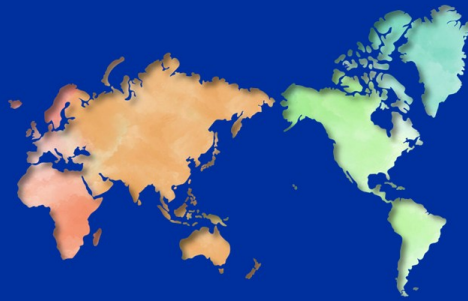


School Readiness Matters

International Perspectives



Edited by:

Matthew Northall, Kerrie Lee and Viki Veale

©2026 Matthew Northall, Kerrie Lee and Viki Veale. All rights reserved.

School Readiness Matters: International Perspectives

First published in 2026 by Lulu

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the editors except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

For permissions and enquiries, please contact: srmip.contact@gmail.com

ISBN 978-1-291-61172-4

Contributing Chapter Editors/ Authors

Chapter 1—Africa



Chapter Editor/Author: Jamal Badaoui
International school leader with experience across the UK, Asia and Africa



Chapter Author: Stuart Busby
Educational consultant and partnership consultant with schools in E. Africa



Chapter Author: Matthew Northall
Senior lecturer—Nottingham Trent University.

Chapter 4—Europe



Chapter Editor/Author: Kristina Robb
Scottish early years leader, educator and workforce specialist.



Chapter Author: Mary Moloney
Associate Professor—Mary Immaculate College Ireland



Chapter Author: Angela Scollan
Associate Professor—Middlesex University



Chapter Author: Lourdes Kerr
Course Leader Early Childhood Studies - Middlesex University

Chapter 2—Asia



Chapter Editor/Author: Charlotte Randis
Teacher/Headteacher with experience in several international schools.



Chapter Author: Louise Heard
Early years international leader with 15-years experience across the UK, Europe and Asia.



Chapter Author: Dr Suhasini Kanwar
Dr Suhasini Kanwar is an early childhood specialist with experience in curriculum, quality, and professional development.



Chapter Author: Karen Dolan
Karen is an early years teacher leader with 30 years experience across Europe and Asia.

Chapter 5—Oceania



Chapter Editor/Author: Dr Hazel Woodhouse
Thirty-year teaching experience in the UK and New Zealand.



Chapter Editor/Author: Dr Kathryn Murray
Founder—Future Strong Education Consultancy - Australia



Chapter Author: Fran Myers-Baird
Early childhood advisor advocating for evidence-informed programs across birth-to-eight.

Chapter 3— The Americas



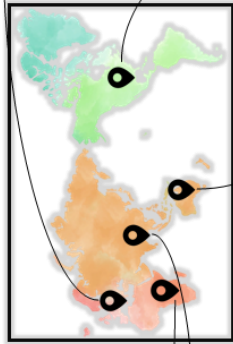
Chapter Editor/Author: Jennifer Partington
Over the last 12 years, Jennifer has worked in a multitude of international schools



Chapter Author: Taylor Williams
International teacher with experience across three continents.



Chapter Author: Kristy Howells
Professor—Canterbury Christchurch University



Contents

Welcome from the Editors	7
Introducing School Readiness Matters: International Perspectives	8
References	18
Africa	21
Introduction: Navigating the Multiplicity of School Readiness in Africa	21
The Landscape of ECCE in Africa: Diversity and Disparity	24
School Starting Age and Educational Contexts Across Africa	28
Perceptions of ‘Readiness’ and Parental Expectations	31
Beginning Well: African Led Strategies for Supporting Young Children’s Transition into School.....	32
Rethinking Transition: From ‘Readiness’ to Continuity.....	33
Play as Pedagogy	35
Case Study: Community Led Preparation for School in Tanga, Tanzania	39
Case Study - Healthy Planet School, India.....	51
Conclusion	41
References	42
Asia	46
Introduction.....	46
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Asia	47
Case Study - Thai Local School	59
Starting School.....	53
Transition	57
Case Study: USA Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten transition experience 1998 – 1999.....	85
Case study: Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) A parent’s perspective.	89
Lessons from Asia.....	62

References.....	64
The Americas	72
Introduction.....	72
Early childhood education within The Americas.....	75
School starting age and practice.....	80
Transition and Case studies.....	85
CASE STUDY: England, UK.....	114
Conclusion	91
References.....	93
Europe	97
Introduction.....	97
Northern Europe	101
Western Europe	103
Southern Europe.....	104
Eastern Europe	105
School Starting age and what school looks like.....	106
Transitions into school	111
Conclusion	117
References.....	119
Oceania	124
Introduction.....	124
Australia.....	125
New Zealand	126
Exploration of Early Childhood Care and Education within Oceania	127
Australia.....	127
New Zealand	129
Starting School	132
Australia.....	132

New Zealand.....	135
Considering brain development and transition	136
Exploring transition: Examples from Oceania.....	138
Conclusion	145
Glossary.....	147
References:	148
Conclusion: Bridging the Divide – A Critical Evaluation of Global School Readiness and Transitions	153
Reframing Readiness: Moving Beyond a Discourse of Cognitive Skill Sets	154
A Paradox of Quality Access.....	155
Continuity and Pedagogy: The Challenge of Play	157
Success Factors for Future Practice	158
Closing Remarks.....	159
Reference List.....	161
References.....	162

Welcome from the Editors

New shoes, new bag, new clothes and a new adventure!

‘School Readiness Matters: Embedded and Threaded Transitions’ (Lee and Veale, 2025) challenged the concept of ‘school readiness’ suggesting it is as much about schools being ready to meet the needs of the children joining them as it is about children’s ‘readiness’ for school.

While writing the previous text, conversations began around how ‘school readiness’ is understood and transition is supported globally. When asked by readers to consider a book focused on international perspectives, together with Matt Northall (who was instrumental in the publication of the previous text), we were ready to answer the call!

This new text offers insights into practice, policy and pedagogy around ‘school readiness’ and transition. It explores these themes from a range of culturally and contextually specific perspectives. In doing so, it challenges assumptions about what, for many children, will be one of the biggest and most significant transitions in their young lives. We hope this text invites readers to reflect on ‘school readiness’ and consider transition practices within their own contexts.

Kerrie, Matt and Viki

Introducing School Readiness Matters: International Perspectives

Kerrie Lee, Matthew Northall and Viki Veale

Every year around the globe, a new cohort of children start their school journey. In different countries, this journey begins at different ages and is directed by different policies, procedures and cultural norms. In this text, we explore how ‘school readiness’ is defined across the globe and how children are supported in making the transition to school.

Readiness

In ‘School Readiness Matters: Embedded and Threaded Transitions’ (Lee and Veale, 2025), we explored how ‘readiness’ is defined. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) offers four principles that guided our thinking on this topic (see page 9).

Our conclusion was that as the experiences children have had before they start school will vary (McLeod and Anderson, 2019), ‘readiness’ is as much about schools being ready for children as it is about children being ready for schools (Lee and Veale, 2025). Beyond this, it is also about families being ready for the adventure that lies ahead.



UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Key Articles

1) Article 2: Right to Fair Treatment

All children have the right to be treated fairly



No discrimination based on gender, ability or background.



Ensuring Equal Opportunity for all



Building a just and equitable society for every child

2) Article 3: Best Interests of the Child

The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration in matters that affect them



Evaluation based on the best interests of the child.



Prioritising child welfare over economic or political goals



A proactive approach to welfare

3) Article 6: Ensuring Full Potential

Govern. Must do all they can to ensure children reach their phys., emot. And educ. potential



Investment in healthcare, nutrition and safe environment



Providing quality education and emotional support systems.



Creating opportunities for every child to grow and succeed

4) Article 12: Viewpoint of the Child

The view of children must be considered in matters that affect them



Listening to child Perspectives and creating safe spaces.

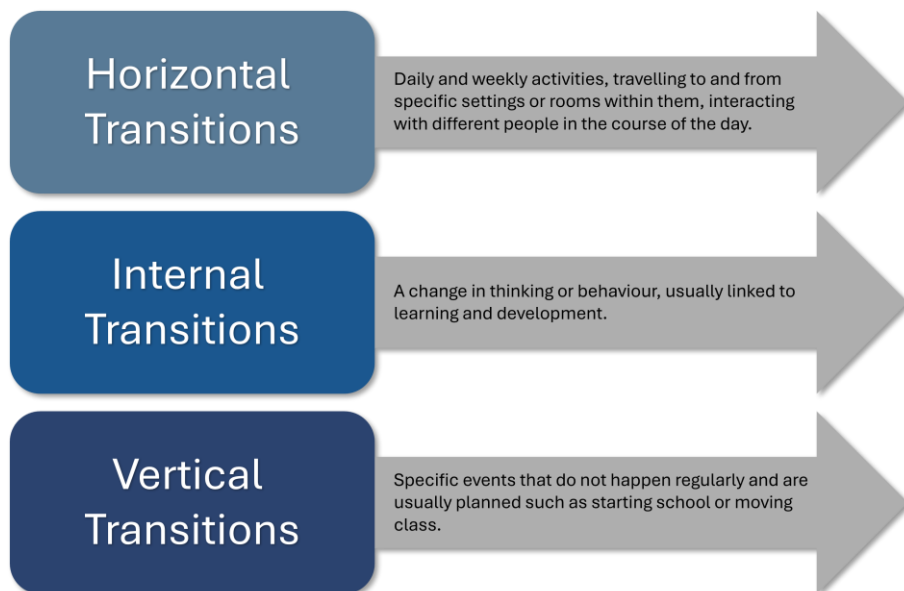


Actively involving children in decisions that directly affect them.



Empowering child voices and fostering civic Engagement.

Starting school is a big adventure, but it is also a big transition. As part of their everyday activities, children experience numerous transitions. These transitions fall into three broad categories:



(Lee and Veale, 2025)

The transition to school involves changes in thinking and behaviour (internal transitions), in daily activities (horizontal transitions) and a vertical transition to a new setting. This shift from early childhood education and care (ECE) to school often marks a cultural shift in expectations as well as a physical change in environment that necessitates the formation of new relationships (OECD, 2017).

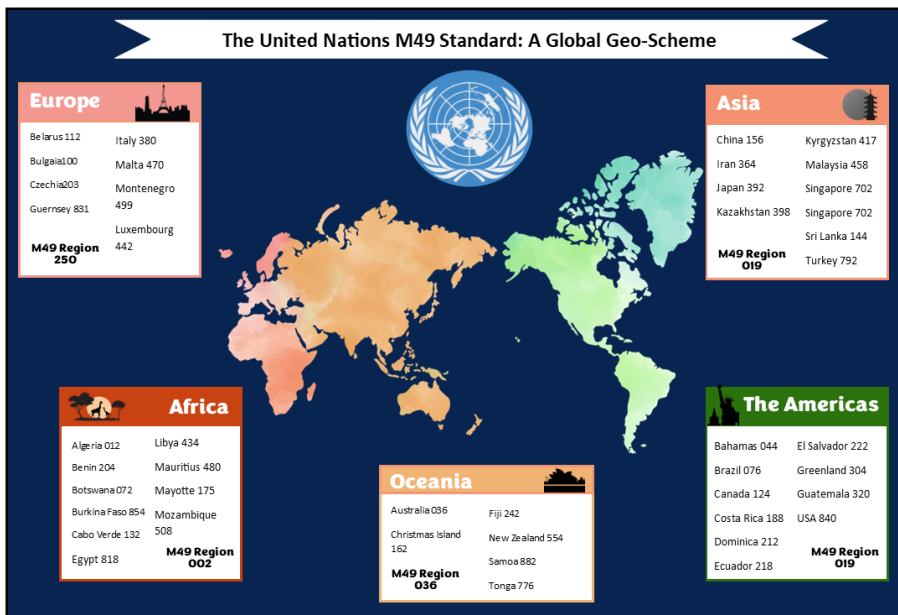
Simply put, when children start school, their world expands. As they move through their educational journey, they ideally begin to develop a sense of themselves as part of a bigger global community.

Geo-schemes

After the publication of ‘School Readiness Matters – Embedded and Threaded Transitions’ (Lee and Veale, 2025) we were contacted by colleagues from other countries asking us to extend the conversation about ‘school readiness’ to encapsulate the global context.

The world itself is a very big place with diverse people, political structures and practices. The prospect of exploring ‘school readiness’ across the globe was rather daunting. In preparing for this publication, we considered various ways of structuring the text to prevent this task from becoming overwhelming.

Since 1970, the United Nations Statistics Division has used a code known as the M49 Standard to group countries or areas for statistical purposes (UNSD, 2026). The M49 Standard provides a way of grouping 249 countries into five large geographical regions or geo-schemes: Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania.



While practice within each geo-scheme will vary depending on cultural norms and political affiliations, the UN geo-schemes are widely used as an organising structure when exploring international data and seemed a wise way to structure this text.

Concepts and Contexts

In School Readiness Matters- Embedded and Threaded Transitions (Lee and Veale, 2025) we brought together families, educators and

academics to reflect on what ‘readiness’ looks like and how we support transitions in England. In doing so, we unpacked terms and redefined ‘school readiness’ as a process of ensuring that not only are children ready for school, but schools are ready for children. In this text we have grappled with the complexities not only of how readiness and transition are perceived in different countries but also with the terminology used to describe them.

In the previous publication we asked ourselves the following questions:

‘What do we call ourselves? Do we have an umbrella term? If we work with children in Reception classes, are we all classed as a ‘school’? Likewise, if we work with children preparing for Reception are we classed as Early Years settings, pre-schools or edu-care settings?’

(Lee and Veale, 2025, p. 8)

Across the five geo-schemes, 194 states have signed The Paris Agreement (UNESCO, 2015), committing to implement all 17 Sustainability Development Goals (SDG’s) by 2030. The Three Pillars of Sustainability (environmental, economic and social) identified by WCED (1987) are designed to ensure that present needs are met without compromising future generations.

To enable children to become lifelong learners with the knowledge and skills required to promote sustainable development, SDG 4 states that all children should have access to high quality early care and education and primary education (UNESCO, 2015). This goal acknowledges that children have different starting points and is seen as supporting all children, regardless of their socio-economic background in getting the best possible start in life.

While this text does not focus on sustainability in relation to the environment, it supports SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2015) by proposing that we must constantly reflect on our practices around transition between ECCE and school. In doing so, we can work towards ensuring that starting school is a positive experience for all children.

Learning together

In compiling this text, we were mindful of the risk of falling into the trap of behavioural universalism. We have deliberately chosen to explore practice across the globe with an open mind, rather than making Eurocentric comparisons. In doing so, we have aimed to explore transitions with an appreciation of cultural relativism (Penn, 2008), beginning with an understanding that children's lived experiences of

attachment and educational structures are culturally and contextually located. Rather than making ethnocentric judgements about what 'best practice' looks like by imposing our own customs, cultures and values (Marshall, 2019), what we offer here is simply a number of stories about what practice around transition looks like in different geo-schemes and how 'readiness' is understood in each of these contexts.

As authors, our thinking in this text has been guided by Brookfield's (1995) reflective model. As Brookfield (2017, p1) points out "every good teacher wants to change the world for the better". Although Brookfield's (2017) work focuses on teaching in higher education, by thinking about our practice through each of Brookfield's (2017) lenses (personal experience, lived experiences of our students, perspectives of colleagues, and theory and research) we can begin to challenge the assumptions we have about practice and work towards improving our children's worlds.

Brookfield's model (1995, 2017), highlighted the limitations of our personal experiences and led us to reach out across the academic and professional community to invite contributions from authors across the globe. Drawing on their professional experiences, these authors have not attempted to discuss every country in each geo-scheme, but to

share insights and case studies offering snapshots of how practice varies in different contexts.

Using Brookfield's model, we are able to reflect on what we do from 'unfamiliar angles' (2017, p61). While comparison is inevitable, we urge readers to engage with Brookfield's (2017) work themselves and, to use his lenses to reflect on what lessons they can learn from colleagues across the globe.

In **chapter 1**, Jamal Badaoui, Stuart Busby and Matthew Northall explore how the philosophy of Ubuntu shapes discourse around 'school readiness', but structural issues around funding continue to prevent the realisation of bold ambitions to end disparity in provision in many countries.

Charlotte Rands, Dr Suhasini Kanwar, Karen Dolan and Louise Heard explore practice across Asia in **chapter 2**. Exploring cultural perceptions of play and learning, they highlight a tension that is almost universally experienced at the point of transition to full time school and how it is negotiated in this context.

In **chapter 3**, Jennifer Partington, Taylor Williams and Kristy Howells take us to The Americas. The complex political and economic structure

of this region also leads to variation in practice and a stark socio-economic divide.

In **chapter 4**, Kristina Robb, Mary Moloney, Angela Scollan and Lourdes Kerr lead us in exploring Europe. Here too, experiences of ECCE vary as do accountability frameworks and both cultural and political constructs of ‘school readiness’.

Our journey ends in **chapter 5**, Oceania, where Hazel Woodhouse, Kathryn Murray, and Fran Myers-Baird offer an in-depth comparison of practice in New Zealand and Australia, highlighting shared priorities and key differences.



References

Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. Jossey-Bass Inc., San Francisco

Brookfield, S. (2017) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Lee, K. and Veale, V. (2025) *School Readiness Matters: Embedded and Threaded Transitions*. Available at: <https://www.tactyc.org.uk/school-readiness-matters>

Marshall, J. (2019) *Introduction to comparative and International Education (2nd ed)* SAGE: London

McLeod, N. and Anderson, B. (2019) 'Towards an understanding of "school" readiness: collective interpretations and priorities', *Educational Action Research*, 28(5), pp. 817–832.

OECD. (2017) *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>.

Penn, H. (2008) *Understanding Early Childhood: Issues and Controversies* (2nd ed). Maidenhead: Open University Press

United Nations. (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations.

UNESCO. (2015) Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981>

UNESCO (2017) Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444.locale=en>

UNESCO. (2025) What you need to know about early childhood care and education. [Online]. Available from: [Early childhood care and education: what you need to know | UNESCO](#)

UNESCO. (2022) Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood. [Online]. Available from: [Global Partnership Strategy for early childhood, 2021-2030 - UNESCO Digital Library](#)

UNSD (1999) Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistics Use, 1999 (Revision 4). UNSD: New York

UNSD. (2026) Methodology: Standard country or area codes for statistical use (M49). Available at:

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>

WCED. (1987). *Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development*. UK: Oxford University Press

Africa

Jamal Badaoui, Stuart Busby and Matthew Northall



Introduction: Navigating the Multiplicity of School Readiness in Africa

The concept of 'school readiness' is often presented as a universal milestone, yet when viewed through the lens of the African continent, is revealed to be a deeply complex, multifaceted construct. Comprising 54 sovereign nations and thousands of ethnic groups, Africa defies reductive generalisations. Understanding 'school readiness' in this context requires an appreciation of the vast cultural, ideological and political diversity of the second largest continent on Earth. From the Cape in South Africa to Magrheb in Northern Africa – definitions of a 'ready child' are subject to persistent renegotiation between

indigenous epistemologies, colonial legacies and contemporary, global educational standards.

Historically, 'school readiness' research has been dominated by Eurocentric frameworks focusing on individual cognitive performance. However, contemporary scholarship across Africa argues for a more "interactionist" and "ecological" approach (Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos, 2017; Cekiso, 2026). This perspective shifts the focus from a child's isolated cognitive competency towards their functional abilities within a classroom, a family and within their community. In many Sub-Saharan contexts, 'readiness' is inextricably linked to moral character and social responsibility – concepts often conveyed through the philosophy of Ubuntu (Mligo, 2025). In the context of many of the sovereign states of Africa, the 'ready child' is one who shows respect for communal hierarchies and demonstrates social competencies (factors prioritised over pre-literacy and mathematics benchmarks).



Economic and political disparities across the Africa geo-scheme further complicates comparisons. The State of Education in Africa Report (UNESCO, 2026) demonstrates stark

'readiness gaps' driven by socioeconomic status and urbanisation. In

regions of Western and Central Africa, UNICEF supported assessments demonstrate that whilst pre-primary enrolment is increasing, nearly 30% of children remain excluded from formal early childhood learning due to poverty or conflict. South Africa, on the other hand, has demonstrated significant progress in institutionalising Early Childhood care and education, but faces significant ‘transition gaps’ where children are seen as being ‘ready for school’ but schools are not yet ready for them due to overcrowding and language-of-instruction barriers (UNESCO, 2025).

Ideological shifts continue to shape education in the Africa geo-scheme. There is a growing interest and movement towards a ‘decolonisation’ of the curriculum, moving away from ‘schooling’ as a colonial educational export towards ‘education’ as a tool for local empowerment. This includes the integration of indigenous languages in the early years, considered by many to be the single most effective predictor of long-term academic success in the region (Cekiso, 2024; Naketsana, 2019; Whollebe and Ross, 2026). In summary, the concept of ‘school readiness’ in Africa is a kaleidoscope of competing priorities.

The Landscape of ECCE in Africa: Diversity and Disparity

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Africa is characterised by a ‘policy practice gap,’ where highly ambitious national strategies



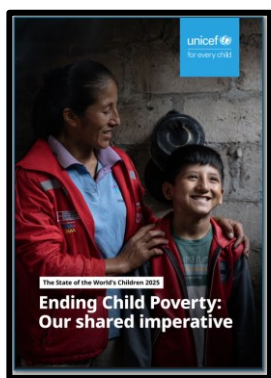
frequently outpace the human resources and finances available for implementation. The UNESCO Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education (2024) highlights that there have been notable increases in the adoption of statutory frameworks for free, pre-primary education. However, it also notes that only 20% of children in low-income African countries are enrolled in formal pre-primary education.

Economic Models and Funding

Within the African geo-scheme, the largest hurdle to ECCE expansion is funding. The Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2026)

suggests that while The African Union's Continental Education Strategy Budget (CESA 2016 - 2025) encourages member states to dedicate at least 10% of their educational budget to pre-primary education, the reality is more serious. According to UNESCO (2024) on average, African nations allocate less than 2% of their total educational finances to ECCE, relying significantly on private sector and third-party actors.

Workforce Realities and Staff-to-Child Ratios



Contrary to the recommended international standard of 1:15 or 1:20, the UNICEF State of the World's Children (2025) report emphasizes that ratios in sub-Saharan Africa can frequently exceed 1:50 in state maintained pre-primary classrooms. In addition to this, workforce instability is compounded by a lack of specialised training with primary school teachers frequently redeployed to ECCE settings without the specialist training in ECCE pedagogy, leading to a 'top-down' primary curriculum rather than age-appropriate, play-based learning.

A Comparative Analysis of Three Competing Models

To understand the complexity of the African geo-scheme, it is necessary to compare how different nations within it have operationalised readiness through different pedagogical filters and funding patterns.



Table 1 – Methods of operationalising School Readiness in parts of Africa

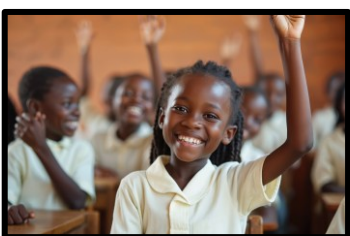
	Tanzania (Eastern Africa): Linguistic Vanguard	South Africa (Southern Africa): The Institutionalised Model	Ghana (Western Africa): A Policy Leader
Background	Tanzania has pioneered a model of ECCE practice that prioritises linguistic readiness as a precursor to academic success. Through the Education Sector Development Plan (United Republic of Tanzania Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2025) the government mandates one year of ‘Standard No’ (pre-primary) for all children.	South Africa has the most highly institutionalised ECCE system within the Africa Geo-scheme. Moving oversight for education from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to ensure academic alignment.	Ghana is often considered a leader in Western Africa to be one of the first to include a two-year ECCE offer into the constitutional right to free basic education.
Key Features	The use of Kiswahili (the ‘language of the coastal people’) as the medium for instruction ensures children are cognitively and socially ‘ready’ within their own cultural context before transitioning to the English language heavy secondary curriculum.	The South African model continues to focus on ‘School Readiness Assessments’ that mirror global approaches. Yet Balton <i>et al.</i> (2019) argues that this frequently neglects the indigenous Ubuntu values that define social readiness within South African communities.	The ‘Whole-of-Child’ approach attempts to bridge the gap between nutrition, health and education, recognising that poor physical development is a significant barrier to ‘school readiness’ in the region.
Funding and Ratios	Education in Tanzania adopts a ‘Fee-Free Basic Education’ model. This though, has caused a significant influx of students without a corresponding increase to infrastructure. The official ECCE ratio target is 1:25 but contemporary research (Mligo, 2025) recognises actual ratios to be 1:60 or higher (particularly in rural regions).	South Africa utilises a formal ‘Grade R’ (Reception year) in primary schools and a ‘per-child’ subsidy model of community-based learning centres. Despite this, a ‘two-tier’ system exists: urban centres struggle with a ration of 1:40 and limited resources whilst private centres maintain ratios of 1:15 (van Rensburg, 2026).	Ghana introduced a ‘Right to Play’ initiative (2024 – 2026) which has been used to scale up play-based ECCE provision within the country. Funding for such a scale up has relied on external partnerships including the Global Partnership for Education. Ratios often hover around 1:35 in urban centres but increase significantly in the northern territories (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2024).

School Starting Age and Educational Contexts Across Africa

Contextualising ‘School Readiness’ Across a Diverse Continent

Across Africa, a child’s first experience of school can be shaped differently and is influenced by a broad range of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; O’Connor, 2018). When framing the early childhood education landscape across the continent, context is key, with a diverse array of national frameworks and policies, as well as cultural expectations and practices, shaping education provision.

Variation in School Starting Age



School starting ages in Africa vary, with age six being the most common entry point into formal primary education, used in over 60% of African nations, including Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ghana. This represents an effort across the continent to bring the formal starting age more in line with international development goals and policy directions (World Bank, 2023). However, many countries in

Southern and East Africa operate within a model of compulsory formal education from age seven.

Tanzania is one of these countries, with a starting age of seven in its national school system. In this East African nation, private providers constitute the primary provision for early childhood development, acting as a bridge between this stage and formal primary education (UNICEF, 2024). As in other countries in the region, pathways into formal primary education vary and depend on a range of factors, particularly across urban and rural contexts.

What School Looks Like: Diversity and Context

Throughout Africa, there is a broad range of provision, from state-funded and private schools that follow national and government-mandated curriculum frameworks to international school settings that offer internationally standardised curricula—although these programmes are often supplemented or adapted to fit local or cultural contexts. Differences can be observed in the experience and qualifications of teaching staff, pedagogy, and available resources, as well as in student–teacher ratios, which vary significantly across geographical and socioeconomic contexts, with some settings reaching 1:60, exceeding the regional average of 1:58 (UNESCO, 2024). These

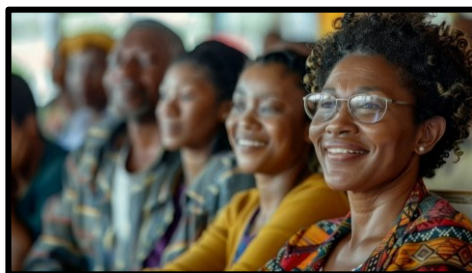
differences can shape children's experience of schooling in a range of ways, including their sense of belonging and identity. International schools across the continent are often diverse, reflecting a range of cultural backgrounds and operating as rich multicultural environments underpinned by strong regional representation.

However, within this landscape, there is considerable variation across settings. Priorities and approaches can differ, with parental aspirations and expectations leading to a strong emphasis on formalised, early academic attainment, perhaps through a more instructional lens, contrasting with more progressive, holistic models that point to contemporary research and evidence to inform a focus on broader developmental learning goals and milestones, emphasising learning alongside social-emotional growth. This raises considerations over how individual schools conceptualise 'school readiness' within their specific contexts, balancing academic expectations with broader, child-centred outcomes.



Perceptions of ‘Readiness’ and Parental Expectations

Perceptions of ‘school readiness’ can also be shaped by external factors, such as wider socioeconomic and cultural influences. In the



context of private and international school settings, expectations may be shaped by heightened parental demands for assured educational outcomes, particularly when children are perceived as academically advanced or gifted.

Through the lens of Appadurai’s (1996) work on globalised mediascapes, in which an individual builds their perceptions through mediated narratives and transnational discourses, parental expectations can be shaped through engagement with social and digital media platforms, particularly in an ever-increasing age of digital hyper-connectivity. Intensive parenting and greater social comparison, with a more competitive parenting landscape, driven by the rapidly increased accessibility of tailored information, inevitably shapes perceptions of early childhood learning goals (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020).

These perceptions can contend with evidence-based understandings of

early childhood learning. Research consistently demonstrates that growth in key developmental areas is a strong indicator of long-term success in school, especially in socio-emotional and self-regulatory milestones (Grimmer et al., 2021). This can create a conflict between externally perceived readiness and age-appropriate developmental readiness, raising important implications for practice, particularly in relation to dialogue, trust, and professional judgement.

Beginning Well: African Led Strategies for Supporting Young Children's Transition into School

Why the Start of School Matters

The transition into formal schooling is a major developmental milestone in early childhood. For children aged three to six, the move from home or early childhood development (ECD) settings into primary school involves significant changes in social and environmental shifts. Research consistently shows that early experiences of school entry have long-term implications for academic progress, emotional wellbeing, and engagement with learning (Margetts and Phatudi, 2013; Ndijuje, 2023).

Across Africa, where access to early childhood education has expanded rapidly, schools and communities have developed contextually grounded strategies to support young children during this transition. Shaped by cultural values, community structures, and resource constraints, these approaches reflect sophisticated understandings of child development and continuity.

Rethinking Transition: From ‘Readiness’ to Continuity

Traditionally, school transition policies have focused on ‘school readiness,’ defined as a set of cognitive or behavioural skills children must possess before entry. African scholars (Akkari, 2022) challenge individualistic ‘readiness’ models, framing transition instead as a relational process of continuity between ECD and primary environments (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017).

Evidence from Zimbabwe and South Africa suggests that challenges at school entry are more often linked to discontinuities between ECD and primary school environments than to children’s individual preparedness (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017;



Margetts and Phatudi, 2013). Consequently, African-led approaches emphasise continuity across curricula, pedagogy, language, and relationships. Transition is framed as a shared responsibility rather than an individual child deficit.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Alignment

Aligning pre-primary and Grade 1 curricula is widely recognised as critical for smooth transitions. Abrupt shifts from play-based learning to rigid, instruction-heavy classrooms are associated with increased stress and disengagement among young children (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017).

In South Africa, Margetts and Phatudi (2013) found that Grade 1 classrooms reflecting ECD practices—such as flexible seating, storytelling, and collaborative activities—supported stronger emotional adjustment and peer relationships. UNESCO’s regional analyses similarly identify curriculum alignment as central to promoting continuity across early learning systems in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2023).

Play as Pedagogy

Play-based pedagogy is a cornerstone of African transition strategies and recognised as a developmentally appropriate and culturally resonant mode of learning that supports adjustment to formal schooling. Many African approaches embed local games, songs, and storytelling, enabling children to experience schooling as continuous with familiar cultural practices (Spier et al., 2020). In Ghana, for example, Wolf and Peele (2020) showed that teacher training focused on play-based learning improved early primary learning outcomes. Similarly, a systematic review by Kalinde et al. (2022) found strong links between play-based approaches and children's social, emotional, and cognitive adjustment during school entry.



Families as Partners

African research consistently highlights families as central to successful school transitions, particularly where access to formal



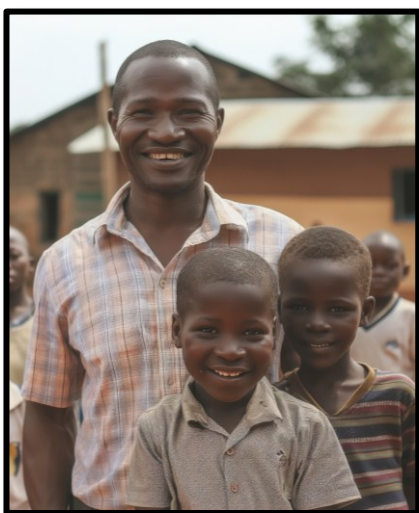
ECD provision is uneven. In Kenya, parental engagement has been shown to predict children's transition outcomes, especially in low-income settings (Gitahi et al., 2017). Similarly, Ndijuye (2023) found that in Tanzania, parental beliefs and expectations shaped children's preparedness for school, sometimes mitigating socioeconomic disadvantage. Common strategies include parent meetings, orientation sessions, open classroom visits, and guidance on home routines aligned with school practices (Margetts and Phatudi, 2013). These approaches frame transition as a partnership between families and schools.

Community-Embedded Approaches

Beyond families, African transition strategies often draw on broader community resources. UNICEF analyses from Eastern and Southern

Africa highlight the use of local languages, community elders, and culturally meaningful practices to position schooling as an extension of community life (Spier et al., 2020). Research by African Union and UNICEF (2025) concurs that community-run pre-primary centres, frequently supported by volunteers or local organisations, help familiarise children with group learning and school-like routines before enrolment, further supporting transition.

Teachers at the Centre



Teachers play a decisive role in shaping children's experiences of school entry. African studies identify teacher preparation as a critical factor influencing transition outcomes (Chikwiri and Musiyiwa, 2017; UNESCO, 2023).

Evidence from Ghana shows that professional development focused on early childhood pedagogy significantly improved outcomes for children entering school, even without wider system reform (Wolf and Peele, 2020). Conversely, limited training in early childhood

development constrains teachers' capacity to support children's social and emotional adjustment (Margetts and Phatudi, 2013).

From Practice to Policy

At policy level, African Union and UNESCO frameworks increasingly recognise transition as a distinct phase within early childhood education rather than a boundary between sectors (African Union and UNICEF, 2025). Moves towards compulsory pre-primary education and curriculum continuity in countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania reflect practice-based evidence. Together, these developments signal a shift from access-focused reform towards a stronger emphasis on quality, continuity, and child wellbeing at the start of school.

However, a stark policy-practice gap remains, consistent with that experienced in other geo-schemes. While the African Union call for a 10% education budget spend on pre-primary education, the regional average remains below 2% resulting in challenging adult to child ratios. Comparative analysis demonstrates diverse strategies to 'school readiness' agendas. South Africa offers a highly institutionalized but inequitable two-tier system; Tanzania prioritizes linguistic readiness via Kiswahili; and Ghana approaches it with the 'Whole-of-Child' and play-based constitutional rights.

Case Study: Community Led Preparation for School in Tanga, Tanzania

At an international school in East Africa, the parent of a prospective early years student requested that their child be placed in a year group beyond their age-appropriate cohort and begin schooling in Year 1. The justification for this request was centred around a perceived advanced academic ability across key areas, such as early literacy and numeracy. In response to the request, the school leadership arranged a meeting with the parent to explore the request in more depth, gain a better understanding of the child and their background, and provide insight into 'school readiness' and the school's approach to placement and progression.

The discussion was an opportunity for the school to share a broader, more nuanced perspective on enrolment and year-group placement. This went beyond perceived academic level to encompass social development, emotional security, independence, and the opportunity to build confidence within an age-appropriate peer group.

The leadership team acknowledged the child's strengths, to validate the parent's perspectives and aspirations, but emphasised that readiness is best understood as a holistic construct. The conversation also explored the concept of long-term development vs short-term acceleration and reframed the dialogue around the shared goal: what is best for the child.



Conclusion

The chapter challenges the Eurocentric, cognitive heavy frameworks of 'school readiness' in favour of ecological and interactionist models. It contends that constructs of readiness are not universal across the 54 nations and remain influenced by a complex interplay between colonial legacies, global standards and indigenous epistemologies such as Ubuntu.

When considering 'school readiness' within the Africa geo-scheme, the central theme of a shift from 'child-deficit' models to systemic continuity emerges. African led research highlights that successful transition requires an alignment of ECCE and primary curricula that fosters community-embedded partnerships and integrates local language. However, such progressive ideas face tensions from 'mediascapes' and parental demands for early academic formalisation particularly within private sectors. Ultimately, we contest that readiness **MUST** be reframed as a shared responsibility, advocating for a decolonised curriculum where schools become positioned as 'ready' for children as children are for schools. With an increasing focus on indigenous values and play-based pedagogy, nations within the African geo-scheme are redefining educational success as a tool for local empowerment rather than colonial replication.

References

African Union and UNICEF. (2025) *Early childhood education and school readiness in Africa*. UNESCO.

Akkari, A. (2022) *Early childhood education in Africa: Between overambitious global objectives, the need to reflect local interests, and educational choices*. Prospects, Vol. 52, Issue, 1–2, pp.7–19.

Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Balton, S., Uys, K. and Alant, E. (2019) Family-based activity settings of children in a low-income African context. *African Journal of Disability*, Vol. 8, pp. 1–14.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cekiso, M. (2026) Mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the foundation phase: A comparison of classroom reality with the South African language-in-education policy. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, Vol. 14, Issue, 1, pp. 1–11.

Chikwiri, E., and Musiyiwa, J. (2017) Challenges and gaps in children's transition from early childhood development to grade one in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue, 7, pp.91–102.

Gitahi, M. W., Kamau, M. J., Mwaura, W. W., and Thinguri, R. (2017) *Parental factors as determinants of children's transition readiness from pre-school to primary school in Kenya*. Mount Kenya University.

Grimmer, T., Bradbury, A., Wright, D. and Juering-Coles, M. (2021) 'Personal, Social and Emotional Development Matters', in *School Readiness Matters: Embedded and Threaded Transitions*. London: Early Education, pp. 53–73.

Kalinde, B., Mambwe, R., Sichula, N. K., and Kaluba, C. (2022) A systematic review of early childhood education and primary school readiness through play-based pedagogies. IDRC.

Livingstone, S. and Blum-Ross, A. (2020) *Parenting for a digital future: how hopes and fears about technology shape children's lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Margetts, K., and Phatudi, N. C. (2013) Transition of children from preschool and home contexts to Grade 1 in two South African schools. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol. 21, Issue, 2–3, pp.107–126.

Mligo, I. (2025) Challenges pre-primary teachers face in the implementation of the revised pre-primary education curriculum in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Research*, [online] available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394851509_Challenges_Primary_Teachers_Face_in_the_Implementation_of_the_Revised_Pre-Primary_Education_Curriculum_in_Tanzania

Ministry of Education (MoE) Ghana. (2024) *Education Sector Performance Report 2024: Addressing regional disparities in teacher allocation*. Accra: Ministry of Education.

Naketsana, S. (2019) The impact of teaching all subjects in mother tongue in the foundation phase. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, Vol. 8 Issue, 9, pp. 245–252.

Ndijuye, L. G. (2023) School readiness and pre-primary learning experiences of children in Tanzania. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, Vol. 31, Issue, 3, pp.454–469.

O'Connor, A., 2018. *Supporting Transitions in the Early Years*. London: Routledge.

Right To Play. (2024). *Global Strategic Plan 2024–2026: Protect, educate and empower*. Toronto: Right To Play International.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. and Sandilos, L. E. (2017) School transition and school readiness: An outcome of early childhood development. In: N. J. Cabrera and B. Leyendecker, eds. *Handbook on Positive Development of Minority Children and Youth*. Cham: Springer.

Spier, E., Oburu, P., and Yoshikawa, H. (2020) Quality and equitable access grounded in local knowledge: Bringing pre-primary education to scale. UNICEF.

UNESCO. (2024) *Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education: The right to a strong foundation*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

UNESCO. (2024) *Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: unesco.org.

UNESCO. (2026) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2026: Leadership in education: Metaphor or reality?* Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

UNESCO. (2026) *The State of Education in Africa Report 2026: Harnessing technology and foundational learning for sustainable growth*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

UNICEF. (2024) *Improving Education in Africa*. [Online]. UNICEF Innocenti. Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/10126/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Improving-Education-Africa-Brief-2024.pdf>

UNICEF. (2025) *The State of the World's Children 2025: Protecting childhood in a changing world*. New York: UNICEF.

United Republic of Tanzania Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (2025). *Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2025/26 – 2029/30: Toward quality foundational learning and skill development*. Dodoma: Government Printers.

van Rensburg, J. (2026) Contextualising school readiness in South Africa: Stakeholders' perspectives. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, Vol. 16, Issue, 1, pp. 12–28

Wohllebe, A. and Ross, J. (2026) Home-language dynamics and statistical modelling of language allocation in early childhood: Predicting long-term academic retention. *International Journal of Applied Research in Business and Management*, Vol. 11, Issue, 2, pp. 88–104.

Wolf, S., and Peele, M. (2020) Changing trajectories of learning and development: Experimental evidence from the Quality Preschool for Ghana interventions. *Journal of the British Academy*, Vol. 8 (Suppl. 2), pp. 71–102.

World Bank (2023) *Strengthening Basic Education System and Improving Education Quality in Tanzania*. [Online]. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099092523030514417/pdf/P1796070183df100c082d702966387de2ed.pdf>

Asia

Charlotte Rands, Louise Heard, Suhasini Kanwar and Karen Dolan



Introduction

As the largest and most populated continent in the world, hosting around 60% of the world's population (Worldometer, 2026), it is no wonder that Asia is also one of the most diverse continents. Within and across individual countries or the five subregions (Central, Eastern, Southern, South-Eastern, and Western Asia), there are vast disparities in terms of wealth, climate, economy, politics, populations, and culture. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2026) suggest Asia is 'more a geographic term than a continent,' arguing that using the term risks 'obscuring the enormous diversity' of the area.

Asia hosts both poor, predominantly rural countries dependent on farming, (e.g. Afghanistan), and wealthy, urbanised business hubs and tech leaders (e.g. Singapore). The largest population within Asia in India with 1.48 billion people (WorldBank, n.d.) and is almost three

thousand times larger than Brunei which is the smallest. Geographically diverse, Asia contains tropical islands, deserts, steppes and vast cities. The democracies of India, South Korea and Indonesia exist alongside highly authoritarian governance systems in North Korea, Turkmenistan and Syria. Asia also presents wide variations in urban safety with seven of the safest cities in the world and eight of the twenty least safest cities being present (CEOWorld magazine, 2025). Conversely Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Bhutan and Qatar are amongst the 30 most stable countries in the 2025 Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Asia

UNESCO (2025a:3) report that globally ECCE is ‘not a political priority for most countries’, and funding for ECCE in Asia through its percentage of overall education budgets, is ‘negligible in most regions’ (Kim and Umayahara, 2010:8). Conversely, the importance of funding ECCE is gaining recognition (Pearson, 2015; UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024). Recent data shows that Central/Southern Asia are joint highest for spending on pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP (UNICEF and UNESCO 2024). Countries such as Mongolia, Maldives, and Vietnam defy established patterns of allocating minimal education

expenditure to pre-primary (Kim and Umayahra, 2010), whilst others increased the share for ECCE by almost 70% (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024). Where government funding is insufficient, the shortfall is made up by private/for-profit providers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), foreign aid, faith-based organisations, or by private households covering the gap (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024; Kim and Umayahara, 2010). Some countries use more novel approaches, such as the excise tax on casinos funding ECCE centres in the Philippines (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024).

Access to and participation in ECCE across Asia has also historically been low, the World Bank (2012) described universal access in South Asia



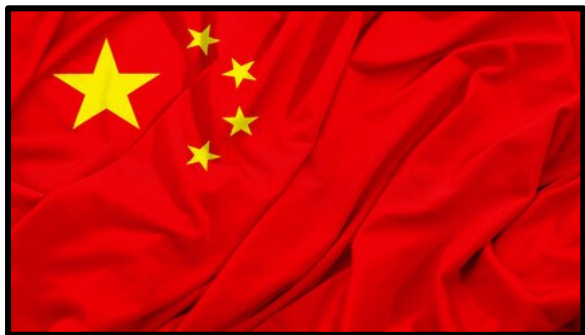
as a 'neglected area', UNICEF (nd) claims 24% of children across the region do not access ECCE and only 3% of under 3s in Western Asia (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024) have access. Whilst net enrolment has generally increased across Asia (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024), this is not uniform and can amplify disadvantages such as poverty, geographical isolation, gender disparity (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024; UNESCO, 2026; Kim and Umayahara, 2010). To add to these three of the ten countries most affected by conflict are in Asia (UNESCO 2026:16) which is seen

as being a significant barrier to ECCE participation (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024)

In remote communities, disadvantage can be magnified by issues such as higher rates of teacher absenteeism (Luschei and Zubaidah, 2012, cited in Barakat and Bengtsson, 2017:212), difficulties recruiting qualified teachers to remote areas (Rao and Sun, 2010), and a lack of early stimulation such as adequate supervision, living in homes with toys and books (Chen and Park 2021; UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024). Government policy and funding can successfully target inequality, e.g. in Lao, opening hundreds of kindergartens and encouraging community-based settings in impoverished districts saw increased in enrolment rates for 5-year-olds and, in Mongolia, mobile kindergartens to reach remote areas have been introduced (UNESCO, 2026:15).

Such rapid expansion of ECCE to meet global goals for universal access have raised concerns including risking further disadvantaging poor families and quality concerns arising without proper regulation (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024; UNESCO, 2026; Pearson, 2015). Lack of regulations, or ECCE-specific frameworks, might also contribute to a ‘downward extension of primary’ (Kim and Umayahara, 2010:7) approaches and inappropriate pedagogy for ECCE (Pearson, 2015; World Bank, 2012). The ratio of pupils to *qualified* primary teachers varies widely with it

being as low as 6:7 in Armenia and as high as 106:2 in Timor-Leste, (UNESCO 2025b:1066-1072).



Of course there are contrasts. Countries such as China and Singapore, have taken positive actions, including increasing funding for and

enrolment in ECCE, social protection programmes supporting poor families and professionalising the workforce with Singapore, ECCE provision being coordinated by a national body (UNESCO, 2023). Enrolment in pre-primary in Uzbekistan has grown from 38% to 82% since the government introduced legal frameworks and funding to improve access (UNESCO 2026).



Case Study - Healthy Planet School, India

India is home to around 158 million children aged 0–6 (Government of India, 2020b; World Bank, 2024), making it one of the largest early childhood populations globally. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) operate within a complex and diverse socio-political context (Government of India, 2022b), where ambitious national policies often contrast with varied local implementation. While frameworks promote joyful, play-based learning that nurtures curiosity and agency, many settings—particularly those with limited resources—still rely on structured, worksheet-driven approaches. In more resourced contexts, however, such materials may support inquiry or reflection, highlighting that pedagogical intent, rather than resources alone, shapes practice.

ECCE in India has developed into a more structured system balancing care and education, supported by programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (Government of India, 1975). A policy shift in 2013 moved the focus from access to quality, although ECCE has often remained positioned as preparation for formal schooling (Baradha, n.d.; Arabandi, 2024).

More recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) (Government of India, 2020) has reinforced commitment to ECCE by extending it to ages 0–8 and introducing a ‘Foundational Stage’ centred on holistic, play-based learning (Government of India, 2020b; 2022a).

Provision includes a mix of state, community, and private funding, though limited public investment constrains quality improvements (Azim Premji Foundation, 2019). Within this landscape, settings such as Healthy Planet School in Noida demonstrate innovative practice.

Healthy Planet reframes early education as a community-based, intergenerational experience, involving families as co-educators. With a low pupil–teacher ratio of around 6:1, children engage in play-based, child-led activities including storytelling, shared meals, and collaborative inquiry. Intergenerational learning supports children’s transitions into school, with research suggesting 20–30% of children experience distress during this

Intergenerational learning supports children's transitions into school, with research suggesting 20–30% of children experience distress during this period (OECD, 2017).

Starting School

Early childhood provision across Asia typically spans ages 3 – 5 years old, theoretically forming a bridge into formal schooling. Yet what it means to be “ready” for school is shaped by a rich diversity of cultural values, educational approaches and lived experiences (Rogoff, 2003; UNICEF, 2012). The uneven access to ECCE provision shaped by geography, socioeconomic context and policy implementation discussed earlier, and the range of settings, from play-based to more formal, academically oriented provision (Rao et al., 2021), mean children arrive at school having experienced different pathways into learning (Rao and Sun 2010; World Bank, 2018). The transition into school is therefore not a simple or uniform step and ‘school readiness’ is best understood not as a fixed set of skills but as a relationship between the child, their experiences, and the environment they are entering (UNICEF, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

Access to ECCE is also shaped by how children are supported in their daily lives,



particularly in relation to independence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; UNICEF, 2012). In many Asian contexts, children grow up within multigenerational households, where caregiving is shared across extended family members (Rogoff, 2003; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; UNESCO, 2021). These environments offer strong relational support and cultural continuity but may also influence the extent to which young children are encouraged to take on independent tasks (Rogoff, 2003; UNESCO, 2021). In higher-income families, this dynamic is often further shaped by the presence of nannies or domestic helpers, who play a significant role in children's self-care routines and organisation (International Labour Organization, 2019; UNICEF, 2019). While these forms of support provide stability and care, they can result in fewer opportunities for children to practise the independence often expected in school settings. Where children's home experiences differ from the expectations of the school setting this shift can feel unfamiliar, reflecting differences in cultural approaches to childhood and learning

rather than deficits in development (Britto et al., 2017; Cole, 1996). Children arrive at primary school with differing experiences of social interaction, language development, independence and familiarity with routines. This variation is significant, as it shapes how children encounter the expectations of school.

Primary education systems across Asia are typically characterised by clearly defined curricula and increasing academic expectations. What becomes most visible at the point of transition is not simply a change in setting, but a shift in pedagogy. In Thailand, the move into Prathom, or Grade, one often marks a transition from play-based early years environments into more structured classroom approaches, with greater emphasis on whole-class teaching, written work and measurable outcomes. In India, experiences vary more widely. While some schools are increasingly aligning with play-based principles, others continue to prioritise early academic instruction, often influenced by parental aspirations and competitive educational pathways. The recent policy shifts discussed earlier represent an important step towards greater continuity.



Despite these developments, what school looks like in practice often reflects a balance between developmentally appropriate approaches and academic expectations. Across many

contexts, the transition into primary school involves a shift from play-based, child-led learning to more structured, teacher-directed instruction (OECD, 2017; Whitebread, 2012). Activities that were once exploratory and open-ended may become more task-oriented, with increased focus on literacy, numeracy and the completion of written work (OECD, 2017; UNESCO, 2020).

What shapes children's experiences most powerfully is not the age at which they start school, but the expectations they encounter on arrival. This highlights an important point: 'school readiness' is not about reaching a fixed set of skills, but about the relationship between children's prior experiences and the expectations of the school environment. Where there is alignment, children are more likely to engage and participate with confidence. Where there is misalignment, differences in experience can become more visible (Pianta et al., 2009; Perry, 2010).

The examples of Thailand and India reflect this wider regional picture. Across both contexts, there is growing recognition of the importance of continuity between early childhood and primary education, alongside ongoing efforts to balance academic expectations with broader approaches to learning and development. These



differences highlight the complexity of children's experiences across contexts.

Children enter school with a range of experiences shaped by their families, communities and early learning environments. Understanding these differences is essential for shaping how readiness is conceptualised, supported and enacted within schools. It is within this complexity that the process of transition becomes particularly significant.

Transition

Transitions in the early years, especially starting school, are a significant and often emotional time, shaping children's wellbeing, development,

and future learning experiences (OECD, 2017). Research shows that a well-supported gradual process of adapting to new environments, relationships and routines aids children's sense of belonging, security and engagement (Peters, 2010; Markström and Simonsson, 2017; Bowlby, 1988).

Several countries in Asia have implemented programmes to support this transition (ARNEC, 2022). In Nepal they have introduced activities and skills from school into the last few months of pre-primary education, visits between pre-primary settings and Grade 1 teachers, and training for Grade 1 teachers to use more active learning in manageable ways with ratios of up to 50 children per teacher have also been utilised. Whilst in Cambodia, by contrast, a 'school readiness' programme has been trialled in the first few months of primary school to compensate for a lack of formal preschools (KAPE, 2004; Aide et Action, 2020).



Case Study - Thai Local School

Jirarat Thepraksa, an Assistant Teacher at a British international school in Thailand, reflects on her daughters' transition into a local Thai school. She describes the experience as initially challenging, with her daughter adjusting to new teachers, peers and environments all at once.

"The transition was quite challenging because everything was new, new teachers, new friends and a new environment. In Thai schools, the transition process is usually quite quick, and children are expected to adjust by themselves within a short time."

While teachers are caring, she explains that support is not always individualised, meaning much of the emotional support happens at home.

"I needed to support my daughter a lot at home to help her feel confident. It took time for her to settle."

In contrast, she highlights differences in international school contexts:

“Communication between the school and parents is stronger, so parents feel more informed and reassured.”

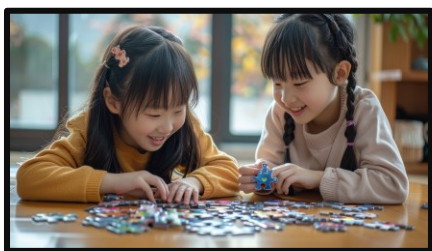
“There is more focus on each child’s emotional readiness, while Thai schools may focus more on routine and discipline from the beginning.”

These reflections highlight how transition is shaped by different priorities across contexts.

When schools and families work together, sharing knowledge, aligning expectations, and building trust, children experience greater home-school continuity, strengthening their sense of belonging and readiness

to learn (Harrison et al., 2023). A gradual approach and strong relationships create the conditions for a positive, successful transition (Dockett and Perry, 2007).

There is a strong body of Western research supporting the role of high-quality early years experiences, rooted in play, as laying the foundation for lifelong learning supporting not only cognitive development but also social competence, emotional wellbeing, and positive learning dispositions (OECD, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978; Harvard Project Zero, 2016; DfE, 2025). This playful, active approach can appear to be at odds with stereotypically traditional Asian methods: in China, for example, where play has traditionally not been the norm, the early childhood curriculum has been influenced by Reggio Emilia and HighScope, in reality resulting in a more hybrid approach of play as a vehicle for academic learning (ARNEC, 2022; Bautista, et al., 2023). For some countries, such as Japan, a focus on child-directed play is more natural (Bautista, et al, 2023).



Ultimately, some of the regional issues discussed, particularly limited participation in pre-primary schooling and family education levels, can present

challenges to the Western concepts of a successful transition stemming from strong parent partnerships, gradual acclimatisation to new settings and expectations, and high-quality early years playful approaches.

Lessons from Asia

Global goals for universal access need to reflect local needs.

There is huge diversity across the region and only a few countries with homogeneous societies (Pearson, 2015). Ensuring attempts at universal access do not further disadvantage marginalised groups requires more specific and targeted interventions (Barakat and Bengtsson, 2017; UNICEF, n.d., UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024; Pearson, 2015; World Bank, 2012; Ahmed and Sadik, 2025).

Quality matters

When expansion of universal access to ECCE does not coincide with quality control measures, quality of provision may decline, and existing disadvantages may be amplified, and pedagogically inappropriate approaches can creep in. Partnerships with private providers are crucial but need regulating. (Barakat and Bengtsson, 2017; Kim and Umayahara, 2010; Pearson, 2015; World Bank, 2012; UNESCO, 2026).

- Look to the Philippines (UNESCO, 2026:15), Nepal (UNESCO 2023:14), Singapore and Uzbekistan (UNESCO 2023:23) for examples of countries working on improving the quality of ECCE provision.
- Look to Singapore, China, South Korea and Uzbekistan (UNESCO, 2023: 23, 31, 36) for examples of improving quality through dedicated training opportunities and career pathways for ECCE professionals.

Unified Government Approaches Are Key

Ensuring coordinated, multisectoral approaches to ensure sustainable funding, engage and partner with stakeholder groups, monitor and ensure quality, requires a unified approach underpinned by legal frameworks and ECCE-specific policies, including support for caregiving practices in the home. (Kim and Umayahara, 2010: UNICEF and UNESCO, 2024: UNESCO, 2024: Pearson, 2015, World Bank, 2012).



- Look to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia for examples of comprehensive legal frameworks and integrated governance. (pp12-14, UNESCO, 2026:12-14)

References

- Aide et Action (2020). School Readiness Toolkit. Available at: https://action-education.org/sea/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2022/07/AEA_SchoolReadinessToolkit_ip14_web_.pdf
- Ahmed, T. T., and Sadik, N. (2025) Wealth-based inequalities in early childhood development (ECD) outcomes in Bangladesh: A decomposition analysis using MICS 2019. PLOS Global Public Health, 5(7), e0004774. Available at <https://journals.plos.org/globalpublichealth/article?id=10.1371/journal.pgph.0004774>
- Ahnert, L., Gunnar, M.R., Lamb, M.E. and Barthel, M. (2004) 'Transition to child care: Associations with infant–mother attachment, infant negative emotion, and cortisol elevations', Child Development, 75(3), pp. 639–650. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/chidev/article-abstract/75/3/639/8275218?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., and Wall, S. (1978) *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Arabandi, V. (2024) *A brief history of ECCE policy in India*. Available at: <https://rocketlearning.org/2-brief-history-of-ecce-policy-in-india/>
- Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) (2022) *Final report on transition*. Available at: https://arnec.net/sites/default/files/2022-07/Final_report_on_Transition.pdf

Azim Premji Foundation (2019) *State of the Education Report for India 2019: Children*

with Disabilities. Bengaluru: Azim Premji University. Available at: <https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/resources/state-education-report-india-2019-children-disabilities>

Baradha, G. (n.d.) *ECCE in India – ECCE / ECE / ECD*. Available at: <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/hsp10/chapter/ecce-in-india-ecce-ece-eed/>

Barakat B, Bengtsson S. (2017) *What do we mean by school entry age? Conceptual ambiguity and its implications: the example of Indonesia*. *Comp Educ*. 2017 Sep 8;54(2):203-224. Available at: [What do we mean by school entry age? Conceptual ambiguity and its implications: the example of Indonesia - PMC](#)

Bautista, A., Yu, J., Lee, K. and Sun, J. (2023) 'Impact of play-based pedagogies in selected Asian contexts: what do we know and how to move forward?', in *Effective Teaching Around the World*. Cham: Springer, pp. 473–488. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31678-4_21

Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books

Bowlby, J. (1988) *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. London: Routledge.

Britto, P. R., Lye, S. J., Proulx, K., Yousafzai, A. K., Matthews, S. G., Vaivada, T., Perez-Escamilla, R., Rao, N., Ip, P., Fernald, L. C. H., MacMillan, H., Hanson, M., Wachs, T. D., Yao, H., Yoshikawa, H., Cerezo, A., Leckman, J. F., Bhutta, Z. A., and Early Childhood Development Interventions Review Group, for the Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee (2017). Nurturing care: promoting early childhood development. *Lancet (London)*,

England), 389(10064),18) School readiness in Europe: Issues and evidence. In: Fleer, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 363-391

CEOWORLD magazine (2025) *Ranked: Safest cities in the world 2025*. Available at: <https://ceoworld.biz/2025/05/12/ranked-safest-cities-in-the-world-2025/>

Chen, J, Park, A. (2021) *School entry age and educational attainment in developing countries: Evidence from China's compulsory education law*. *Journal of Comparative Economics*. Volume 49, Issue 3, September 2021, Pages 715-732. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147596720300846>

Cole, M. (1996) *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Council on Foreign Relations (n.d.) *Global Conflict Tracker*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker>

Department for Education (2025) *Early years foundation stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Dockett, S. and Perry, B. (2007) *Transitions to School: Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

Encyclopaedia Britannica (2026) *Asia*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia>

Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A.-W. (eds.) (2007) *Informing Transitions in the Early Years: Research, Policy and Practice*. McGraw-Hill/Open University Press

Government of India (Ministry of Women and Child Development) (1975) *Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme*. Available at: <https://icds-wcd.nic.in/>

Government of India (2020a) *National Education Policy 2020*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education. Available at: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

Government of India (2020b) *Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections (2011–2036)*. New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Available at: nhm.gov.in/New_Updates_2018/Report_Population_Projection_2019.pdf

Government of India, Ministry of Education, (2022a) *National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage*. New Delhi: NCERT. Available at: https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/NCF_for_Foundational_Stage_20_October_2022.pdf

Government of India, Ministry of Education (2022b) *Samagra Shiksha: Framework for implementation*. Available at: https://samagra.education.gov.in/docs/ss_implementation.pdf .

Harrison, L.J., Murray, E., McFarland, L. and Waller, T. (2023) 'Transforming transitions to primary school: using children's perspectives to inform practice', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 31(6), pp. 1–15.

Harvard Project Zero (n.d.) *Visible Thinking and Thinking Routines*. Available at: <https://pz.harvard.edu>

Hatzifilalithis, A. and Grenier, A. (2019) '*Intergenerational learning programs*'. In: *Intergenerational Practice in Early Childhood Education* – Trial Report. Sydney: AIIP Network. Available at: <https://aiip.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Intergenerational-Practice-in-Early-Childhood-Education-Trial.pdf>

Institute for Economics and Peace (2025) *Global Peace Index 2025*. Available at: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/GPI-2025-web.pdf>

International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) (2004). *SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM: Assessment Report*, Available at: https://www.kapekh.org/files/report_file/90-en.pdf

Kim, G.J. and Umayahara, M. (2010) *Early childhood care and education: building the foundation for lifelong learning and the future of the nations of Asia and the Pacific*. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 4(2), pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/2288-6729-4-2-1>

Markström, A.-M. and Simonsson, M. (2017) 'Introduction to preschool: strategies for managing the gap between home and preschool', *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 3(2), pp. 179–188.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Pearson, E.C. (2015) *Moving forward with early childhood care and education (ECCE) post-2015 in the Asia Pacific Region: an analysis of*

global and national policy goals. ICEP 9, 13 (2015). Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-015-0016-9>

Perry, B. (2010) *Transitions to School: Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

Peters, S. (2010) *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, New Zealand.

Pianta, R.C., Cox, M.J. and Snow, K.L. (2009) *School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

PTI (2025) *Healthy Planet named India's best preschool 2024–25: A new era in early childhood education*. The Wire. Available at:
<https://thewire.in/ptiprnews/healthy-planet-named-indias-best-preschool-2024-25-a-new-era-in-early-childhood-education>

Rao, N. and Sun, J. (2010) Early Childhood Care and Education in the Asia Pacific Region: Moving Towards Goal 1. Bangkok: UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000190526>

Rao, N., Ranganathan, N., Kaur, R. and Mukhopadhyay, R. (2021) 'Fostering equitable access to quality preschool education in India: challenges and opportunities', *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 15(1), Article 9. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353805804_Fostering_equitable_access_to_quality_preschool_education_in_India_challenges_and_opportunities

Rogoff, B. (2003) *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. and Bell, D. (2002) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*. London: DfES.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Institute for Statistics (UNESCO UIS) (n.d.) *Pupil-teacher ratio in pre-primary education (headcount basis), PTRHC_0*. UNdata. Available at: https://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNESCO&df=series%3APTRHC_0

UNESCO (2020) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2021) *Early childhood care and education in Southeast Asia*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2023) *Regional Report for Asia-Pacific. Education Starts Early. Progress, challenges and opportunities*. Paris. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387860/PDF/387860eng.pdf.multi>

UNESCO (2025a) *Asia-Pacific Overview: Sustainable Development Goal 4. Factsheet: Target 4.2* Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/04/SDG%204.2%20for%20web.pdf>

UNESCO (2025b) *Institute for Statistics World Education Statistics*. Montreal, Canada

UNESCO (2026) *Global Education Monitoring Report Summary 2026: Access and equity, countdown to 2030, Paris* Available at: [2026 GEM Report | Global Education Monitoring Report](#)

UNICEF (2012) *School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework*. New York: UNICEF.

UNICEF (2019) *Early childhood development in Thailand*. Bangkok: UNICEF Thailand.

UNICEF and UNESCO (2024) *Global report on early childhood care and education: The right to a strong foundation*. Available at:
<https://www.unicef.org/media/158496/file/Global-report-on-early-childhoodcare-and-education-2024-1.pdf>

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Whitebread, D. (2012) *The Importance of Play: A Report on the Value of Children's Play with a Series of Policy Recommendations*. Brussels: Toy Industries of Europe.

World Bank (2012) *Early childhood care and education: setting the stage for lifelong development*. Available at:
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/09/19/early-childhood-care-education-setting-stage-lifelong-development>

World Bank (2018) *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank (n.d.) *Population, total*. Available at:
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

Worldometer (2026) *Asia population*. Available at:
<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/asia-population/>

The Americas

Jennifer Partington, Taylor Williams and Kristy Howell



Introduction

The United Nations geo scheme for the Americas represents one of the most expansive and diverse statistical frameworks in the global system. This vast geographic and demographic span creates a uniquely complex landscape for early childhood development, where ‘school readiness’ is shaped by vastly different economic realities, language barriers, and urban-rural divides across the hemisphere.

As cited by world population review (worldpopulationreview.com, 2026), 12.8% of the world’s population live in the America’s geo-scheme comprising of North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, which makes it the only region spanning the entire Western hemisphere, physically bridging the global North and global South. The Americas have over 1.014 billion inhabitants covering 35 countries and

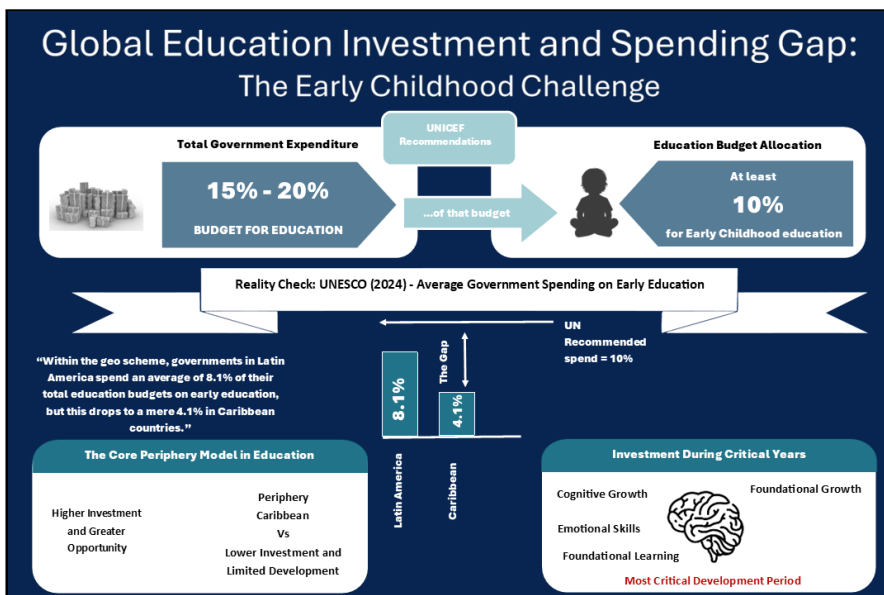
several dependent territories all of which covers 8.3% of the Earth's land surface.

The most populous of these countries within the geo-scheme is the United States with a population of 342.9 million (census.gov, 2026) closely followed by Brazil in South America amassing to 223 million. Mexico stands next with 130 million. Five of the world's megacities are situated in these 3 countries. The smallest independent country in the Americas is the island nation of St Kitts and Nevis covering an area of 261 km² with 46000 inhabitants (sknbs.org, 2025). This highlights the extreme variance in scale, resources, and infrastructure that defines the regional challenge of preparing the next generation for education.

It should also be noted that many smaller territories are geographically 'American' but politically European (World Population Review, 2026). This dual identity shapes their approach to early childhood education, blending local context with European colonial history.

A defining characteristic that comes with the region is its complex political and economic structure, meaning on many levels it does not act as a single unit. It's broad spread leads to divides of extreme

economic disparities between countries such as the United States and lower income countries like Haiti, which is frequently disrupted by natural disasters. Predominantly the US dominates the economy across the region with advancements in tech and manufacturing; however, it relies on resource extraction from Latin America. This thereby perpetuates a core periphery model that fundamentally impacts educational investment across the hemisphere.



UNICEF (2022) recommends that 15 – 20% of total public expenditure is budgeted for education and that at least 10% of that should be for early childhood education, specifically in Low to Middle Income Countries. Within the geo scheme, governments in Latin America spend an average of 8.1% of their total education budgets on early education,

but this drops to a mere 4.1% in Caribbean countries (UNESCO, 2024 p.97), well below UNICEF's recommended amount. This sharp divide highlights the core periphery model within education, and the investment children are receiving during their most critical developmental years.

These disparities directly impact the resources available for early childhood development within each country and consequently, the varied benchmarks for 'school readiness' across the geo-scheme.

Early childhood education within The Americas

World data (ourworldindata.org, 2024) indicates that early education enrolment across the Americas typically begins around age three, though regional policies vary. In 2019, French Guiana lowered its compulsory preschool age from six to three to align with the French system. Conversely, Bolivia and Suriname begin at age four, the same compulsory age as Brazil.

The region's vast geography results in diverse approaches rather than a unified system. A key example of policy evolution is Costa Rica, which implemented two years of compulsory preschool in 2018. This aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) to ensure equal access to quality education. By standardizing foundational skills before primary school begins at age six, these programs aim to reduce socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, early childcare shapes the language and cultural identity fundamental to diverse childhood experiences throughout the Americas.

In Latin America, early childhood education (ECE) remains primarily publicly led. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Argentina faced significant structural challenges due to the absence of a comprehensive national system. Access to quality services was often determined by a family's income level creating inequities.



The National Early Childhood Strategy (ENPI), a partnership between



the UN and Argentina, integrated SDG targets to bridge funding gaps. This shift moved daycare centres away from a

purely educational model toward an inclusive approach. By prioritizing affection and belonging, this strategy ensured that early childhood centres serve the child's emotional and social needs over their learning. To support these reforms, Argentina and the UN developed an integrated indicator system to monitor policy effectiveness and launched the Federal Care Map, a tool used to track and manage both private and public childcare facilities, providing a level of institutional visibility that many systems currently lack.

In contrast Brazil established a clear concept of education from birth aimed at holistic development (Brasil, Ministério da Educação, 2009) as early as 1996, through the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB). This represented a major turning point as ECCE was no longer just social assistance but recognized as the first stage of basic education. These guidelines regulated daycare centres and preschool for children aged 0–6, with a curriculum focused on the child's overall well-being.

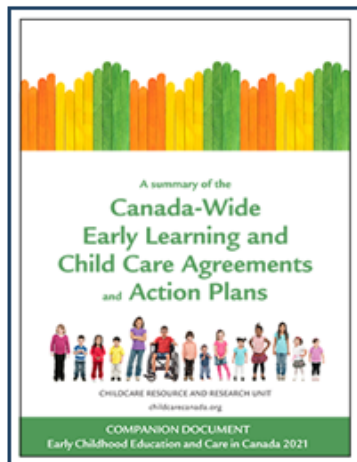
This legislative foundation paved the way for modern policies like the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC). Rolled out in 2018, the BNCC provides a unified framework for the organisation and functioning of ECCE institutions nationwide (UNESCO, 2022). Consequently, Brazil serves as a global model for progressive ECCE on paper, however significant regional variability remains due to the differing capacities of local municipalities (Raikes, 2023).

While Brazil and its South American neighbours move toward a publicly led, holistic framework, the landscape shifts significantly moving North. Within the United States, the federal Department of Education has been under threat to give full power of educational choice to individual States to decide policy at local levels. This presents a decentralized and varied approach to early education. As of 2024, kindergarten is mandatory in only 19 states and the District of Columbia. Despite this lack of a federal mandate, enrolment remains high, with approximately 85 percent of five-year-olds (nces.ed.gov, 2024) attending some form of school.

The wide range of available programs including part-time, full-school day, and full working day hours is established across a complex mix of federal, state, and local funding. However, this has resulted in an incoherent "patchwork" system characterized by significant disparities in access and quality between public and private sectors. A critical

exception to this is the Head Start program. Since 1965, Head Start has provided comprehensive services to low-income children and their families, serving over 40 million people since its inception (Office of Head Start, 2025) maintaining a holistic focus on early learning, family well-being, and health.

In contrast to U.S. decentralization, Canada recently launched the 2021 Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan. This federal investment of approximately \$30 billion over five years aims to reduce licensed childcare fees to an average of \$10-a-day by 2026. This approach views high-quality, inclusive care as a necessity and



a core service (canada.ca, 2022). Standardized agreements with every province highlight the importance of early language development, including access to French language programs for Francophone families outside Quebec.

Moving into the Caribbean, Jamaica has emerged as a regional leader in formalizing early childhood education through the establishment of the Early Childhood Commission (ECC). The ECC seeks to standardize teaching quality, health, and safety, while integrating play-based

learning and community involvement into the national framework. However, implementation remains a challenge. The country's dual system: comprising of community run, Basic Schools and state-funded Infant Schools, creates a significant funding disparity. Despite the ECC's regulatory efforts, many institutions remain under-resourced and ill-prepared to meet the developmental needs of children, demonstrating that policy aims are often hindered by structural financial barriers.



Across the Americas, the evolution of ECCE shows that while regions increasingly value play, their curriculum goals and implementation reflect vastly

different social, economic, and cultural priorities.

School starting age and practice

In 1989 the USA announced six national education goals, the first being that by the year 2000 all children in America would start school ready to learn (Samms-Vaughan, 2015). Debate continues regarding the 'optimal' school starting age, with research often providing

contradictory results depending on whether it measures test scores or long-term, emotional well-being. Across the entire geo-scheme, the defining tension is between starting age, when primary school begins, and compulsory age, when the law requires attendance.

Currently there is a growing trend in Central and South America aiming to lower the school starting age to 4 or 5 years rather than 6 years. This shift looks to formalize early childhood education, leveraging earlier enrolment as a primary tool to combat regional literacy gaps prior to formal school age. In contrast to this, amongst higher socio-economic families within the US, the opposite trend is emerging (Dhuey and Kobel, 2022) as parents consider if, despite being eligible to attend school, being older better supports 'school readiness' in the long term. This practice, referred to as 'redshirting' is parental preference rather than policy set by a state.

Dhuey and Kobel (2022) mention that approximately 4-6% of US children are 'redshirted', allowing them to have greater social and cognitive skills than their younger peers. This response has developed mostly to the academic pushdown practice that is becoming increasingly apparent in US elementary schools driven by pressure and testing. With the knowledge of how redshirting impacts the socioeconomic divide of starting school, Fyffe et al. (2022) studied how

participating in a play-based Reggio Emilia program impact students entering kindergarten.



Their study focused on the experiences of four children in their kindergarten year. Specifically, four themes that

demonstrated the 'school readiness' of the children in their research were learners, communicators, explorers, and empathizers. Through the year, they discovered that these children were ready to attend school and their time in a play-based environment was a vital factor for this. The final question they posed focused on the importance on the how various experiences prepare children for school rather than what experiences prepare children.

With this insight, it is a wonder to think how redshirting has impacted students' preparedness. Durkin et al. (2022) completed a longitudinal study on how a statewide prekindergarten program impacted student's achievement and behaviour through sixth grade. They found that a statewide prekindergarten program did not positively impact student's reading abilities by third grade. Instead, these researchers asked how

creative and innovative thinking can provide further insight into the United States' goal of student achievement.

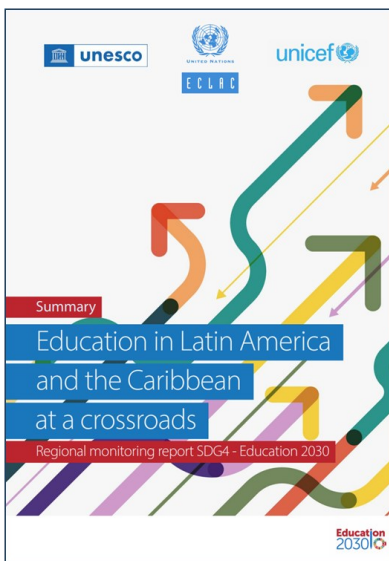
While Latin American policies leverage early starts as a tool for raising attainment, redshirting in the United States functions as a luxury that may inadvertently widen the achievement gap. Ultimately, these diverging practices reveal a stark socioeconomic divide.

Following the mandatory two-year preschool cycle, Costa Rican children transition into primary education at age six, entering a system that has



long been a regional leader in Latin America. Dating back to the 19th Century free mandatory primary education was introduced to all children and in 1949, funds previously directed to the military were put into education (Artavia et al. 2024) showing the country's dedication to an educated and literate population. While the use of mandatory uniforms across all levels attempts to mask socio-economic disparities, the transition into first grade highlights a growing divide between urban centres and rural zones. In rural areas, there is a growing concern regarding unidocente (single teacher) schools. In these settings, one

teacher instructs first through sixth-grade students simultaneously. While this multi-age environment can be nurturing for 6-year-olds, it demands immediate academic independence from them in an environment where reading and writing is a heavy focus. This is a stark contrast to the active inquiry-based learning typically found in urban primary schools.



UNESCO (2022) completed a regional monitoring report related to the SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2015) on Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, which supported the development of Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016). Here, the variety of needs within Latin America, such as funding, public systems, healthcare, poverty, etc are addressed.

Approaches to reaching the goals include the decentralization of education systems management as is the case in nations like Mexico, Argentina and Brazil where the transfer of school management control is given to federal states (like the approach of the United States), or developing the municipalization of education, like Chile. However, the

act of decentralization in many situations caused greater system fragmentation and developed new inequities within the education systems. After experiencing this, many nations began recentralizing their education systems again. An example of the success of this can be seen in Chile's intermediate management approach that maintains a decentralized system but also provided a shared decision-making system which ensures that children have access to the same resources regardless of their status.

Transition and Case studies

The transition to formal elementary school is of vital importance for all children (Cook and Coley, 2017). A child's experience when they enter the education system sets an important foundation for ongoing engagement and learning.

Case Study: USA Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten transition experience 1998 – 1999.

In North Carolina, USA, pre-kindergarten is optional and formal schooling begins at kindergarten (age 5). This case study follows a family who enrolled their child in a private, play-based pre-kindergarten program

at age four to support holistic development before entering the public system.

The move meant the student was then between six months to one year younger than their classmates. Despite being considered an “average” pupil, they began experiencing academic and social difficulties at school. No additional learning support was received outside of Tier One approaches to teaching.

In the 27 years that have passed our understanding of best practices and transition have changed. The integrated indicator systems used in the Argentine model as discussed earlier highlight a critical missing piece for this student.

By valuing the child’s holistic development over academic milestones, it may have identified that the student was not socially prepared for the age gap, regardless of their ability to complete kindergarten tasks.

The Head Start to Kindergarten program in the USA aims to do just that with bridging systems and practices.

Bridging systems and practices are common across the Americas but vary from context to context. Chile Crece Contigo (Chile Grows with You) was launched in 2007 as a national social protection system and has become a regional model for promoting equity, child well-being, and 'school readiness' (UNESCO, no date). For example, in Santiago-one centre implemented a transition model focused on collaborative governance and pedagogical continuity. Following Decree 373 (Ministerio de Educación, 2017), this shifted the focus from student readiness to ensuring school environments are ready for the child.

During transition periods, educators applied the following key strategies.

- Early childhood and primary educators engaged in joint pedagogical planning to ensure a greater consistent learning environment.
- Educators utilized written records and portfolios of the children to facilitate the transfer of developmental milestones.
- Early childhood students participated in on-site classroom visits to foster familiarity with the primary school environment.

The approach also integrates families through school orientations and can be particularly helpful in supporting understanding of their child's next steps. Despite its success, hurdles remain. Current schedules lack

time for educator dialogue, and more funding is needed to sustain play-based learning in primary grades, to ease transition for children and families, promoting equity, wellbeing and ‘school readiness.’



Case study: Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) A parent's perspective.

The transition from our Head Start daycare to kindergarten felt daunting moving from a familiar, supportive environment into a larger and more complex system. My daughter had spent three years in a classroom where the teachers knew her favourite songs, her temperament and our family's specific needs. I felt worried about how she was feeling.

The HS2K program changed everything. Before the school year even began, my daughter's new kindergarten teacher came to our house. Sitting in our living room I could see this helped my daughter feel safe and secure. Her teacher expressed an interest in sitting on the floor to play with her which aided her shyness. That also visit gave me the space to share my hopes for her education in a relaxed, private setting.

Because of those home visits and the shared transition meetings, I didn't feel like an outsider on the first day.

I felt included in her education journey. The HS2K process ensured that the transition between schools was handled with care. I entered the elementary school system knowing that my voice mattered and that her new teacher already understood her as a student and a person.

As Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) note, these transitions lay a foundation for later school success. Educators hold the power to make transitions easier such as is the case with the HS2K approach.



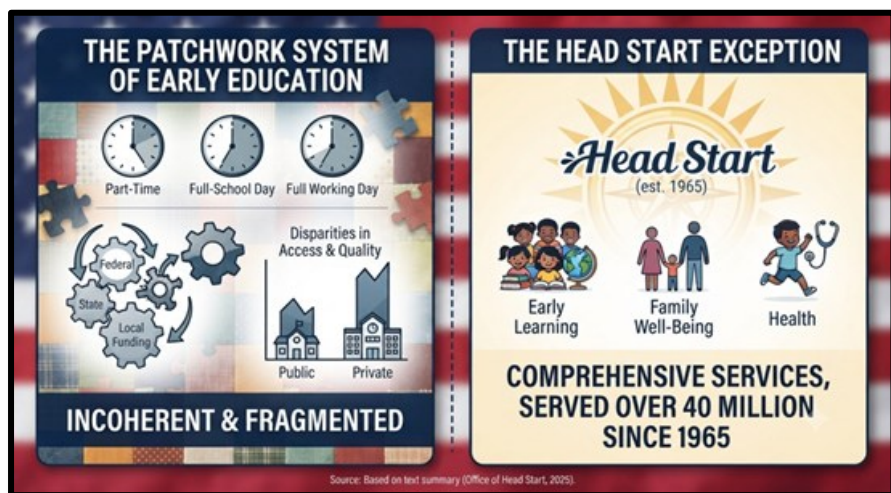
Conclusion

‘School readiness’ is not merely something a child possesses, but more about what the system provides. As explored in this chapter, nations across the Americas define the primary purpose of early childhood care as supporting holistic growth and wellbeing, to establish a foundation for a lifelong love of learning benefiting children substantially in the long run of their education. Many early childhood settings also talk about the value play as the driver of a child’s learning experience, however as cultural and complex external factors take over at a school level, this does not always continue, compromising those initial clear intentions.

Within the Southern hemisphere of the geo scheme, external agencies such as the UN and UNESCO have supported countries to uphold the SDG4 (UNESCO, 2015) and place emphasis on quality education through training, funding, and resourcing all of which are important to continuity within transitions to school.

While nations across the Americas are looking toward the future, positive intention does not however guarantee success. What we have

learnt is that many programs have identified the basic needs for successful transition from ECCE to school through pedagogical conversations, hand over transcripts, parental involvement and an opportunity for children to experience school settings before the first day. Cementing this all together however requires navigating the challenges of systemic organisation, research integration, and sustainable resource management.



References

- Artavia, R., Ilie-Cardoza, C. and Fernández, A. (2024) 'The Evolution of Education in Costa Rica: Challenges and Opportunities', *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*. Available at: <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/the-evolution-of-education-in-costa-rica-challenges-and-opportunities/>
- Brasil, Ministério da Educação (2009) Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil. Brasília, DF: Secretaria de Educação Básica.
- Canada.ca National progress report on early child care 2021 – 2022 (online) <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/national-progress-2021-2022.html>
- Cook, K. and Coley, R. (2017) School Transition Practices and Children's Social and Academic Adjustment in Kindergarten *Journal of Education Psychology* Volume 109 Issue 2
- Dhuey, E and Koebel, K. (2022) Is there an optimal school starting age? *IZA World of Labor* 2022: 247v2
- Durkin, K., Lipset, M., Farran, D. and Wiesen, S. (2022) *Effects of a Statewide Prekindergarten Program on Children's Achievement and Behavior through Sixth Grade*

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9716729/pdf/nihms-1839477.pdf>

Fyffe, L., Sample, P., Lewis, A., Rattenborg, K. and Bundy, A. (2022) *Entering Kindergarten After Years of Play: A Cross-Case Analysis of School Readiness Following Play-Based Education*. Early Childhood Education Journal. Available at :

https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9666934/pdf/10643_2022_Article_1428.pdf

Kamerman, S. and Gatenio-Gabel, S. (2007), *Early Childhood Education and Care in the United States: An Overview of the Current Policy Picture* International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, Vol. 1, No.1, 23-34

Ministerio de Educación. (2017), *Decreto 373 Exento* Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile.

<https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=1102225>

NCES Ourworldindata (2024)

<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/official-entrance-age-to-compulsory-education#:~:text=Data%20on%20official%20entrance%20age,follow%20the%20system%20as%20designed.>

nces.ed.gov (2024) School Enrolment Rates of Young Children
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cfa/enrollment-of-young-children>

Office of Head Start. (2025) *Head Start Approach*. Available at:
<https://headstart.gov/programs/article/head-start-approach>

Raikes, A., Alvarenga Lima, J.H.-N. and Abuchaim, B. (2023) 'Early Childhood Education in Brazil: Child Rights to ECE in Context of Great Disparities', *Children*, 10(6), p. 919

Rimm-Kaufman, S. and Pianta, R. (2000) *An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research*. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology Vol. 21, Issue 5

Saint Kitts and Nevis Bureau of Standards. (2025) About St. Kitts and Nevis. Available at: <https://www.sknbs.org/about-bureau/about-st-kitts-and-nevis/>

Samms-Vaughan, M. (2015) *The Jamaica School Readiness Assessment Report of the Phase 1 Pilot in the Parish of Westmoreland*. Early Childhood Commission April 25, 2015

UNESCO. (2016). Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. UNESCO. right-to-education.org

UNESCO. (2022). Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a crossroads. Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/37791/file/EducationinLatinAmericaaandtheCaribbeanatacrossroads.pdf>

UNESCO. (2024). global report on Early Childhood Care and Education. The Right to a strong Foundation. Available at:

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390215>

UNESCO. (No Date) Chile Crece Contigo: Building an Integrated System for Early Childhood Development. Available from:

<https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/chile-crece-contigo-building-integrated-system-early-childhood-development>

United States Census Bureau. (2026) Measuring America's People and Economy Counting on Our Future While Celebrating Our Past
Available at:

<https://www.census.gov/#:~:text=USA%20Population,as%20of%20March%2006%2C%202026>

World Population Review. (2026) Countries in America. Available at :

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-in-americas>

Europe

Kristina Robb, Mary Moloney, Angela Scollan and Lourdes Kerr



Introduction

Europe is a diverse geo-scheme encompassing countries with long established welfare states, liberal market economies and post socialist governance traditions. While there is significant variation in population size, demographic composition, economic capacity and political history, early childhood care and education (ECCE) and approaches to ‘school readiness’ are widely recognised as matters of public policy importance across the region. This chapter uses the United Nations geo-scheme for Europe, to bring together perspectives from across the region to explore how ‘school readiness’ is understood, enacted and supported in different contexts.

Across Europe, ECCE is increasingly positioned as foundational to children’s learning, development and wellbeing, and to wider social and economic goals (Eurydice, 2025, OECD, 2025a). European countries

have expanded participation in early childhood provision over recent decades, often linking this to workforce participation, gender equality and social inclusion (Eurydice, 2025, OECD, 2025a). Comparative evidence shows high overall participation from age three in many countries, while highlighting persistent inequalities in access and quality, particularly for younger children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Eurydice, 2025). These concerns are reflected at policy level in the Council of the European Union's Recommendation (2021) establishing a European Child Guarantee, which positions access to ECCE as a key mechanism for preventing child poverty and social exclusion.

Despite shared policy attention, early childhood systems across Europe are far from uniform. Governance arrangements range from highly integrated systems located within



education ministries to fragmented models split across health, social care and education. Funding mechanisms, workforce qualifications, working conditions and curriculum frameworks vary considerably. These structural differences shape children's everyday experiences in early childhood settings, influencing how readiness for school is defined, understood, prioritised and supported (OECD, 2021a).

School starting age and the organisation of compulsory education also differ significantly across the region. In many European countries, compulsory schooling begins at around six years of age, while in others, where for example, the affordability of childcare may influence parental decisions, children enter formal education earlier. OECD (2025a, 2025b) data continue to show that earlier school starting ages are often associated with greater emphasis on assessment and accountability in the early years, while later entry tends to be accompanied by a stronger focus on play, wellbeing and gradual transition.



Transitions from ECCE to school are, therefore, a central policy and practice concern across Europe. OECD (2017, 2021b) analysis consistently highlights how effective transitions depend on

professional continuity, pedagogical alignment and shared responsibility and respect between early childhood settings and schools. The OECD's (2017) analysis emphasises the need to focus on making schools ready for children, rather than positioning readiness as an attribute located solely within the child. However, there are ongoing

challenges in achieving coherence, particularly where early years and school systems operate under different accountability frameworks (European Commission, 2025). These tensions shape how 'school readiness' is understood and enacted across the European geo-scheme.

Across Europe, ECCE varies widely in organisation and delivery, shaped by distinct historical, cultural and policy traditions. Differences in funding, staff–child ratios and entitlement reflect contrasting priorities and conceptions of the role of ECCE. Despite these differences, common priorities linked to 'school readiness' can be identified, notably play, wellbeing and relationships, and the framing of early education as a foundation for later learning rather than an extension of formal schooling (Rogers, 2021). These priorities are interpreted and enacted differently across contexts, reflecting ongoing tensions around curriculum content, coherence and control, which continue to shape how ECCE is defined, organised and governed (Wood and Hedges, 2016).



From a child's rights perspective (United Nations, 1989) the transition from ECCE to school should protect children's wellbeing and development, including the right to play and to be heard in matters affecting them: principles that are reflected in early childhood policy frameworks across Europe. While all European countries



have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Scotland is distinctive in having incorporated the Convention directly into domestic law through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Together, these commitments position ECCE and transition as matters of children's rights beyond educational policy.

Northern Europe

In Northern Europe, ECCE is typically organised as an integrated system spanning birth to school entry and embedded within welfare state models. Provision is widely accessible, publicly funded, and positioned

as a right of the child and a collective societal responsibility (Broström et al., 2018; Klippen et al., 2024).

Pedagogically, approaches are play based and informed by sociocultural and cultural historical perspectives. Learning is conceptualised as emerging through play, exploration and shared activity, rather than through didactic teaching or early academic outcomes. (Kangas et al., 2021; Skovbjerg et al., 2024; Klippen et al., 2024).

Wellbeing and relationships are foundational to practice, with continuity of care supporting emotional security and stable peer relationships; experiences that underpin children's confidence and engagement during the transition to school (Fabian and Dunlop, 2020). A notable tension within this sub-region is the growing pressure to articulate learning outcomes and monitor quality more explicitly, with 'school readiness' increasingly used as a policy lever for curriculum reform and accountability alongside long standing holistic and play based traditions (Ahlgren and Lundahl, 2026). Recent reforms in countries such as Norway illustrate how strengthened curriculum frameworks and evaluation requirements emphasise demonstrable learning outcomes alongside child-centred and holistic values (Eurydice, 2025; Størksen et al., 2024).

Western Europe

Western Europe encompasses a wide range of ECCE arrangements, including integrated and split systems, and a mix of public and private provision. Participation rates for children from three years are high, and ECCE is increasingly framed as a key mechanism for promoting equity and educational attainment (Eurydice, 2025).

Historically, Western European pedagogic traditions have emphasised play, autonomy and holistic development. However, increasing tendencies towards schoolification place pressure on ECCE settings to introduce more structured learning, with the role of play increasingly negotiated alongside curriculum frameworks and assessment regimes (Bingham and Whitebread, 2018; Moss, 2019; Fler, 2020; Wood, 2020).

Emotionally supportive relationships and interactions between adults and children are consistently identified as a key quality factor linked to stronger readiness outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children, within systems



that combine progressive pedagogical traditions with strong accountability cultures (OECD, 2021b; Siraj, 2021).

Southern Europe

In Southern Europe, ECCE has expanded significantly over recent decades, driven by policy objectives related to employment, social inclusion, and family support. Provision for children aged three to school entry is well established in many countries, with access for younger children more uneven (Eurydice, 2025).

Pedagogic approaches typically combine social pedagogical traditions with increasing curricular guidance. Play is widely valued, but practice often places stronger emphasis on socialisation, routines, and early academic behaviours. ECCE is frequently framed as supporting children's adjustment to group life and the expectations of formal schooling (Bingham and Whitebread, 2018).



Wellbeing and relationships are central, particularly in relation to continuity between home and ECCE settings. Strong relational practices are seen as supporting children's

emotional security and confidence as they approach school entry. Notable differences within this sub region include variation in workforce qualifications and pedagogical consistency, influencing how play and readiness are enacted in practice and how children experience transitions to school.

Eastern Europe

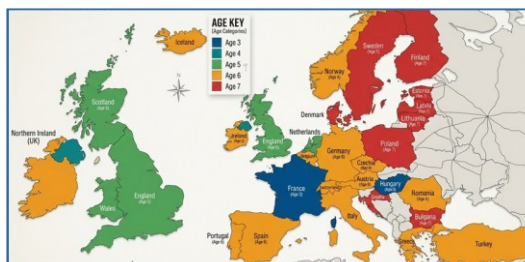
Eastern Europe reflects a distinct ECCE tradition, shaped by long standing engagement with psychological and educational theory. ECCE is often organised as a formal educational stage prior to school, with strong state involvement in curriculum design and pedagogical guidance (Fleer and Veresov, 2018).

Pedagogically, play is explicitly conceptualised as a leading activity for development and as central to higher mental functions, including self-regulation and imagination which are viewed as foundational for ‘school readiness’ (Fleer and Veresov, 2018; McClelland and Wanless, 2015).

Wellbeing and relationships are closely linked to developmental aims, including emotional development, motivation, and children’s social and relational contexts for learning. A notable feature of this sub region is the explicit theorisation of the relationship between play and learning, offering a more structured and intentional approach to ‘school readiness.’

School Starting age and what school looks like

While the modal age of entry to formal primary schooling across Europe is six, national systems vary considerably, with earlier



entry common in parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland and later entry typical in several Northern and Eastern European countries (Sharp, 2002; European Commission EACEA Eurydice, 2023; Eurydice, 2025). These differences are closely connected to how early schooling

is organised and to wider policy priorities relating to welfare provision, labour market participation and educational accountability (Urban, 2015; Moss, 2020).

The relationship between school starting age and what the first year of school looks like in practice remains significant. At the point of entry, systems differ in the balance between play and formal instruction, the pace at which academic expectations are introduced and the extent to which early schooling builds on, or departs from, ECCE practices (Dahlberg et al., 2013; OECD, 2017; Eurydice, 2025). In some European systems, 'readiness' is framed broadly to include wellbeing, curiosity, social competence and emotional regulation. In others, 'readiness' is more closely linked to expectations around literacy and numeracy, with greater emphasis placed on children's ability to meet established school routines and assessment benchmarks (Bingham and Whitebread, 2018; Ring et al., 2016).

In Northern European countries (e.g., Finland, Sweden and Estonia), where compulsory schooling begins at seven, early schooling is explicitly designed to maintain continuity with ECCE. Curricula in the initial years of school retain play-based pedagogy, flexible routines and a strong emphasis on wellbeing and relationships, introducing formal academic instruction gradually (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Kangas et

al., 2021; Skovbjerg et al., 2024). These long standing social pedagogic traditions resist early schoolification, positioning early schooling as an extension of childhood rather than an early academic threshold.

Western European systems, including the United Kingdom and Ireland, present a more mixed picture. In countries where compulsory schooling begins at five or six ECCE often emphasises play,



child-initiated activity and holistic development, while entry into school frequently involves longer days, more structured routines and increased emphasis on attainment (Eurydice, 2025; Ofsted, 2023). In practice, however, many children, particularly in England, enter school at four through reception classes. Although reception is formally part of the Early Years Foundation Stage, it is frequently experienced by children and enacted by schools as the beginning of formal schooling (Aubrey, 2004, Lee and Veale, 2025). This can intensify the shift away from early childhood pedagogic values at an earlier age than policy frameworks intend, creating additional tension between ECCE principles and the institutional expectations of early schooling, particularly in systems with strong accountability pressures.

Southern European countries (e.g., Italy, Spain and France) combine later school entry with well-established ECCE for children aged three to

six supporting children's adjustment to institutional routines prior to school entry (Eurydice, 2025). Early schooling tends to introduce clearer expectations around participation, behaviour and task engagement from the outset, with readiness partly framed in terms of children's capacity to function within structured group environments (Bingham and Whitebread, 2018).



Eastern European systems, influenced by cultural historical traditions, add further variation. In several Central and Eastern European countries, ECCE is treated as a formal educational stage with explicit developmental objectives. Although play is recognised as a leading activity for development, practice often involves more structured and intentional pedagogy than is typical in Northern Europe (Fleer and Veresov, 2018). Transitions into school may involve less curricular rupture while still requiring adjustment to new relational and institutional expectations.

Across European systems there are consistent associations between later school entry, play-based pedagogy and the development of self-regulation, emotional wellbeing and sustained engagement with

learning (Dee and Sievertsen, 2018; Davies, Cooper and Bains, 2020). However, evidence also indicates that later entry is most effective when paired with pedagogical continuity and alignment between ECCE and early schooling, rather than treated as a simple deferral of formal instruction (OECD, 2017).

Assessment and accountability frameworks further shape what early schooling looks like at the point of entry. In earlier starting systems, readiness is often reinforced through assessment practices that privilege measurable outcomes, such as in England, where Reception entry is accompanied by a statutory baseline assessment linked to later accountability measures, and France, where nationally standardised assessments are administered at the start of primary school in *cours préparatoire*, shaping early curricular priorities in literacy and numeracy (Archer, 2017; OECD, 2021a; Eurydice, 2025). In contrast, systems with stronger social pedagogical traditions are more likely to employ formative and observational approaches that integrate assessment within play-based practice, emphasising process quality over early attainment (Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024).

Transitions into school

Across Europe, transitions into school are shaped by how education systems organise ECCE, structure entry to school and align expectations between institutions. While national arrangements differ, shared patterns and persistent divergences are seen in how transition is enacted and prioritised in practice, particularly in relation to governance, pedagogy and accountability (Petriwskyj et al., 2005; OECD, 2017; Eurydice, 2025).

In practice, transition into school is increasingly treated as a process rather than a single point of transfer. Responsibility for continuity is therefore not located at the moment of entry alone, but sits across ECCE settings, schools and wider system structures. Transition commonly involves adjustment over time to new environments, routines and relationships, rather than a one-off test of ‘readiness’ at school entry (Petriwskyj et al., 2005; Ring et al., 2016).

Further shared features across European systems include the importance placed on relationships, play, wellbeing and the development of self-regulation (Ring et al., 2016). Policy and practice increasingly recognise that continuity of key adults where possible, emotionally supportive classroom environments and opportunities for

children to become familiar with new settings are key supports for children entering school, with play supporting emotional security and continuity during periods of change (OECD, 2021b; Bingham and Whitebread, 2018).

Alongside these similarities, transition practices differ in systematic ways. One key point of divergence concerns the degree of coherence between ECCE and early schooling. In some systems, early childhood provision and primary education are governed and regulated within closely aligned frameworks, supporting pedagogical continuity, professional expectations and daily practice. In others, early childhood settings and schools operate under distinct governance, curriculum and accountability arrangements, increasing the likelihood of discontinuity at school entry (Eurydice, 2025).

A second area of difference relates to how expectations at school entry are paced. In systems with later entry and stronger social pedagogical traditions, such as Finland and Sweden, early schooling typically introduces new expectations gradually, maintaining close alignment with early childhood practices around play, routines and relational security. In earlier starting systems and where continuity between ECCE and early primary is weaker, school entry is more commonly associated with full day attendance, more formal routines and early assessment.

This pattern can be seen in England, France and parts of Belgium, where structural and curricular divisions between early childhood provision and primary education result in sharper transitions and higher immediate expectations on children at the point of entry (OECD, 2017; OECD, 2021a; Archer, 2017; Eurydice, 2025; Montoya Fernández et al., 2024).



CASE STUDY: England, UK

Vincent, a summer-born child turning five in August, attended a nursery class. The nursery followed a free flow, play rich pedagogy, offering continuous indoor and outdoor access and high levels of child choice. Although eligible to remain in nursery for another year due to his summer birth, Vincent's parents were unaware of this option.

Practitioners described Vincent as confident, sociable and deeply engaged in outdoor construction, imaginative play and storytelling. He formed secure friendships, separated easily from his parents, and was highly familiar with the nursery's routines and expectations.

In September, Vincent transitioned into the first year of formal schooling. His initial week was positive: he enjoyed wearing his uniform, attending full days, and spoke warmly about his new teacher. However, midway through the second week, Vincent became distressed during morning arrival.

He cried when the bell rang and refused to enter the classroom, clinging to his mother and sibling. This pattern continued over subsequent weeks, despite a range of supportive strategies from both home and school. Vincent communicated clearly, both verbally and physically, that he did not want to enter the class.

Vincent's experience illustrates how system level arrangements shape transition into school, with his distress better understood as a response to rapid institutional change rather than as a deficit in 'readiness.'

Research consistently shows that discontinuities between ECCE and early schooling can heighten stress where children experience reduced autonomy, diminished relational security and abrupt shifts in expectations as Vincent experienced here (Petriwskyj et al., 2005; OECD, 2017; Rogers, 2021). Such experiences are more likely where responsibility for adjustment rests primarily with the child, rather than being shared across settings through coordinated transition planning.

The case highlights the importance of informed parental choice and flexible entry pathways at the point of school entry, with Vincent's missed eligibility for delayed entry reflecting how system design can

constrain flexibility for summer born children (DfE, 2023; Campbell, 2023). Evidence across Europe shows that transitions are most effective where systems embed coherence, relational continuity and adaptability, rather than assuming uniform readiness at a fixed age (Eurydice, 2025; Fabian and Dunlop, 2020; Moss, 2019).

Vincent's experience reinforces a consistent conclusion evident across European practice. The quality of transition into school is shaped primarily by structural and pedagogical design rather than by children's individual readiness alone. Transitions are most effectively supported where coherence, relational continuity and flexibility are built into early schooling arrangements.



Conclusion

Europe offers a wide and instructive range of approaches to ECE, school entry and transition, reflecting diverse welfare traditions, policy priorities and conceptions of childhood. This chapter demonstrates that, across Europe, rather than a fixed set of skills or characteristics located within individual children, ‘readiness’ is best understood as emerging from how education systems organise early education, structure entry to school and support continuity over time.

Across different European contexts, play-based pedagogy, emotionally supportive relationships and attention to wellbeing consistently underpin children’s engagement with early schooling, even where governance arrangements, funding models and accountability expectations differ. European experience also shows that what school looks like at the point of entry matters as much as the age at which children begin. Systems that maintain and respect pedagogical continuity between ECCE and early schooling and avoid premature formalisation, are more likely to support positive engagement, equity and longer-term learning outcomes.

The variation and commonalities observed across European approaches offer useful points for reflection on how ‘school readiness’

and transition are understood in other contexts. European experience suggests that greater coherence between ECCE and early schooling, particularly in pedagogy, expectations and professional practice, is often associated with smoother transition experiences for children. In contrast, where ECCE settings and schools operate under misaligned structures or expectations, transition is more likely to be experienced as a period of individual adjustment. Taken as a whole, the European case highlights the potential value of focusing on system alignment and continuity, rather than relying primarily on children and families to adapt between institutional contexts.

References

- Ahlgren, A. and Lundahl, C. (2026) 'Ready or not – ready for what? Reconceptualising school readiness as a socio-political boundary object in educational reform', *History of Education*, pp. 1–20.
- Archer, N. (2017) 'Where is the ethic of care in early childhood summative assessment?', *Global Studies of Childhood*, 7(4), pp. 357–368.
- Aubrey, C. (2004) 'Implementing the Foundation Stage in reception classes', *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5), pp. 633–656.
- Bingham, S. and Whitebread, D. (2018) School readiness in Europe: Issues and evidence. In: Fler, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 363–391.
- Broström, S., Einarsdottir, J. and Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2018) The Nordic perspective on early childhood education and care. In: Fler, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 867–889.
- Bubikova-Moan, J., Hjetland, H.N. and Wollscheid, S. (2019) 'ECE teachers' views on play-based learning: a systematic review', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 27(6), pp. 776–800.
- Campbell, T. (2023) 'Whose entry to primary school is deferred or delayed? Evidence from the English National Pupil Database', *Review of Education*, 11, e3409.
- Council of the European Union (2021) Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 223, pp. 14–23.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (2013) *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of evaluation*. 3rd edn. London: Routledge.

Davies, N., Cooper, R., and Bains, M. (2020) 'What is school readiness? A qualitative exploration of parental perceptions in England', *Journal of Health Visiting*, 8(8).

Dee, T.S. and Sievertsen, H.H. (2018) 'The gift of time? School starting age and mental health', *Health Economics*, 27(5), pp. 781–802.

Department for Education (DfE) (2023) Delayed school admissions for summer-born pupils: 2023, Research report RR1385. London: Department for Education.

European Commission. (2025). *Pathways to School Success*.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2023) *Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe – 2023: Early childhood education and care*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurydice (2025) *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A-W. (2020) *Transitions in the Early Years: Debating continuity and progression*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Fleer, M. and Veresov, N. (2018) Cultural-historical and activity theories informing early childhood education. In: Fleer, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 47–76.

Fleer, M. (2020) *Conceptual PlayWorlds: The role of imagination in play-based learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kangas, J., Ukkonen-Mikkola, T., Harju-Luukkainen, H., Ranta, S., Chydenius, H., Lahdenperä, J., Neitola, M., Kinos, J., Sajaniemi, N. and Ruokonen, I. (2021) Understanding different approaches to early childhood education pedagogy through tensions. *Education Sciences*, 11(12), Article 790.

Klippen, M. I. F., Moser, T., Reikerås, E. and Guldbrandsen, A. (2024) A review of trends in Scandinavian early childhood education and care research from 2006 to 2021. *Education Sciences*, 14(5), 478.

Lee, K. and Veale, V. (2025) School Readiness Matters: Embedded and Threaded Transitions. Available at: <https://www.tactyc.org.uk/school-readiness-matters>

McClelland, M. M., and Wanless, S. B. (2015) Introduction to the Special Issue: Self-Regulation Across Different Cultural Contexts. *Early Education and Development*, 26(5–6), pp. 609–614.

Montoya-Fernández, A., Vidal, J. and Ferreira, C. (2024) ‘Play-based assessment and developmental readiness in ECCE: rethinking accountability through pedagogy’, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, (in press).

Moss, P. (2019) *Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood Education: An Introduction for Students and Practitioners*. London: Routledge.

OECD (2017) *Starting Strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. OECD Publishing.

OECD (2021a) *Process quality, curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education and care*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (2021b) *Starting Strong VI: Supporting meaningful interactions in early childhood education and care*. OECD Publishing.

OECD (2025a) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (2025b) *Starting Strong VIII: Reducing inequalities by investing in early childhood education and care*. OECD Publishing.

Ofsted (2023) *International perspectives on early years*.

Petriwskyj, A., Thorpe, K. and Tayler, C. (2005) Trends in construction of transition to school in three western regions, 1990–2004. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 13(1), pp. 55–69.

Ring, E., Mhic Mhathúna, M., Moloney, M., Hayes, N., Breathnach, D., Stafford, P., Carswell, D., Keegan, S., Kelleher, C., McCafferty, D., O’Keeffe, A., Leavy, A., Madden, R. and Ozonyia, M. (2016) *An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Rogers, S. (2021) ‘Reframing school readiness: Children’s transitions to school in a changing policy landscape’, *Early Years*, 41(2), pp. 122–135.

Scottish Parliament (2024) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.

Sharp, C. (2002) *School starting age: European policy and recent research*. Slough: NFER.

Siraj, I. (2021) *Quality Interactions in Early Childhood*. London: UCL Press.

Skovbjerg, H. M., Ødegaard, E. E., Lund, O., Have, M., Jørgensen, H. H., Schrøder, V., Oreskov, S. and Boysen, M. S. W. (2024) Special issue on Nordic perspectives on play and playful approaches to pedagogy, teaching and learning: Editorial. *Nordisk tidsskrift for pedagogikk og kritikk*, 10(5), pp. 10–18.

Størksen, I., Lenes, R., ten Braak, D., McClelland, M. and Michnick Golinkoff, R. (2024) Quality in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care: Progress, Persistent Challenges, and Recommendations for the Future. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 53, pp. 2631–2640.

United Nations (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations.

Urban, M. (2015) *Not for Sale? Early childhood education as public good and public responsibility*. Brussels: Education International.

Wood, E. and Hedges, H. (2016) Curriculum in early childhood education: critical questions about content, coherence, and control. *The Curriculum Journal*, 27(3), pp. 387–405.

Wood, E. (2020) ‘Pedagogical approaches to play and learning’, in Brooker, L., Blaise, M. and Edwards, S. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE, pp. 145–159.

Oceania

Dr Hazel Woodhouse, Dr Kathryn Murray and Fran Myers-Baird



Introduction

The Oceania geo-scheme includes a grouping of countries in the Pacific region, including Australia, New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Within this region, both Australia and New Zealand are often examined together due to their geographic proximity, shared colonial histories, and comparable education systems. Australians and New Zealanders refer to each other as being ‘across the ditch’ meaning the strip of Pacific Ocean that separates the two continents. While there are similarities and differences culturally and economically the Aussies (Australians) and the Kiwi’s (New Zealanders) have an aligned focus on the importance of early childhood care and education. This chapter examines how national context influences early childhood education,

schooling, and transition practices, focusing on intersections and divides in the shaping of the systems in each setting.

Australia



Australia is a vast island continent and home to around 27.8 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025). Most Australians live in urban coastal

cities with the interior of the country being arid and remote. Australia has a robust economy driven by mining, services, agriculture and tourism. It is a democracy under a constitutional monarchy, where the King of England serves as ceremonial Head of State, but elected representatives hold the governing power. This is a multicultural nation, enriched by global migration, and delivers early childhood care and education (0-8 years) to diverse learners through a mixture of private, government and non-profit-supported kindergartens, long day care, in-home care, outside school hours care and family day care options designed to support children and families.

New Zealand

New Zealand is geographically made up of two main islands: the North Island and South Island, along with a number of smaller surrounding islands. New Zealand has a population of



approximately 5.34 million (Stats NZ, 2026) and is culturally diverse, including Māori, Pacific, and migrant communities. Like Australia, New Zealand is a democracy under a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch serving as the official Head of State. In addition, New Zealand recognises the significance of its bicultural foundation through the Treaty of Waitangi. Within te ao Māori, there is also the Kīngitanga (Māori King movement), who provides a unifying form of leadership, with the current Māori Queen holding significant cultural, spiritual, and political importance for many iwi (reflecting the partnership and ongoing relationship between Māori and the Crown).

New Zealand has a stable parliamentary democracy, with the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2026) overseeing a publicly funded system across the country. Education policy prioritises participation, equity, and inclusion, supporting children's holistic learning and wellbeing.

Exploration of Early Childhood Care and Education within Oceania

Exploration of Early Childhood Care and Education within Oceania highlights both shared priorities and significant variation across countries. It is recognised that geo-schemes are vast and encompass diverse political, cultural, and economic contexts, with particular attention to how these differences influence access, quality, and participation in early learning. The discussion first considers Australia, followed by New Zealand, to provide a structured comparison of ECCE systems across the region.

Australia

Early childhood care and education is overseen by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2018), which outlines the National Quality Framework (NQF), providing a robust national regulatory system for quality assurance and consistency. The NQF mandates and monitors: educator-to-child ratios, staff qualifications, and enforces minimum standards of care and education for all children (ACECQA, 2026; Care for Kids, 2024).

Australia's early childhood care and education (ECCE) system is underpinned by state and federal funding, primarily through the Child

Care Subsidy (CCS), to improve access and affordability for families. From 2026, this includes the “Three Day Guarantee” providing eligible families 72 hours of subsidised care per fortnight (Services Australia, 2026). ECCE provision in Australia operates across urban, regional, and rural contexts and includes a range of service models.

In contrast, where funding, geography, and access to services shape provision, remote and rural areas, particularly First Nations communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, face acute challenges related to isolation and staffing shortages. As a result, services



rely on mobile playgroups that deliver outreach to isolated sites, coordinated family day care spanning vast distances, occasional or flexible care for sporadic needs, and culturally attuned outside school hours programs funded through the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF), along with dedicated First Nations-specific grants. Funding prioritises local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to weave in community languages, kinship structures, and land-based learning while tackling barriers to transport and high turnover (Closing the Gap, 2022).

New Zealand

Following the Australian context, the discussion now turns to New Zealand, highlighting both similarities and distinct approaches within the Oceania region.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) plays an important role in the learning and development of young children in New Zealand, supporting their wellbeing, relationships, and early learning pathways. Participation in ECCE is high, particularly in the years before school. Census data from 2023 showed participation rates of around 16% for children under one year of age, increasing with age, and reaching approximately 87% for four-year-olds (Education Counts, 2024).

A diverse range of ECCE services is available to children and families (MoE, 2025). Many services are teacher-led, meaning at least 50% of teachers must hold an approved ECCE teaching qualification. These include education and care centres, home-based services, and kindergartens, where all teachers are typically fully qualified. Other services are parent- or whānau-led, such as playcentres, playgroups, Pacific early childhood groups, and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust settings, which provide total immersion in te reo Māori. All early

learning services are licensed or certificated by the Ministry of Education.

ECCE in New Zealand is guided by Te Whāriki, the national curriculum for all early learning services. Its vision is for children to grow as “competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (MoE, 2017, p. 5). This vision aligns closely with the goals of schooling and supports smooth transitions to school.

ECCE funding includes government subsidies such as the 20 Hours ECCE scheme for children aged three to five. Ratios vary by age, with lower ratios required for younger children to support safety and responsive care. More recently, changes to funding and pay parity policies have created uncertainty for the sector, particularly regarding the ability of services to maintain high levels of qualified teachers and equitable pay (The Office of Early Childhood Education, 2026).

Regardless of the early childhood context the following requirements must be implemented:

Country	Educator to Child Ratios	Educator Qualifications	Administrator
Australia	1:4 for infants (0-24 months), 1:5 for toddlers (24-36 months), 1:10-1:11 for preschoolers (36 months to school age)	Certificate III in Early Childhood 50% of educators in the service must hold a Diploma in Early Childhood Services must have access to an Early Childhood Teacher in accordance with National Regulations, based on service size (usually the kindergarten teacher)	Nominated Supervisor - A person appointed to manage the day-to-day operations. Educational Leader – A person who leads and supports the development of the educational program and pedagogy.
New Zealand	Infants: 1:5 (0-24 months), 1:6 children aged 2 years + 2:20 children if more than 6 children aged 2 years + and further adults for every additional 10 children	Teacher-led centres must employ at least 50% of teaching staff who are ECCE qualified. But the Ministry of Education does not require that any or all the ECCE qualified teaching staff be present and supervising children	Person Responsible – ensures regulatory compliance when the service is operating. Centre Manager / Supervisor – operational leadership (role titles vary by service)

Early childhood practices and standards are regularly assessed using evidence supplied by the service that identifies whether they are: working toward; meeting; or exceeding the seven NQS. An additional excellence rating is also available for exceptional early childhood services.

Starting School

Across Oceania, school starting ages vary, reflecting differences in local policy and resources, with many Pacific island nations beginning formal schooling between ages five and seven years old. By contrast, in Australia and New Zealand, children typically start school at age five, providing a point of comparison within the region.

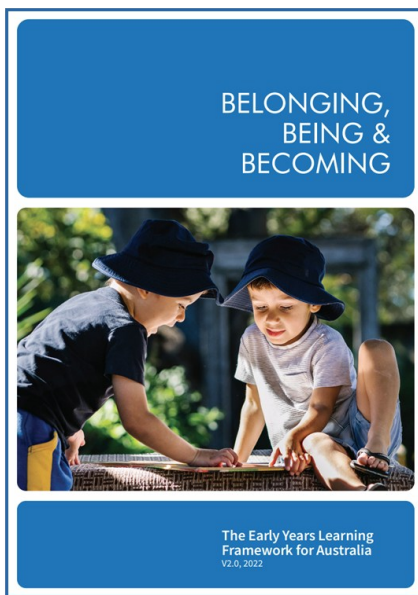
Australia

In Australia, children typically commence formal schooling in the year they turn 5, beginning a preparatory year known as Prep, Kindergarten, or Foundation depending on the state or territory. While participation requirements vary across jurisdictions, the national compulsory schooling age is 6. Cut-off dates vary by state - for instance, 30 June in Queensland and Western Australia, or 31 July in New South Wales,

resulting in variation in the age at which children start school (Services Australia, 2026).

School education in Australia is delivered through three sectors: government, catholic, and independent, all operating under state and territory regulation, with variation in school models and pedagogical approaches. Schooling is guided by the Australian Curriculum, which outlines learning expectations across core subject areas including English, Mathematics, Science, and Humanities.

Early childhood education typically emphasises play-based learning, while primary education curricula prioritise literacy and numeracy, with variation across Australian jurisdictions and schooling sectors. This pedagogical shift is accompanied by differences in learning contexts. Class sizes in primary schools generally range between 22 and 30 students, while in early childhood classrooms, group sizes are determined by children's age and mandated child to educator ratios. These differences are characteristic of the transition to formal schooling.



Prior to formal schooling, early childhood education in Australia is guided by the Early Years Learning Framework (AGDE, 2022), which includes five Learning Outcomes to support children's: wellbeing; being connected to and contributing to their world. States and territories may also implement jurisdiction-specific curriculum guidelines that operate alongside national learning

frameworks. These state-based documents support local policy priorities, funding arrangements, while remaining aligned with national directions. For example, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VSGDE, 2026); the Western Australian Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines and the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guidelines (QCAA, 2024).

Schools and early childhood care and education services are encouraged to establish reciprocal connections prior to school through transition practices that strengthen continuity of relationships and learning across settings, including engagement with children,

educators, and families. (ACECQA, 2023; NSW Department of Education, 2022).

New Zealand

In New Zealand, children can begin school as New Entrants (NE) between the ages of five and six. While many children start school soon after their fifth birthday, families have some flexibility about when to enrol. However, children must be enrolled in a school or registered for home education by their sixth birthday (New Zealand Government, 2024). Because children can start at different times during the year, it is common for a child to begin school on their own start date, rather than as part of a large intake group.

More recently, some schools have introduced a cohort entry approach, where children start school in small groups at set times during the term. This model aims to support smoother transitions by helping children settle into school routines alongside peers who are starting at the same time (MoE, 2024a).

In 2025, alongside updates to the national curriculum (MoE, 2024b), the Ministry of Education announced new expectations for assessing

early literacy skills. Schools are now required to check children’s ability to connect sounds and letters after approximately 20 and 40 weeks of schooling (MoE, 2024c). These changes introduce more structured assessment at the beginning of school and have prompted discussion about how to balance formal learning requirements with the broader, holistic learning approaches that are strongly emphasised in Early Childhood Care and Education.

Geo-scheme Entry Age Comparisons

Country	Entry age	ECCE Framework/Curriculum
Australia	5 years of age, by a cut-off date which varies between states and territories.	Early Years Learning Framework and jurisdiction-specific curriculum guidelines
New Zealand	Turning 5 on their birthday and no cut-offs across Years 1-13.	Te Whāriki early childhood framework

Considering brain development and transition

Children’s experiences during the first five years of life relate directly to adult dispositions and productivity (Harvard University, 2026).

Experiences during these years align with critical periods of brain development. Protective factors to support the growth of neural pathways include respectful relationships, gentle transitions, predictable routines, and playful pedagogical approaches. (Harvard University, 2026; Murray, 2024). Transitioning from early childhood to formal schooling requires the review of classroom environment design. Designing an environment where the brain experiences a sense of safety and feels emotionally connected creates the foundation for learning in new and adaptive contexts. This is done by maintaining early childhood pedagogical approaches during the initial transition to school. Easing children into formal schooling could look like the Year 1 classroom maintaining many of the open-ended learning spaces seen in early childhood rooms. For example, including a couch and reading space, dramatic play area, block construction space, collage and painting areas in the room for the first school term allows children to gracefully and gradually adjust to the new expectations and requirements of primary school.

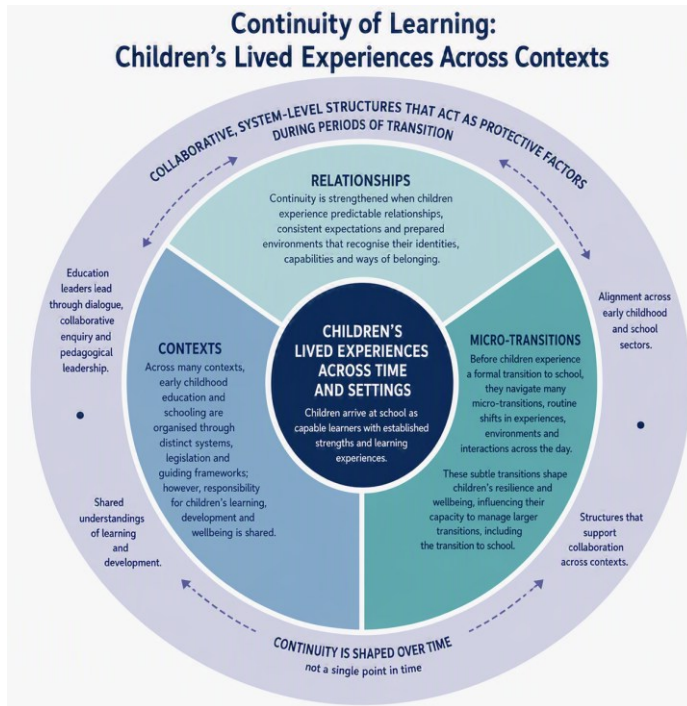
This gradual entry forms a bridge from one context to another. It allows children to develop confidence, independence, and security while developing relationships with children, teachers and the new environment. Once security is found, the brain relaxes and learning happens easily. Academic learning will happen naturally as children

develop and mature in a familiar and comfortable classroom environment (Murray, 2025).

Exploring transition: Examples from Oceania

Continuity of learning is strengthened when children experience predictable relationships, consistent expectations and prepared environments that recognise their identities, capabilities and ways of belonging. Children arrive at school as capable learners with established strengths and learning experiences. Continuity is most effectively sustained when teachers and educators' knowledge of children and their learning is supported by collaborative, system-level structures that act as protective factors during periods of transition.

A substantial body of research has examined transitions to school as complex and interconnected processes shaped over time. Rather than being understood as a single point in time, transition is increasingly conceptualised as an ongoing process influenced by relationships, contexts and the alignment of experiences across early childhood and school settings (Page et al., 2025).



Pedersen et al. (2023) describe that, before they experience a formal transition to school, children navigate many micro-transitions, routine shifts in experiences, environments and interactions across the day. The success of these subtle transitions shape children's resilience and wellbeing, influencing their capacity to manage larger transitions, including the transition to school. Evidence from the Australian Government Department of Education (n.d.), through the Australian Early Development Census, demonstrates that participation in kindergarten acts as a protective factor. Children who attend quality

early childhood services enter school with stronger developmental outcomes, and these advantages are sustained across their schooling years.

Across many contexts, early childhood education and schooling are organised through distinct systems, legislation and guiding frameworks; however, responsibility for children's learning, development and wellbeing is shared. Transitions to formal schooling are most effective when systems create the conditions to recognise and support the whole child, including wrap-around approaches that strengthen relationships and continuity across the systems surrounding children and families.

This contribution examines how continuity is influenced through the work of education leaders operating across interconnected layers of the education system. Central to this work is an understanding of children's lived experiences across settings. In Australia, early childhood and school contexts will often have an education leader who leads through dialogue, collaborative enquiry and pedagogical leadership, fosters shared understandings that strengthen continuity of learning across contexts.

From a system-level perspective, continuity of learning during the transition to school is influenced by how education systems are organised to support all children across their learning trajectories. Framing transition systemically highlights the roles of policies, structures and system-wide arrangements, positioning responsibility for continuity beyond individual children, families and carers. Alignment across early childhood and school sectors, shared understandings of learning and development, and structures that support collaboration act as key enabling conditions for continuity.

In some geographical and socio-economic contexts, education leaders across early childhood and school settings are engaging in collaborative practices that support continuity of learning for children and families. These examples demonstrate the potential of system-level dialogue to strengthen continuity across contexts.

When educators, leaders and families work together to support continuity, transitions to school are more coherent and responsive to children's sense of belonging, wellbeing and engagement.

Case Study 1

An example within one Australian school-based context is the use of multi age groupings, where pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and foundation school age children learn together within a carefully prepared learning environment. This approach supports continuity of learning by reducing spatial, relational and pedagogical transitions from early childhood education into the first years of formal schooling.

The approach is informed by the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori (1967), which conceptualises learning across Planes of Development, with the first plane encompassing early childhood from approximately three to six years.

A defining feature of this example is the emphasis on time and relationships. Educators engage with children over extended periods, enabling the development of reciprocal, trusting relationships and a deep understanding of children's interests, strengths and learning trajectories. This continuity supports responsive practice and contributes to an environment in which children feel safe, supported and confident to engage in learning.

Case Study 2

In a different educational context, continuity of learning was strengthened through collaborative, cross sector leadership shaping transition practices across early childhood and school settings. Rather than examining a particular organisational model, this example highlights how leadership working across system layers can support children, families and educators by positioning continuity as a shared responsibility.

Instead of prioritising alignment between frameworks, the collaborative work centred on developing shared understandings of children's developmental domains, learning trajectories and wellbeing, reinforcing a whole child perspective across contexts. This work was informed by shared reference points that emphasise children's development and learning across time, enabling educators and allied health professionals to draw on a common, evidence informed language across early childhood and school contexts.

Through ongoing dialogue, educators worked alongside allied health professionals, children and families to develop shared understandings of children's strengths and support needs.

These discussions drew on family perspectives, cultural knowledge and community contexts to maintain coherence in how children were understood across settings.

In this way, continuity was enacted through shared understanding across system layers, rather than through a single event or moment of transition.



Conclusion

Examining early childhood care and education, school entry, and transition practices across two countries in Oceania highlights both shared priorities and key differences between Australia and New Zealand. Both countries demonstrate strong participation in early childhood, established regulatory frameworks, and a common school starting age. However, Australia's federal system creates variation across states and territories, while New Zealand maintains a more nationally consistent approach shaped by centralised policy and the influence of a common early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.

Across both contexts, there is a clear commitment to quality, inclusion, and supporting children's early development. At the same time, challenges remain, including equitable access in rural and remote areas, workforce sustainability, and balancing play-based learning with increasing formal expectations in the early years of school.

A key theme across the chapter is the importance of continuity of learning and effective transition practices. Transitions are most successful when supported by strong relationships, shared understandings and alignment between sectors. These approaches help children feel secure, confident, and engaged as they begin school.

Identifying positive practices across this geo-scheme provides a valuable blueprint for future policy and systemic change, strengthening transition approaches that have the potential to benefit children, educators and families.

Looking forward, as curriculum and assessment approaches evolve, it is critical that these key principles remain at the heart of practice, supporting inclusive and positive transitions that help young learners feel confident, capable, and ready for their learning journey.



Glossary

ACECQA (the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority) - an independent national authority that supports the implementation of the National Quality Framework across Australia.

Iwi- A Māori tribe or extended kinship group, descended from a common ancestor and linked to a specific territory/area.

Māori- Māori are the Indigenous people of New Zealand (Aotearoa, with a rich culture, language, (te reo Māori), and strong connections to land, ancestry, and community.

National Quality Standards - The National Quality Standards (NQS) are a central part of the National Quality Framework (NQF), incorporating seven quality areas. Services are regularly assessed against the standards to ensure high-quality early childhood education is maintained throughout Australia.

Te Whāriki- A Māori term meaning “woven mat”, symbolising how children's learning and development are woven together through relationships, experiences, and culture.

Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) - An 1840 agreement between Māori chiefs and the British Crown establishing partnership, recognising Māori rights, and forming the foundation of New Zealand's governance.

References:

ACECQA (2026) *National Quality Framework*. Available at: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>

ACECQA (2023) *Continuity of learning and transitions*. Available at: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/InformationSheet_EYLF-Continuity%20of%20lear_Practices.pdf

Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE] (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025) *Welcome to the Australian Bureau of Statistics*. Available from: [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

Australian Curriculum (2026) *Structure / The Australian Curriculum (Version 8.4)*. Available at: <https://v8.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/structure/>

Australian Government Department of Education. (n.d.). *Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)*. Available at: <https://www.aedc.gov.au>

Australian Government Department of Education. (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Version 2.0)*. Available at : <https://www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework>

Australian Government Department of Education. (n.d.). *Preschool education in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/preschool>

Care for Kids (2024) *Childcare ratios and qualifications*. Available at: <https://www.careforkids.com.au/blog/childcare-ratios-and-qualifications->

Closing the Gap (2022) *Sector Strengthening Plan: Early Childhood Care and Development*. Available at: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/sector-strengthening-plan-early-childhood-care-development.pdf>

Crown Relocations (2026) *NZ vs Australia School System*. Available at: <https://www.crownrelo.com.au/nz-vs-australia-schools/>

Education Counts (2024) *Annual ECE census 2023: Fact sheets*. Available at: <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/annual-early-childhood-education-census/annual-ece-census-2023-fact-sheets>

Harvard University. Centre of the Developing Child. (2026). Brain Architecture. Available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/brain-architecture/>

Ministry of Education (2017) *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media. Available at: [https://tewhariki.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/public/Key-documents/Files/Te-](https://tewhariki.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/public/Key-documents/Files/Te-Whariki-)

Ministry of Education (2024a) *Cohort or group entry for children starting school*. Available at: <https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/starting-school/cohort-or-group-entry-children-starting-school>

Ministry of Education (2024b) *New Zealand curriculum refresh*. Available at: <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/new-zealand-curriculum-online/new-zealand-curriculum/new-zealand-curriculum-refresh/5637144667.c>

Ministry of Education (2024c) *Phonics checks*. Available at:
<https://tahurangi.education.govt.nz/newphonics-checks>

Ministry of Education (2025) *Types of ECE services*. Available at:
<https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/running-ece-centre/establishing-a-certified-puna-kohungahunga-maori-language-playgroup/types-of-ece-services>

Montessori, M. (1967) *The absorbent mind*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Murray, K. (2024). What do learning environments, wellbeing and playful learning have in common? *Cache Alumni*, 7. 30-33

Murray, K. (2025). Aligning learning environments with the needs of the brain. *The voice of early childhood*. Available at:
<https://thevoiceofearlychildhood.com/projects/astrea-academy-trust-project/#1>

New Zealand Government (2024) *How to enrol your child at school in New Zealand*. Available at:
<https://www.govt.nz/browse/education/school-and-college/how-to-enrol-your-child-at-school-in-nz/>

NSW Department of Education (2022) *Regional and remote*. Available at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/>...

Office of Early Childhood Education (2026) Structural indicators of quality (e.g.) Ratios and group size. Available at:
<https://oece.nz/public/information/childcare-choices/structural-indicators/#:~:text=In%20centres%20operating%20for%20more,further%20adults%20for%20every%20additional>

Page, J., McLean Davies, L., Ziebell, N., Mentha, S., Canobi, K. and Hinton Herrington, M. (2025) *Transitions literature review*.

Melbourne: Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, for State of Queensland (Department of Education).

Pedersen, L., Bakken, A.R.B., Johannessen, K. and Bøyum, S. (2023) '*Teachers' interactions with children in micro-level transitions in Norwegian preschools*', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 32(2), pp. 236–247.

Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2024). Queensland kindergarten learning guideline - QKLG 2024: Nurturing confident and creative lifelong learners. [Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority](#).

Queensland Government (n.d.) *Kindergarten funding*. Brisbane: Department of Education. Available at: <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/grants-and-funding/kindergarten-funding>

Services Australia (2026) *Child Care Subsidy changes*. Available at: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-changes?context=41186>

Services Australia (2026) *School years*. Available at: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/school-years?context=60007>

Stats NZ (2026) *National population estimates: 31 December 2025*. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand. Available at: <https://www.stats.govt.nz>

The Office of Early Childhood Education (2026) *The 13 big changes the government has made to ECE: News analysis, 19 March 2026*. Available at: <https://oece.nz/newsroom/stories/ece-reform-13-big-changes-government-has-made/>

Victoria State Government Department of Education (2026). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Available at:

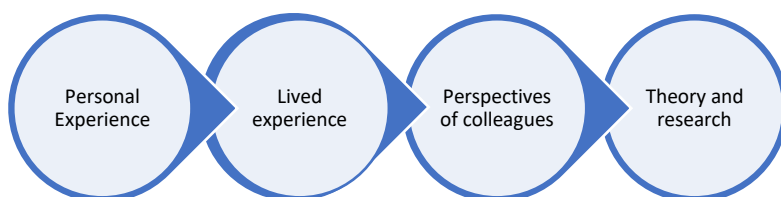
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/Victorian-Early-Years-Learnin...>

Victorian Government (2026) *Educator to child ratios in early childhood services*. Available at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/educator-child-ratios-early-childhood-services>

Conclusion: Bridging the Divide – A Critical Evaluation of Global School Readiness and Transitions

Kerrie Lee, Matthew Northall and Viki Veale

This book has plotted a complex global landscape of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), unveiling that while the shared goal of universal access is a global priority under SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2015) and the subsequent Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap (UNESCO, 2020), the practicality of ‘school readiness’ and the experience of transition are deeply rooted in regional economic, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Mirroring the Three Pillars of Sustainability (WCED, 1987), the variations in global approach can be unpacked through Stephen Brookfield’s (2017) critical reflection model. The filtration of approaches to international transition through a multitude of analytical lenses we move beyond institutional assumptions to explore, discover and influence future comparative analysis.



Adapted from Brookfield's (2017) Model of Reflection

Reframing Readiness: Moving Beyond a Discourse of Cognitive Skill Sets

A central theme across geo-schemes is the conflict between Western-centric, individualised notions of readiness and holistic or indigenous epistemologies. The unpacking of these tensions requires practitioners, parents, politicians and us as individuals to firstly engage with the personal experience lens, exploring customs, educational cultures and individually held beliefs. A failure to reflect on one's own educational history risks inadvertently falling into the trap of ethnocentrism. This consequently leads to internalised beliefs that our own local context is inherently correct othering approaches outside of our immediate experience. Once we challenge our own baseline biases, an ethological shift comes into sight. In the African context, for example, scholarship continues to move the needle from purely cognitive performance to an 'ecological' approach where the philosophy of Ubuntu and social responsibility is seen as the dominant discourse around 'school readiness.'

Increasingly, there is a critical consensus that 'readiness' is not a deficit to be 'fixed' but a measure of the system's ability to provide. Within the Asia geo-scheme, this is positioned as a relationship between the child's diverse home experiences—often in multi-generational

households—and the environments they are entering. A critical analysis of this relationship is benefited from looking through the lens of lived experience. Entering a new educational environment causes children to enter a period of disequilibrium as they work through who can be trusted and how things work.

Analysing transitions through the learners' lived experience affords opportunities to confront how the child experiences the attachment and educational structures that have preceded them. To support this reframing of transition, chapters have explored themes such as the fundamental importance of 'play' and idea of 'Quality Access.'

A Paradox of Quality Access

The many definitions surrounding the concept of quality reinforce the need to reflect on the purpose of education and the wider systemic influences that impose power, hierarchy, and standardisation on our beliefs and values in ECCE. Such power dynamics can be navigated using the lens of our colleagues' experiences learning from the international context through rigorous engagement with peer-reviewed research to expand our professional horizons. By actively listening to our global colleagues, we distance ourselves from rigid

behavioural universalism (the concept that child development can be compared internationally with only minor variations). This instead, allows us to adopt cultural relativism, honouring, respecting and elevating the ways individual families, societies and communities behave.

Due to the rapid expansion of ECCE enrolment globally, structural expansion often outpaces quality control. This causes a 'downward extension of primary school' that risks compressing early years settings and compromising developmentally appropriate practice. Likewise, resource disparities are a key concern across many of the geo-schemes where a critical gap emerges between ambitious national policies and financial reality. For example, despite recommendations for a 10% budget allocation to ECCE in Africa, the average spend remains below 2% resulting in staggering staff-to-child ratios often exceeding 1:50.

There are also regulatory variations that impact quality access. In Oceania, the contrast between New Zealand's nationally consistent Te Whāriki curriculum and Australia's state-varied federal system highlights how contrasting government and national priorities can directly influence the continuity of a child's transition experience.

Continuity and Pedagogy: The Challenge of Play

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 7 includes seven “features of early childhood” (2005, p. 3) that address the uniqueness of early childhood and young children’s lived realities, advocating that children under the age of 8 learn and explore through the genre of play. Whilst across geo-schemes play is recognized as a primary driver of learning, its application at the point of transition remains uncertain. When viewed through the lens of theoretical literature a tension emerges between policy accountability metrics and developmental theory. Most global models of ‘school readiness’ acknowledge that it should focus on a child’s capacity for learning; however, contemporary policy trends and a Eurocentric focus on ‘school readiness’ has steadily pulled it toward a set of prescribed academic targets.

In China, this tension is manifest as play is often viewed as a learning vehicle, resulting in adult-led learning rather than child-initiated learning. We acknowledge that transition linked to ‘school readiness’ often marks a significant shift from play-based environments to teacher-led instruction. The Thai local school case study highlights the tension this brings. If we view this tension through the combined lenses of the learner’s eyes and theoretical scholarship, we observe children

who are expected to adapt quickly to routine and discipline with limited individualised support or focus on emotional wellbeing. Therefore, whilst play is globally heralded as the primary driver of learning and enshrined as a Right in Article 31 of the UNCRC (1989), its application at the point of transition into ‘school readiness’ remains precarious.

Success Factors for Future Practice

A significant finding within this text is that successful transitions are not defined merely by chronological age but through an alignment of expectations. Success in future approaches to ‘school readiness’ globally is contingent on several key factors. Firstly, innovative practices (such as India’s ‘Healthy Planet School’) demonstrate the value of family-school partnerships and intergenerational learning in building continuity. Secondly, it highlights that there are inherent risks associated with uncritical universal access. While a socially just ideal, it can inadvertently further disadvantage marginalised groups (children with SEND or summer born children) unless interventions targeting local, context specific needs (such as those seen in the mobile kindergartens of Mongolia) are enacted.

Finally, the text highlights that global, sustainable improvements require multisectoral approaches and legislative frameworks that move

away from fragmented, volatile education budgets. Instead of viewing transition as a single event, marked by standardised procedures, we should instead reframe this as a highly nuanced, slow process that begins well before the first day of school and extends into the academic year.

Closing Remarks

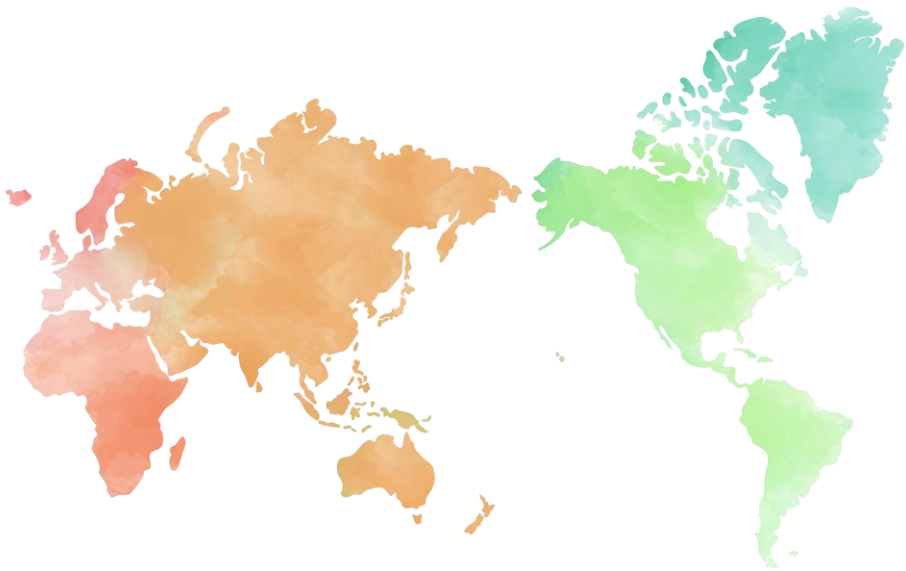
The global ‘transition gap’ will only be fully addressed when geo-schemes move from the narrow discourse of ‘preparing the child for school’ and instead replace this with the edifying discourse of ‘preparing the school for the child’. Such a move requires a deep respect for the diverse pathways children take into learning, navigating the complex challenges of resource management, and integrating local research.

Through the active application of Brookfield’s (1995) reflective model (confronting our personal biases, centring the child’s lived experiences, collaborating with international colleagues, and grounding systems in critical theory) the global ECCE sector can unmask hidden assumptions and challenge systemic inequalities. Above all else, success in school transition requires the continuity of play, the fostering of meaningful

parent-teacher partnerships, and the absolute assurance that the first steps into formal education are characterised by belonging rather than a shift into unnecessary academic pressure. We again emphasise our ultimate wish.

‘...for every child to love and enjoy school settings from their very first experience’.

(Lee and Veale, 2025, p. 118).



Reference List

Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Lee, K., and Veale, V., 2025. Conclusion. In K. Lee and V. Veale (Eds.), *School readiness matters: Threaded and embedded transitions* (p. 118). TACTYC. Available at: [School Readiness Matters | Tactyc](#)

Marshall, J., 2019. *Introduction to comparative and international education* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Penn, H., 2008. *Understanding early childhood: Issues and controversies* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005. General comment No. 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1). Refworld.

UNESCO, 2015. *Sustainable Development Goals*. United Nations.

UNESCO, 2020. *Education for sustainable development: A roadmap*. UNESCO Digital Library.

United Nations, 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, 3.

World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. *Our common future*. Oxford University Press.

References

A

- ACECQA (2026) *National Quality Framework*. Available at: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>
- ACECQA (2023) *Continuity of learning and transitions*. Available at: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/InformationSheet_EYLF-Continuity%20of%20lear_Practices.pdf
- Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE] (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council.
- Aide et Action (2020). *School Readiness Toolkit*. Available at: https://action-education.org/sea/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2022/07/AEA_SchoolReadinessToolkit_ip14_web_.pdf
- Ahlgren, A. and Lundahl, C. (2026) 'Ready or not – ready for what? Reconceptualising school readiness as a socio-political

boundary object in educational reform', *History of Education*, pp. 1–20.

- Ahnert, L., Gunnar, M.R., Lamb, M.E. and Barthel, M. (2004) 'Transition to childcare: Associations with infant–mother attachment, infant negative emotion, and cortisol elevations', *Child Development*, 75(3), pp. 639–650. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/chidev/article-abstract/75/3/639/8275218?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., and Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Archer, N. (2017) 'Where is the ethic of care in early childhood summative assessment?', *Global Studies of Childhood*, 7(4), pp. 357–368. doi: 10.1177/2043610617747983.
- Artavia, R., Ilie-Cardoza, C. and Fernández, A. (2024) 'The Evolution of Education in Costa Rica: Challenges and Opportunities', *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*. Available at: <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/the-evolution-of-education-in-costa-rica-challenges-and-opportunities/>
- Arabandi, V. (2024) *A brief history of ECCE policy in India*. Available at: <https://rocketlearning.org/2-brief-history-of-ecce-policy-in-india/>

- Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) (2022) *Final report on transition*. Available at: https://arnec.net/sites/default/files/2022-07/Final_report_on_Transition.pdf
- Azim Premji Foundation (2019) *State of the Education Report for India 2019: Children with Disabilities*. Bengaluru: Azim Premji University. Available at: <https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/resources/state-education-report-india-2019-children-disabilities>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025) Welcome to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Available from: [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
- Australian Curriculum (2026) *Structure / The Australian Curriculum (Version8.4)*. Available at: <https://v8.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/structure/>
- Australian Government Department of Education. (n.d.). *Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)*. Available at: <https://www.aedc.gov.au>
- Australian Government Department of Education. (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Version 2.0). <https://www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework>

- Australian Government Department of Education. (n.d.). *Preschool education in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government. Available at:
<https://www.education.gov.au/preschool>

B

- Baradha, G. (n.d.) *ECCE in India – ECCE / ECE / ECD*. Available at:
<https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/hsp10/chapter/ecce-in-india-ecce-ece-eed/> Barakat B, Bengtsson S. (2017) *What do we mean by school entry age? Conceptual ambiguity and its implications: the example of Indonesia*. *Comp Educ*. 2017 Sep 8;54(2):203-224. Available at [What do we mean by school entry age? Conceptual ambiguity and its implications: the example of Indonesia - PMC](#)
- Bautista, A., Yu, J., Lee, K. and Sun, J. (2023) 'Impact of play-based pedagogies in selected Asian contexts: what do we know and how to move forward?', in *Effective Teaching Around the World*. Cham: Springer, pp. 473–488. Available at:
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31678-4_21
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books

- Bowlby, J. (1988) *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. London: Routledge.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Britto, P. R., Lye, S. J., Proulx, K., Yousafzai, A. K., Matthews, S. G., Vaivada, T., Perez-Escamilla, R., Rao, N., Ip, P., Fernald, L. C. H., MacMillan, H., Hanson, M., Wachs, T. D., Yao, H., Yoshikawa, H., Cerezo, A., Leckman, J. F., Bhutta, Z. A., and Early Childhood Development Interventions Review Group, for the Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee (2017). Nurturing care: promoting early childhood development. *Lancet (London, England)*, 389(10064), 91–102.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31390-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31390-3)
- Bingham, S. and Whitebread, D. (2018) School readiness in Europe: Issues and evidence. In: Flear, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 363-391
- Broström, S., Einarsdottir, J. and Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2018) The Nordic perspective on early childhood education and care. In: Flear, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 867–889.

- Bubikova-Moan, J., Hjetland, H.N. and Wollscheid, S. (2019) 'ECE teachers' views on play-based learning: a systematic review', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 27(6), pp. 776–800.

C

- Campbell, T. (2023) 'Whose entry to primary school is deferred or delayed? Evidence from the English National Pupil Database', *Review of Education*, 11, e3409.
- Canada.ca National progress report on early childcare 2021 – 2022 (online) <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/national-progress-2021-2022.html>
- Care for Kids (2024) *Childcare ratios and qualifications*. Available at: <https://www.careforkids.com.au/blog/childcare-ratios-and-qualifications->
- CEOWORLD magazine (2025) *Ranked: Safest cities in the world 2025*. Available at: <https://ceoworld.biz/2025/05/12/ranked-safest-cities-in-the-world-2025/>
- Chen, J, Park, A. (2021) *School entry age and educational attainment in developing countries: Evidence from China's compulsory education law*. [*Journal of Comparative Economics*](#)

[Volume 49, Issue 3](#), September 2021, Pages 715-732. Available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147596720300846>

- Closing the Gap (2022) *Sector Strengthening Plan: Early Childhood Care and Development*. Available at: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/sector-strengthening-plan-early-childhood-care-development.pdf>
- Cole, M. (1996) *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cook, K. and Coley, R. (2017) School Transition Practices and Children's Social and Academic Adjustment in Kindergarten *Journal of Education Psychology* Volume 109 Issue 2
- Council of the European Union (2021) Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 223, pp. 14–23.
- Council on Foreign Relations (n.d.) *Global Conflict Tracker*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker>
- Crown Relocations (2026) *NZ vs Australia School System*. Available at: <https://www.crownrelo.com.au/nz-vs-australia-schools/>

D

- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (2013) *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of evaluation*. 3rd edn. London: Routledge.
- Davies, S. et al. (2020) 'What is school readiness? A qualitative exploration of parental perceptions in England', *Journal of Health Visiting*, 8(10).
- Dee, T.S. and Sievertsen, H.H. (2018) 'The gift of time? School starting age and mental health', *Health Economics*, 27(5), pp. 781–802.
- Department for Education (2025) *Early years foundation stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>
- Department for Education (DfE) (2023) Delayed school admissions for summer-born pupils: 2023, Research report RR1385. London: Department for Education.
- Dhuey, E. and Koebel, K. (2022) Is there an optimal school starting age? *IZA World of Labor* 2022: 247v2

- Dockett, S. and Perry, B. (2007) *Transitions to School: Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Durkin K, Lipset. M, Farran. D, Wiesen. S (2022) *Effects of a Statewide Prekindergarten Program on Children's Achievement and Behavior through Sixth Grade*
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9716729/pdf/nihms-1839477.pdf>

E

- Education Counts (2024) *Annual ECE census 2023: Fact sheets*. Available at:
<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/annual-early-childhood-education-census/annual-ece-census-2023-fact-sheets>
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (2026) *Asia*. Available at:
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia>
- European Commission. (2025). *Pathways to School Success*.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2023) *Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe – 2023: Early childhood education and care*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

- Eurydice (2025) *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

F

- Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A.-W. (eds.) (2007) *Informing Transitions in the Early Years: Research, Policy and Practice*. McGraw-Hill/Open University Press
- Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A.-W. (2020) *Transitions in the Early Years: Debating continuity and progression*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Fler, M. and Veresov, N. (2018) Cultural-historical and activity theories informing early childhood education. In: Fler, M. and van Oers, B. (eds.) *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. Springer, pp. 47–76.
- Fler, M. (2020) *Conceptual PlayWorlds: The role of imagination in play-based learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fyffe L, Sample. P, Lewis. A, Rattenborg. K, and Bundy. A (2022) *Entering Kindergarten After Years of Play: A Cross-Case Analysis of School Readiness Following Play-Based Education*. Early Childhood Education Journal

https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9666934/pdf/10643_2022_Article_1428.pdf

G

- Government of India (Ministry of Women and Child Development) (1975) *Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme*. Available at: <https://icds-wcd.nic.in/>
- Government of India (2020a) *National Education Policy 2020*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education. Available at: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
- Government of India (2020b) *Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections (2011–2036)*. New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Available at: nhm.gov.in/New_Updates_2018/Report_Population_Projection_2019.pdf
- Government of India, Ministry of Education, (2022a) *National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage*. New Delhi: NCERT. Available at: https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/NCF_for_Foundational_Stage_20_October_2022.pdf
- Government of India, Ministry of Education (2022b) *Samagra Shiksha: Framework for implementation*. Available at:

https://samagra.education.gov.in/docs/ss_implementation.pdf

H

- Harrison, L.J., Murray, E., McFarland, L. and Waller, T. (2023) 'Transforming transitions to primary school: using children's perspectives to inform practice', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 31(6), pp. 1–15.
- Harvard Project Zero (n.d.) *Visible Thinking and Thinking Routines*. Available at: <https://pz.harvard.edu>
- Harvard University. Centre of the Developing Child. (2026). Brain Architecture. Available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/brain-architecture/>
- Hatzifilalithis, A. and Grenier, A. (2019) 'Intergenerational learning programs'. In: *Intergenerational Practice in Early Childhood Education* – Trial Report. Sydney: AIIP Network. Available at: <https://aiip.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Intergenerational-Practice-in-Early-Childhood-Education-Trial.pdf>
- Office of Head Start (2026) Head Start. Available at: <https://headstart.gov/>

I

- Institute for Economics and Peace (2025) *Global Peace Index 2025*. Available at: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/GPI-2025-web.pdf>
- International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

J

K

- Kamerman. S and Gatenio-Gabel. S (2007), *Early Childhood Education and Care in the United States: An Overview of the Current Policy Picture* International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, Vol. 1, No.1, 23-34
- Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) (2004). SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM: Assessment Report, Available at: https://www.kapekh.org/files/report_file/90-en.pdf
- Kangas, J., Ukkonen-Mikkola, T., Harju-Luukkainen, H., Ranta, S., Chydenius, H., Lahdenperä, J., Neitola, M., Kinos, J., Sajaniemi, N. and Ruokonen, I. (2021) Understanding different approaches to early childhood education pedagogy through tensions. *Education Sciences*, 11(12), Article 790.

- Kim, G.J. and Umayahara, M. (2010) *Early childhood care and education: building the foundation for lifelong learning and the future of the nations of Asia and the Pacific*. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 4(2), pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/2288-6729-4-2-1>
- Klippen, M. I. F., Moser, T., Reikerås, E. and Guldbrandsen, A. (2024) A review of trends in Scandinavian early childhood education and care research from 2006 to 2021. *Education Sciences*, 14(5), 478.

L

- Lee, K. and Veale, V. (2025). *School Readiness Matters: Embedded and Threaded Transitions*. Available at: <https://www.tactyc.org.uk/school-readiness-matters>

M

- Markström, A.-M. and Simonsson, M. (2017) ‘Introduction to preschool: strategies for managing the gap between home and preschool’, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 3(2), pp. 179–188.

- McClelland, M. M., and Wanless, S. B. (2015) Introduction to the Special Issue: Self-Regulation Across Different Cultural Contexts. *Early Education and Development*, 26(5–6), pp. 609–614.
- Ministry of Education (2017) *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media. Available at: <https://tewhariki.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/public/Key-documents/Files/Te-Whariki->
- Ministry of Education (2024a) *Cohort or group entry for children starting school*. Available at: <https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-caregivers/schools-year-0-13/starting-school/cohort-or-group-entry-children-starting-school>
- Ministry of Education (2024b) *New Zealand curriculum refresh*. Available at: <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/new-zealand-curriculum-online/new-zealand-curriculum/new-zealand-curriculum-refresh/5637144667.c>
- Ministry of Education (2024c) *Phonics checks*. Available at: <https://tahurangi.education.govt.nz/newphonics-checks>
- Ministry of Education (2025) *Types of ECE services*. Available at: <https://www.education.govt.nz/education-professionals/early-learning/running-ece-centre/establishing->

[a-certified-puna-kohungahunga-maori-language-playgroup/types-of-ecce-services](#)

- Montessori, M. (1967) *The absorbent mind*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Montoya-Fernández, A., Vidal, J. and Ferreira, C. (2024) ‘Play-based assessment and developmental readiness in ECCE: rethinking accountability through pedagogy’, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, (in press).
- Moss, P. (2019) *Alternative Narratives in Early Childhood Education: An Introduction for Students and Practitioners*. London: Routledge.
- Murray, K. (2024). What do learning environments, wellbeing and playful learning have in common? *Cache Alumni*, 7. 30-33
- Murray, K. (2025). Aligning learning environments with the needs of the brain. *The voice of early childhood*. Available at: <https://thevoiceofearlychildhood.com/projects/astrea-academy-trust-project/#1>

N

- New Zealand Government (2024) *How to enrol your child at school in New Zealand*. Available at:

<https://www.govt.nz/browse/education/school-and-college/how-to-enrol-your-child-at-school-in-nz/>

- NSW Department of Education (2022) *Regional and remote*. Available at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/>

O

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017a) *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017) *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2021a) *Process quality, curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education and care*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2021b) *Starting Strong VI: Supporting meaningful interactions in early childhood education and care*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2025a) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

- OECD (2025b) *Starting Strong VIII: Reducing inequalities by investing in early childhood education and care*. OECD Publishing.
- Office of Early Childhood Education (2026) Structural indicators of quality (e.g.) Ratios and group size. Available at: <https://oece.nz/public/information/childcare-choices/structural-indicators/#:~:text=In%20centres%20operating%20for%20more,further%20adults%20for%20every%20additional>
- Ofsted (2023) International perspectives on early years. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-perspectives-on-early-years/international-perspectives-on-early-years>

P

- Page, J., McLean Davies, L., Ziebell, N., Mentha, S., Canobi, K. and Hinton Herrington, M. (2025) *Transitions literature review*. Melbourne: Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, for State of Queensland (Department of Education).

- Pearson, E.C. (2015) *Moving forward with early childhood care and education (ECCE) post-2015 in the Asia Pacific Region: an analysis of global and national policy goals*. ICEP 9, 13.
Available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-015-0016-9>
- Pedersen, L., Bakken, A.R.B., Johannessen, K. and Bøyum, S. (2023) 'Teachers' interactions with children in micro-level transitions in Norwegian preschools', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 32(2), pp. 236–247.
- Perry, B. (2010) *Transitions to School: Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Peters, S. (2010) *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, New Zealand.
- Pianta, R.C., Cox, M.J. and Snow, K.L. (2009) *School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Petriwskyj, A., Thorpe, K. and Tayler, C. (2005) Trends in construction of transition to school in three western regions, 1990–2004. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 13(1), pp. 55–69.
- PTI (2025) *Healthy Planet named India's best preschool 2024–25: A new era in early childhood education*. The Wire.
Available at:

<https://thewire.in/ptiprnews/healthy-planet-named-indias-best-preschool-2024-25-a-new-era-in-early-childhood-education>

Q

- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2024). *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline - QKLG 2024: Nurturing confident and creative lifelong learners*. [Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority](#).
- Queensland Government (n.d.) Kindergarten funding. Brisbane: Department of Education. Available at: <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/grants-and-funding/kindergarten-funding>

R

- Rao, N. et al. (2014) 'Early childhood development and learning in Asia', *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 8(1), pp. 1–14.

- Rao, N. et al. (2020) 'Early childhood education in India: progress and challenges', *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 52(2), pp. 111–126.
- Ring, E., Mhic Mhathúna, M., Moloney, M., Hayes, N., Breathnach, D., Stafford, P., Carswell, D., Keegan, S., Kelleher, C., McCafferty, D., O'Keeffe, A., Leavy, A., Madden, R. and Ozonyia, M. (2016) *An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Rogers, S. (2021) 'Reframing school readiness: Children's transitions to school in a changing policy landscape', *Early Years*, 41(2), pp. 122–135.
- Rogoff, B. (2003) *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

S

- Samms-Vaughan. M (2015) *The Jamaica School Readiness Assessment Report of the Phase 1 Pilot in the Parish of Westmoreland*. Early Childhood Commission April, 25, 2015
- Scottish Parliament (2024) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.

- Services Australia (2026) *Child Care Subsidy changes*. Available at: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-changes?context=41186>
- Services Australia (2026) *School years*. Available at: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/school-years?context=60007>
- Sharp, C. (2002) *School starting age: European policy and recent research*. Slough: NFER.
- Siraj, I. (2021) *Quality Interactions in Early Childhood*. London: UCL Press.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. and Bell, D. (2002) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*. London: DfES.
- Skovbjerg, H. M., Ødegaard, E. E., Lund, O., Have, M., Jørgensen, H. H., Schrøder, V., Oreskov, S. and Boysen, M. S. W. (2024) Special issue on Nordic perspectives on play and playful approaches to pedagogy, teaching and learning: Editorial. *Nordisk tidsskrift for pedagogikk og kritikk*, 10(5), pp. 10–18.
- SKNBS (2025) About St. Kitts & Nevis. Available at: <https://www.sknbs.org/about-bureau/about-st-kitts-and-nevis/>

- Størksen, I., Lenes, R., ten Braak, D., McClelland, M. and Michnick Golinkoff, R. (2024) Quality in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care: Progress, Persistent Challenges, and Recommendations for the Future. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 53, pp. 2631–2640.
- Stats NZ (2026) *National population estimates: 31 December 2025*. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand. Available at: <https://www.stats.govt.nz>

T

- The Office of Early Childhood Education (2026) *The 13 big changes the government has made to ECE: News analysis, 19 March 2026*. Available at: <https://oece.nz/newsroom/stories/ece-reform-13-big-changes-government-has-made/>

U

- United Nations (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (UNESCO UIS) (n.d.) *Pupil-teacher ratio in pre-primary education (headcount basis), PTRHC_0*. UNdata. Available at:

https://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNESCO&f=series%3APTRHC_0

- UNESCO (2020) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2021) *Early childhood care and education in Southeast Asia*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2023) *Regional Report for Asia-Pacific. Education Starts Early. Progress, challenges and opportunities*. Paris. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387860/PDF/387860eng.pdf.multi>
- UNESCO (2025a) *Asia-Pacific Overview: Sustainable Development Goal 4. Factsheet: Target 4.2* Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/04/SDG%204.2%20for%20web.pdf>
- UNESCO (2025b) *Institute for Statistics World Education Statistics*. Montreal, Canada
- UNESCO (2026) *Global Education Monitoring Report Summary 2026: Access and equity, countdown to 2030, Paris* Available at: [2026 GEM Report | Global Education Monitoring Report](#)
- UNESCO. (2016). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. UNESCO. right-to-education.org

- UNESCO (2024) global report on Early Childhood Care and Education. The Right to a strong Foundation. Available at: [UIS.unesco.org](https://uis.unesco.org)
- UNESCO (2022) Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a crossroads Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/37791/file/EducationinLatinAmericaandtheCaribbeanatacrossroads.pdf>
- UNICEF (2012) *School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework*. New York: UNICEF.
- UNICEF (2019) *Early childhood development in Thailand*. Bangkok: UNICEF Thailand.
- UNICEF and UNESCO (2024) *Global report on early childhood care and education: The right to a strong foundation*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/158496/file/Global-report-on-early-childhoodcare-and-education-2024-1.pdf>
- United States Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/#:~:text=USA%20Population,as%20of%20March%2006%2C%202026>
- Urban, M. (2015) *Not for Sale? Early childhood education as public good and public responsibility*. Brussels: Education International.

V

- Victoria State Government Department of Education (2026). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Available at:
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/Victorian-Early-Years-Learnin...>
- Victorian Government (2026) *Educator to child ratios in early childhood services*. Available at:
<https://www.vic.gov.au/educator-child-ratios-early-childhood-services>
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

W

- WCED. (1987). *Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development*. UK: Oxford University Press
- Whitebread, D. (2012) *The Importance of Play: A Report on the Value of Children's Play with a Series of Policy Recommendations*. Brussels: Toy Industries of Europe.
- Wood, E. and Hedges, H. (2016) Curriculum in early childhood education: critical questions about content, coherence, and control. *The Curriculum Journal*, 27(3), pp. 387–405.

- Wood, E. (2020) 'Pedagogical approaches to play and learning', in Brooker, L., Blaise, M. and Edwards, S. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE, pp. 145–159.
- Worldometer (2026) *Asia population*. Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/asia-population/>
- World Bank (2012) *Early childhood care and education: setting the stage for lifelong development*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/09/19/early-childhood-care-education-setting-stage-lifelong-development>
- World Bank (2018) *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank (n.d.) *Population, total*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL> Available at: [Population, total | Data](#)
- World Population Review (2026) *World Population Review*. Available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-in-americas>

X

Y

Z