

# Early Childhood Education At a Glance

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Early childhood education is a vital period of growth and development for your child's brain which will have a long term effect on successes and resilience much later in life. Here, we embark on a journey of understanding early childhood education perspectives through time.

## The Kindergarten and child-centred learning (1779-1945)

**Friedrich Froebel** invented the word Kindergarten (meaning 'children's garden') when he founded the Play and Activity Institute in Germany. He emphasised play as well as games, songs, stories, and arts and crafts to stimulate a child's imagination and develop physical and motor skills. His ideas about learning through nature and the importance of play have since spread throughout the world.

Like Froebel, **Maria Montessori** implemented an early education curriculum that adopted play and introduced developmentally appropriate materials designed to facilitate sensory and cognitive skills. Montessori education promotes a child-centred and child-led approach as well as a focus on educating the child as a whole (physically, socially, mentally and emotionally). It also values autonomy and self-exploration that fosters a child's love for learning.

**Loris Malaguzzi** founded the Reggio Emilia approach in the villages around Reggio Emilia, Italy (hence the name).



Teachers in Lebanon learn how to lead interactive stories



Teachers having as much fun as children. Seenaryo's Playkit training in Azraq Camp



Learning through play; Caritas teachers train in Amman

Children are encouraged to express themselves through 'natural languages', including drawing, painting, working in clay, sculpting, constructing, conversing, and dramatic play. Educators pay close attention to the look and feel of the classroom to create a room that is beautiful, joyful, inviting and stimulating.

### From play-based learning to formal academic instruction (1945-2000)

After World War II, many countries took control of school systems for the first time to raise a well-prepared workforce for the future. Primary school meant reading, writing and maths so it seemed logical for First Graders to get a head-start on these subjects early in life. New curricula for three to eight-year-olds had very little to do with research (such as Montessori's). Instead, ministries of education drew a straight line back from university. At university, students sit, listen, read and write. The conclusion was that sitting, listening, reading and writing should therefore start as early as possible. This academic emphasis intensified throughout the 20th century with the vast escalation of testing.

### Holistic education (2001-today)

Did you know that schooling in Finland doesn't begin until seven years of age and when it does, it's explicitly

play-based? There's minimal testing and no homework in primary school. It is considered one of the best educational systems in the world, along with those in Singapore and Japan, outperforming many countries in reading, science and mathematics. It does present a curious fact: doing less literacy and maths makes

### About Seenaryo Playkit

Now, more than ever, educators, parents and caregivers need support. The Seenaryo Playkit



mobile phone app caters to teachers and parents of three to eight-year-olds. Lessons are made interactive through music, stories and games. Visit [seenaryoplaykit.org](https://seenaryoplaykit.org) to find out more.


Now available to download on Google Play and App Store.

children better at literacy and maths. It also creates the space to work on a hundred more vital skills which set children up for successful adulthood: increased curiosity, social intelligence, better motor skills, physical fitness and much more.

Holistic education, the philosophy of educating the whole person beyond academics, is gaining popularity as today's job market is less reliant on traditional skills (reading, writing and maths). Employers stress soft, transferable skills such as problem-solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, decision-making, teamwork and negotiation. In holistic education, students reflect on how their actions impact the local and global community and engage in projects that apply critical-thinking skills toward solving real-world problems. This explains why the Reggio Emilia (50 years old) and the Montessori (over 100 years old) methods are back in vogue!

### Play-based, participatory learning in action

*What's the Weather?* is a song from the Seenaryo Playkit which teaches children about types of weather using the different senses. Karim, a student in Azraq used to be afraid of noises and fast movement. Through singing and dancing along to Playkit songs he has become comfortable with sound and movement and integrated better with his classmates. He now suggests actions and ideas for Playkit activities himself!

In many ways, we are returning to what Froebel knew all along in 1779. Seenaryo, a non-governmental organisation that works with marginalised communities in Jordan and Lebanon, is using arts and play to equip learners with the tools to collaborate, think critically and build transferable skills. 



*Kindergarten children learn and play, taking part in Playkit activities in the classroom*