

Growing the Evidence for Children: Measuring Development and Early Learning Globally



Photo credit: Save the Children Afghanistan

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs ensure that young children fulfill their right to healthy development, and reach their full potential. The first years of life are critical in shaping cognitive, social and language skills, as well as lifelong approaches to learning. Children's early learning before entering school determines their future academic success and beyond.

Have you ever wondered what skills children bring to school on their first day around the globe? Are you curious about how child development and early learning programs can boost equity? Are you looking for an accessible, reliable tool to measure children's development and early learning? Are you interested in documenting the impact of early learning programs?

The International Development and Early Learning Assessment, **IDELA** is an easy-to-use, rigorous global assessment prototype that measures children's early learning and development and provides ministries and ECCD programs with clear evidence on the status of children from 3.5 to 6 years.

There is consensus that a reliable, international measurement of early learning and development is needed to inform program quality and help governments monitor their progress towards ECCD goals as well as inspire action and scale up of ECCD initiatives. Yet, there are almost no tools available that can capture the multidimensional aspects of development and early learning in feasible, child-sensitive and reliable ways.

A LEADER IN ECCD PROGRAMMING

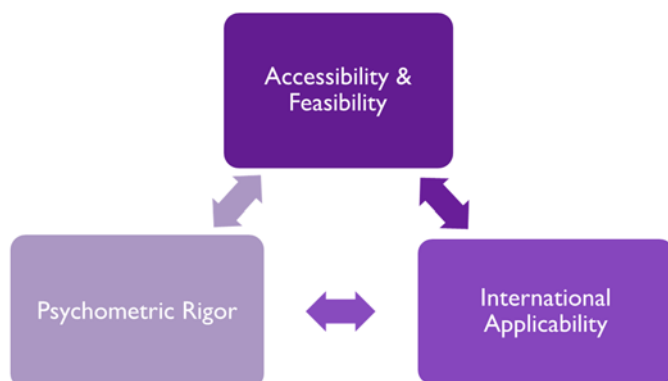
Save the Children has been working for more than 20 years to develop and support ECCD programs and national level policies that benefit young children and their families. Our ECCD efforts:

- Extend to **75 countries globally** (Save the Children International)
- Reach more than **2.1 million vulnerable young children annually** with innovative programs
- Seek to build rigorous evidence for ECCD programs regionally and globally

Development and Validation of IDELA

Save the Children is committed to implementing effective programs grounded in strong evidence. Few international tools can be used to measure the impact of ECCD interventions across varied settings. In 2011, based on lessons learned from years of early childhood programming as well as a comprehensive review of existing child development assessments, Save the Children began the process of creating and validating the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA).

In the first phase, more than 60 items were tested, covering five developmental domains, with the goal of narrowing down the instrument to the most reliable and feasible items that can be used across countries and contexts with 3.5-6 year old children. Testing and modifying the tool over the past three years in multiple sites across ten countries has resulted in a 20-item assessment that balances three key dimensions: psychometric rigor, accessibility and feasibility, and international applicability. As a result, IDELA is easily translated and administered, and has strong reliability and validity.



What does IDELA measure?

IDELA provides a holistic picture of children's development and learning, covering four developmental domains: motor development, early language and literacy, early numeracy/problem solving, and socio-emotional skills.

Tasks, which are designed as play with children, focus on skills like:

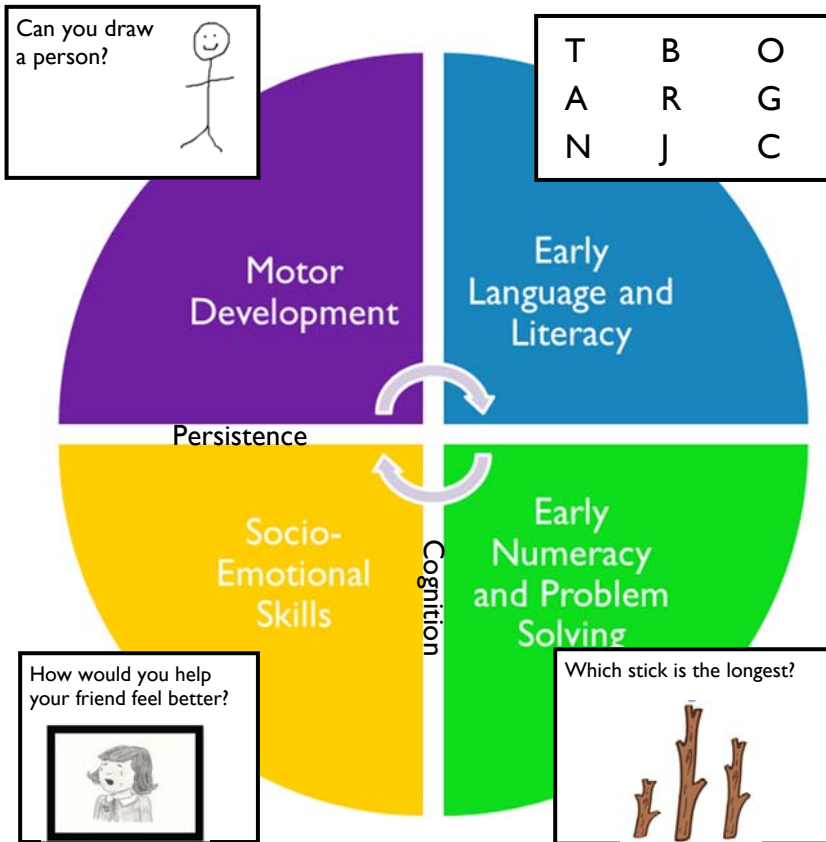
- hopping
- phonemic awareness
- oral language
- letter knowledge
- emergent writing
- understanding feelings
- self awareness
- shapes and spatial relations
- problem solving
- measurement and comparison

Add-on items to the core IDELA also measure health knowledge and practices, persistence, memory, and attention.



BANGLADESH, A group of children play with locally made educational toys at a home-based early learning opportunity center. Photo by Michael Bisceglie / Save the Children

Components of Save the Children's International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA)



Content Validity

Utilizing data from ten countries and 4,700 children, a series of factor analyses were conducted to test item integrity and the strength of domain-specific subscales within the assessment. Internal consistency of IDELA's 20 core items is .91 and all subscales have good reliability as well.

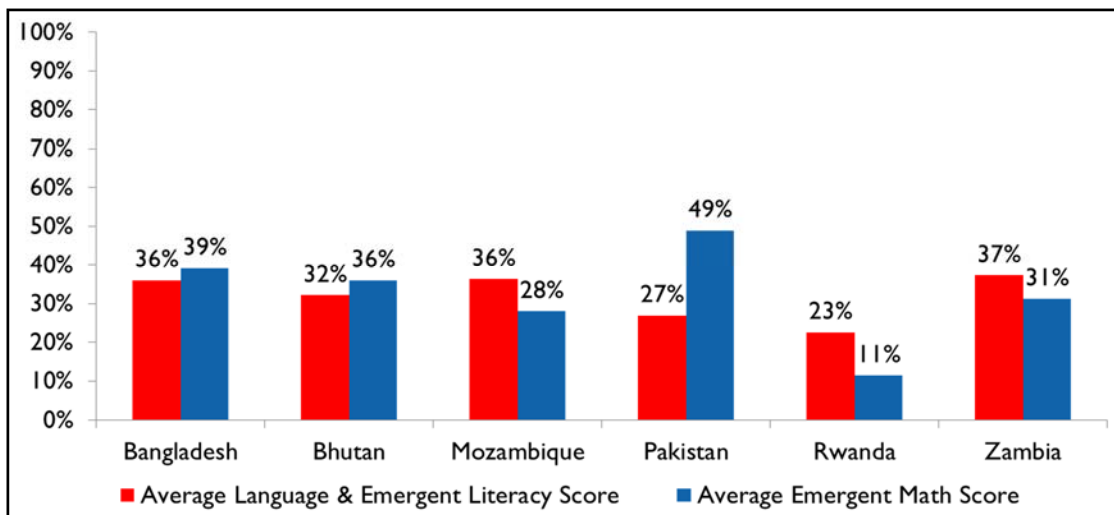


MALI, An assessor is using IDELA with a preschooler
Photo by Lauren Pisani / Save the Children

Global Comparison: Variation Across Countries

IDELA has been used and validated in 12+ countries by the end of 2014 due to its ability to successfully evaluate many aspects of ECCD programs and provide reliable data. The evidence on child outcomes supports continual program improvement and highlights program strengths and weaknesses in established ECCD programs. IDELA also captures age variation, equity, programmatic impact and quality across different interventions.

Figure 1. Average Early Literacy and Numeracy Scores for 5 year-old Children, by Country



IDELA for Policy, Advocacy and as a National Monitoring Tool

Save the Children now has an easy-to-use, adaptable, rigorous tool that provides a strong indication of children's development. With IDELA, we can answer pressing questions about how ECCD programs and systems are working and why, evidence that is critical for informing policy and advocacy. Uses for IDELA include:

- Program evaluation
- Classroom assessment
- Randomized control trials
- Comparison of different ECCD interventions
- School readiness assessment at Grade 1 entry
- National monitoring of ECCD programs

IDELA data from different countries have been able to shed light on the skills children bring to school and the areas where stronger program inputs are needed. This information helps governments monitor their progress towards ECCD goals, as well as highlight effective initiatives for young children. Valid and reliable evidence on early learning in the global context, across many countries, supports the global current focus on early learning (especially early grade reading) and provides a clear picture of why education outcomes will remain persistently low without investment in the foundations of learning in the early years.

CONTACT US

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