



Early Development and Learning in **Mongolia**

Background

Mongolia's population of 2.8 million occupies an area of about 1.56 million square kilometres. About 95% of the population is of Mongol ethnicity and 90% speak the official language, Khalkha Mongol. Children under the age of 15 constitute 26.9% of the population, and Mongolia has an infant mortality rate of 31 out of 1000 (UNESCO, 2014). About 30% of the population is nomadic; this has implications on the provision of Early Childhood Development (ECD) services.

In 2011, the gross enrolment ratio for early childhood education was 82% (UNESCO, 2014). Participation in ECD services across the country is uneven, with the highest rates found in major cities. Children from nomadic families account for only 15% of the total enrolment. Alternative early childhood services (teaching by mobile teachers, short-term pre-school summer courses and home training) are available to some, but the quality of such programmes is reported to often be poor and of short duration. Moreover, there is a lack of curriculum guidance for these alternative services, and systematic training of teachers has been weak (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2011). Such disparities have resulted in unequal development opportunities for young children, and have a consequential impact on basic educational attainment at later stages (UNESCO, 2008).

Objectives

Mongolia was one of six countries that participated in the East Asia-Pacific Early Child Development Scales (EAP-ECDS) project, supported by UNICEF- East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), the Open Society Foundations, and the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC).

The main objective of this project was to equip stakeholders across East Asia and the Pacific with a common measurement tool to assess the holistic developmental progress of children ranging in age from three to five years. It was felt that stakeholders in Mongolia including governments, universities, research institutions and donor partners would be able to utilise the data garnered from this project to promote early development and learning and prevent the loss of human potential by investing in the early years.

Methodology

As part of this project, direct assessments of the holistic development and learning of 3- to 5-year-old children residing in urban and rural settings were carried out in 2013. Children were administered the EAP-ECDS. The items on these Scales were developed based on the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) from countries in the East Asia and Pacific Region (including Mongolia) through an iterative process. The EAP-ECDS includes seven domains and 85 items. Caregivers were also interviewed in individual sessions to obtain: (i) standard demographic data; (ii) reports on the child's early learning and development; and (iii) information about the child's health and habits.



Conclusions

- The EAP-ECDS are valid and reliable measures of developmental functioning in Mongolia. Older children performed better than younger children in all domains of the Scales.
- Participation in early childhood programmes had a significant positive effect on the EAP-ECDS. Children who attended such programmes scored about 6.5 percentage points higher than other children.
- Early childhood education in rural areas should be enhanced to improve the performance of children in rural areas.
- Caregivers should be provided education and support to encourage them to be more involved in the early development of their wards.
- Steps should be taken to address gender differences in early learning and development.

Sample

Age	Rural		Urban		Total
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	
3Y	103	102	104	105	414
4Y	104	105	104	105	418
5Y	104	104	105	102	415
Total	311	311	313	312	1247

The ideal sample size was determined to be 1,200, and children were drawn from five provinces (Dundgovi, Khentii, Khovd, Khuvsgul, and Ulaanbaatar) and 14 districts (Bayanzurkh, Binder, Darvi, Erdenedalai, Erdenetsagaan, Jargalant, Kherlen, Kherlen sum, Murun, Saintsagaan, Sukhbaatar, Takhilgat, Tarialan, and Undurkhssn).

Tests confirmed that the EAP-ECDS as a whole, and the different sub-scales (domains) were valid and reliable measures of the early development and learning of children from Mongolia. Comparisons of average scores on each domain were made across age, sex, and urban/rural settings. Further, the relationship between findings from direct assessments of children and parent reports were also examined.

Early Child Development

Older children performed better than younger children in all domains of the EAP-ECDS. This finding is not unexpected as the EAP-ECDS is a developmental scale with adequate validity and reliability.

Cognitive Development

- Although the performance of all children increased with age, girls tended to make more gains than boys with increasing age, but these differences were not statistically significant in the three age groups.
- 5-year-old urban children performed significantly better than the 5-year-olds from rural areas. Urban–rural differences were not significant for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Socio-emotional Development

- Girls showed significantly better performance than boys.
- While there were no significant differences between urban and rural 3- and 4-year-olds, urban 5-year-olds once again did significantly better than their rural peers.

Motor Development

- Unlike in the other domains, children from rural areas did significantly better than urban children.

Language and Emergent Literacy

- Girls showed significantly better performance than boys.
- Children from urban areas did significantly better than rural children.

Health, Hygiene, and Safety

- Girls showed significantly better performance than boys.
- Children from urban areas did significantly better than rural children.

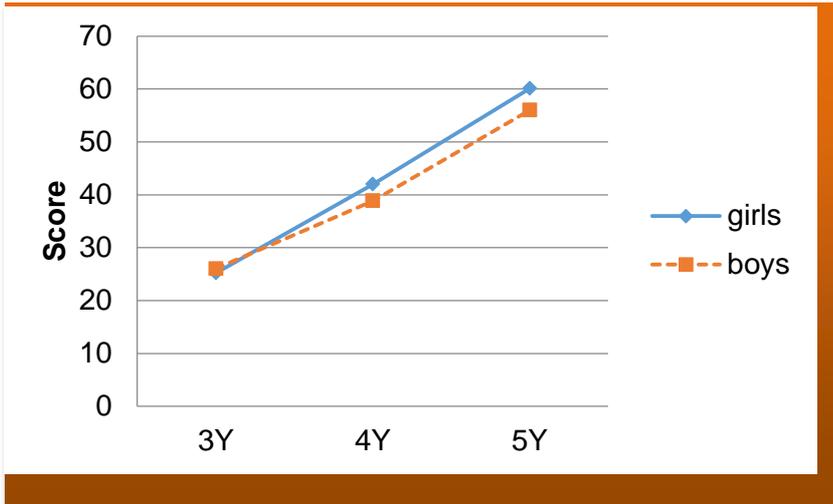
Cultural Knowledge and Participation

- Girls showed significantly better performance than boys.
- While no significant urbanicity effects were found among the 3- and 4-year-olds, the 5-year-old urban children did significantly better than those from rural areas.

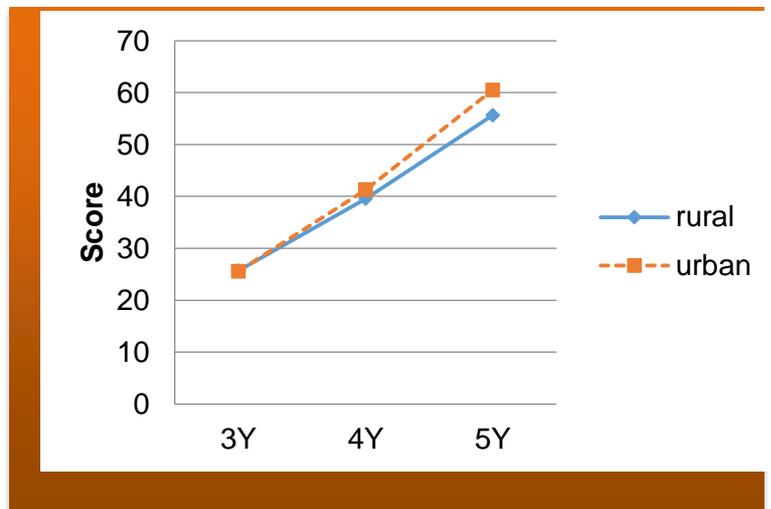
Approaches to Learning

- The gender differences were not significant for 3 and 4-year-olds. However, 5-year-old girls showed significantly better performance than 5-year-old boys.
- Children from urban areas did significantly better than rural children.

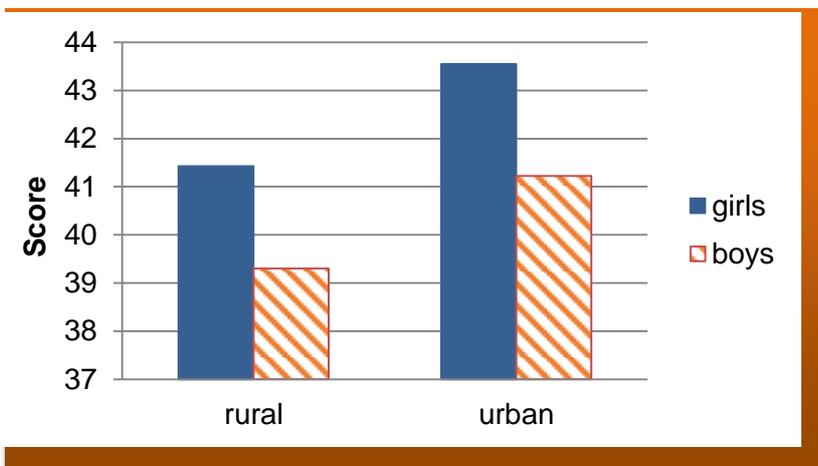
Age and Gender differences in Cognitive Development (Mongolia)



Age differences in Cognitive Development in children living in rural and urban areas (Mongolia)



Gender differences in Cognitive Development in children living in rural and urban areas (Mongolia)



Early Learning and Development

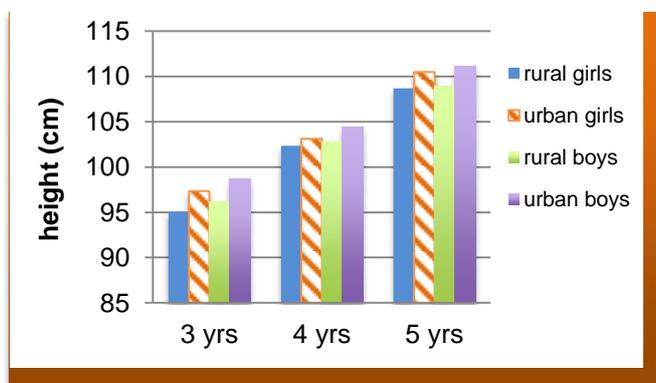
- About half of the participating children attended early education programmes. While the gross enrolment ratio for pre-primary education (3 to 5 years) was 82% in 2011, there are disparities within the country with relatively low coverage rates amongst the nomadic population. The children who were older or of better-educated parents were more likely to be enrolled in an early learning programme than other children. Unexpectedly, we found that children in the rural areas were more likely to be enrolled in an early learning programme than those in the urban areas. We think that this may be related to the sampling strategy deployed, which tried to get an equal number of children attending and not attending early childhood programmes, and may not reflect reality. Hence, this finding should be interpreted with caution.
- Almost all the children who attended an early childhood programme went to kindergartens and spent 20 to 40 hours a week in the kindergarten.
- Urban, better-educated parents thought that their children were more competent in basic literacy and numeracy skills than other children. This is consistent with findings from the EAP-ECDS.
- Mongolian parents reported having limited involvement in early learning-related activities at home. However, mothers were more involved in early learning activities than other family members, and urban educated parents were more likely to support early learning at home than other parents.

Health and Hygiene

- In terms of health, almost all children had had their vaccinations.
- The child's age was the best predictor of health facilitation practices.
- Urban parents were more likely to report that their children had health problems. It is not clear whether urban children suffer poorer health or whether urban parents are more aware of children's health issues and are more likely to report health concerns.

Height and Weight

Age and Gender differences in Height in rural and urban areas (Mongolia)



Age and Gender differences in Weight in rural and urban areas (Mongolia)

