importance of giving priority to children at developmental risk due to issues in accessing education.
- Since the implementation of the ECE Summer Schools, there have been significant and positive differences in the areas of basic ECD in only nine weeks. This change constitutes a significant result for scientific studies in this field.

According to the results, ECE Summer Schools have made a positive impact on the basic ECD areas (cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional) of children who were at developmental risk associated with living in unfavourable conditions and being exposed to environmental risk factors. This positive difference will almost certainly facilitate participant children's primary school orientation and improve academic achievement levels.

- Although it is well-known that children rapidly develop during early childhood years, how ECE Summer Schools have proven to support and enhance their development within such a short period of time is evident in the comparatively little progress shown by children who were not involved in the intervention. This finding is an indicator that PEP as an early intervention support programme has dynamically responded to the needs of the target children.

- The results from the study indicate that the ECE Summer Schools benefit both Syrian and local children in the region, who represent two groups with differences in mother tongue, ethnicity and culture.

PEP implemented as part of the ECE Summer Schools has helped both cultural groups with similar levels of efficiency, both in terms of content and method of implementation. This shows that the programme gave proper consideration to the environmental conditions children lived in, the cultural aspects they brought along to their classrooms and their social identities, and was responsive to their varying needs. Furthermore, the statistically meaningful differences PEP has made between both groups of children, despite all these variables, confirms that the content and methodology of the programme were responsive to the needs of the target group.

When the scores of the Syrian and local children are compared, differences are evident between the two groups, although both groups did have important gains from the ECE Summer Schools in the three areas of development examined. The reason for these differences is that the children who attended the programme were at different levels before starting the programme. In other words, children who had less advanced skills in these areas in the pre-implementation period showed greater progress compared to their peers who started with more advanced skills. The factors causing Syrian and local children to be at different levels before starting the programme, and to consequently have demonstrated differences in their development, are listed as follows:

- With regard to children's verbal skills, the educational background of their mothers appears to have an impact on their progress. Since the children of mothers with higher levels of education had a head start, they showed less progress in their verbal skills compared to the children whose mothers only had a lower level of education. Although there was no significant difference between the education levels of the Syrian and local mothers – there were more Syrian mothers with a higher level of education than the local mothers – this might be the reason for the lower progress in verbal skills seen in the Syrian children.
- Local children showing higher progress on pre-numeracy skills than Syrian children can be explained by language ability being a determinant of numeracy skills. In other words, the fact that local children had higher competencies in the Turkish language helped improve their comprehension in the classroom. We can presume that since local children can understand and express themselves better in Turkish, this might have contributed to their pre-numeracy skill development.
- Regarding Turkish receptive and expressive language skills, Syrian children attending the programme showed better progress than local children. This result indicates that Syrian children improved more by the end of the programme because they had comparatively lower scores in Turkish receptive and expressive language at the beginning of the programme.
- With regard to emotion-regulation skills of the participant children as reported by their mothers, the Syrian mothers stated that they observed much more positive progress in their children's behaviours after the programme compared to the mothers of local children. Here again, we can presume that the Syrian mothers – the majority of which had a higher level of education than the local mothers – were more conscious and supportive of the behavioural situation and emotional needs of their children in the home environment compared to local mothers. A similar explanation can be considered for social competencies and problem behaviours, the two other areas where Syrian children showed higher progress as reported by their teachers.

6 SUCCESS CRITERIA IN IMPACT OF ECE SUMMER SCHOOLS

- **A multi-stakeholder implementation structure:** The multi-stakeholder implementation structure of ECE Summer Schools was effective in obtaining positive results. This structure facilitated the use of ready-made learning content, reaching out to families, building and maintaining trust with them, and cooperating with local institutions. Moreover, managing logistics and supporting relationships with relevant stakeholders played an important role in effectively managing the programme.

- **Working with bilingual teachers:** The profile of the teachers, who ensured the implementation of ECE Summer Schools and communication with children and families, was one of several factors that played an effective role on impact. Attention was given to selecting bilingual teachers in order to help children use both Turkish and their mother tongue during classes. Bilingual teachers who attended the training were selected based on their statements or language competence.

- **Teacher training and in-service support systems:** Teacher training provided in advance of the ECE Summer Schools programme constituted one of the key components affecting the research results. The teacher training was composed of theoretical and practical modules and lasted for 10 days in total. It played an important role in guaranteeing the quality of PEP. During the practical training that took place following the theoretical training, the teachers were assessed through feedback meetings held at the end of each day to support their development. Furthermore, the in-service support system provided by supervisors and field experts to teachers during the implementation was among one of several factors that effectively contributed to research results. This system, which enabled teachers to receive regular feedback on their performance, enabled the Summer Schools to be implemented to a high quality and in an effective manner. The tasks of the supervisors included visiting and monitoring the implementation centres, making observations and providing feedback in educational environments, and creating a programme for teachers to monitor and support their development. This system contributed to the teacher's PEP implementation skills, as well as professional development.

- **A bilingual and multicultural programme:** Another component contributing to the research results was the fact that PEP was implemented in a bilingual setting and the programme's content was sensitive to multiculturalism. To ensure a smooth transition for children to the Turkish educational system and to facilitate children's adaptation to the ECE Summer Schools, teachers translated the content into the mother tongue of the children as needed and the programme was conducted in the mother tongue at certain periods of time for the Syrian children. To help children adapt to the programme, attention was paid to ensuring that the programme activities contained elements from their own culture (songs, plays, etc.). In line with the method used for the language of instruction of the programme, translations from Turkish into the mother tongue of the children were gradually reduced from the first week to the last week of the course and the use of Turkish increased. This method facilitated children's adaptation to the class and their participation in programme activities while supporting their Turkish language skills.

- **Investment in learning environment:** Investment of partners in enhancing the standards of an inclusive, quality learning environment was crucial for achieving success in this programme, as well as reaching out to children of different abilities, nationalities and social backgrounds. This included the use of small class sizes (with around 20 students each), the provision of specialized ECE materials and furniture, recruitment and training of enough teachers, and monitoring the quality of instruction by trained provincial supervisors.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND POLICY MAKERS

In view of the achievements and the lessons learnt from the ECE Summer Schools experience, the following recommendations can play a key role in scaling up the quality practices in this field:

1) Support multi-stakeholder approvals for greater access and lower costs

- Partnering with non-governmental organizations and governmental agencies that have a good command of local dynamics and the necessary infrastructure can enable a positive difference in the short term.

2) Hire bilingual teachers qualified to work with at-risk children whose mother tongue is not Turkish

- Early intervention programmes – especially those designed for working with children exposed to a set of risk factors associated with unfavourable conditions – should be delivered by teachers with a degree in preschool teaching or child development.
- Bilingual teachers who are equally fluent in both languages should be recruited to makes sure that interventions are delivered in both languages.

3) Empower teachers through participatory theoretical and practical training to improve teaching quality

- Teachers should go through both theoretical and practical teacher training prior to implementation. Teacher training should be structured based on the understanding that each adult has a unique teaching style and, therefore, training should be designed to involve different teaching methods that would respond to each of them (role-play, games, Q & A, lecturing, small- and large-scale group work, etc.).
- Training content should include themes and examples aimed at raising awareness on matters such as child protection and gender issues, which are known to make a difference in ECE.
- Teachers should be fully engaged in the training and should be given the chance to actively participate in both theoretical and practical training components.
- The content of the teacher training should be expertise-centric such that teachers are encouraged to exchange their experiences throughout the training. In addition, a continuous learning environment should be promoted by allowing teachers to observe their colleagues' learning processes and to provide peer review.

4) Provide in-service support to teachers to enhance the quality of implementation

- In order for the teachers delivering ECE interventions to improve their expertise, the training programme should be effectively monitored, and interventions held with ongoing feedback. In addition, an in-service support system should be in place for teachers.
- A high-quality programme should include a team of field consultants with relevant expertise to provide guidance to the teachers and supervisors.
- Monitoring standards should be put in place with observation and supervision processes and forms to ensure standardized and clear instructions should be made available to both teachers and field consultants. These forms should be designed to measure not only the quality of the implementation delivered by teachers and how children have benefited from each of these activities, but also to assess programme content. Field consultants should be advised to strictly use these forms during their observation visits.

5) Implementing the structured programme as planned to ensure intended impact

- Teachers should strictly adhere to the daily schedule where subject matter, themes and time slots within the programme are listed in order to make sure that the intended gains of the intervention are being achieved by the children.
- The order of time slots within the daily schedule should be adhered to and leisure-time hours should also be provided to children to make own choices in free play.
- The schedule should include activities designed to support children's cognitive development and equip them with pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and knowledge, such as conceptual development, hand-eye coordination, and general aptitude, categorizing and sorting.
- Programmes should involve reading preparedness and activities to improve the children's ability to understand and use different linguistic structures of the Turkish language.
- Leisure time should accommodate activities where teachers do not act only as observers, but support children in expanding and improving their games.

6) Allocate time and resources to deliver a bilingual and multi-culturally responsive education when working with children whose mother tongue is not Turkish

- Programme content should let children bring along aspects of their respective cultures and engage in activities that embody cultural aspects of the host community they currently live in.
- The process of interpretation of the content into children's mother tongue, which would be particularly intensive throughout the early weeks, should be "early-childhood friendly" with word-for-word translations being avoided.
- In an effort to create a supportive environment where children can advance their Turkish language acquisition outside the classroom setting, mothers of Syrian children should be offered language education during the intervention period.

7) Ensure the logistics are well-managed

- The equipment and materials needed for the programme should be rapidly delivered to all classrooms through comprehensive logistic support prior to the start of the intervention.
- Auxiliary staff should be hired to support the practitioners in smoothly delivering the daily programme, coordinating the logistical procedures and providing the proper physical setting for learning.
- Two meals scheduled within the programme – breakfast and fruit time – should consist of nutrients recommended for the children's ages and meet their developmental needs. The organization of agencies and officials that would be in charge of supplying and delivering the meals, as well as personal hygiene materials, such as the children's toothbrushes, toothpastes, soaps and towels, should be clarified during the planning stage.

8) Deliver evidence-based training programmes to parents

- Validated mother-child programmes, as well as mother-support and father-support programmes, should be organized simultaneously with the interventions for children in order to achieve long-lasting gains and guarantee that the positive impacts of the programme are stronger and more permanent for both children and their parents.

- In order to achieve high turnout rates and active participation, programmes targeting parents should be valid interventions which are designed to address their specific needs and expectations.
- Where resources are available, support programmes for fathers should also be organized to encourage their participation and improve child development outcomes.
- Provide basic information and referral pathways for parents to access Turkish language services, healthcare and continuing education.

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