

Early education gives East Asian and the Pacific children a strong head start

October 7 2020



Children in the region will benefit from a more accessible pre-school education.
Credit: famveldman/123rf

Young children in East Asia and the Pacific who attend preschool show better cognitive, language and socio-emotional development than those

who don't, according to a study published in Early Childhood Research Quarterly.

The study's findings highlight the importance of making [early childhood education](#) more accessible in the region.

Dr Jin Sun, Associate Head and Assistant Professor at the Department of Early Childhood Education of The Education University of Hong Kong, and colleagues at The University of Hong Kong, Stanford University School of Medicine in the US, and Telethon Kids Institute in Australia analyzed data from 4,712 ethnic majority 3-to-5-year-olds in Cambodia, China, Mongolia and Vanuatu. The researchers examined the effects of participation, intensity (hours per week), duration (months attended), and total dosage (total hours attended) of early childhood education on children's cognitive, language and socio-[emotional development](#).

Cognitive development was measured by a child's ability to count, add and subtract, know shapes, and in terms of their short-term memory and behavioral inhibition. Language was measured by children's abilities to express themselves, write and draw. Socio-emotional development was measured according to a child's social comprehension, etiquette and ability to recognize emotions.

The researchers found that participation in early childhood education, such as kindergarten, pre-primary classes or community preschool, was positively associated with all three types of childhood development. Attending early childhood education for longer hours per week was associated with higher scores in all developmental domains in children in Mongolia; higher language scores in Cambodia; and lower socio-emotional scores in Cambodia and China. A higher total dosage of early education was associated with better cognitive and socio-emotional scores in China and better language scores in Mongolia.

"Our results indicate that early childhood education is beneficial for

children's early development, but many children in the region are unable to reap these rewards due to barriers to access," says Sun. "More efforts are needed in East Asia and the Pacific to ensure all children have access to a quality early education."

Similar studies have been conducted in typically high-income countries, where only 18% of children are born. The researchers wanted to develop a better understanding of the impacts of early childhood education in East Asia and the Pacific. According to UNESCO figures, only two-thirds of children received pre-primary education in the region in 2012.

The scientists recommend that further studies be conducted to assess the content and quality of early [childhood education](#) in the region.

More information: Nirmala Rao et al. Early childhood education and child development in four countries in East Asia and the Pacific, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.08.011](#)

Provided by ResearchSEA

Citation: Early education gives East Asian and the Pacific children a strong head start (2020, October 7) retrieved 11 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-early-east-asian-pacific-children.html>

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