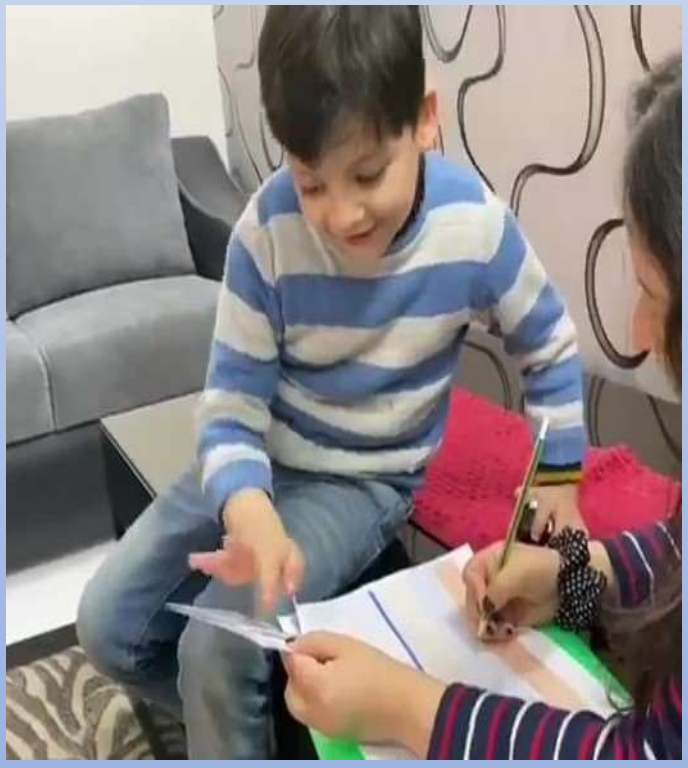
AESAS project is an opportunity for us to investigate the importance and function of school in children's lives in the two largest regions of Punjab, Pakistan and State of Gujarat, India. AESAS is a comparative study of children's learning outcomes in the 3.5 to 6 years of age. We are assessing children in this study regardless of their school enrolment status so that we can compare the learning levels of children who attended early years of formal education with those who have had no chance of attending formal education. This comparison will carefully match children based on their family socioeconomic status, family size, parental education, access to schools and regional characteristics. The analysis of these factors will give us an indication of differences among children and their learning patterns and how much early years of education can determine children's readiness to attend formal school.

Pilot study report 2020

Assessing Early Years Schooling, Access and Student Outcomes (AESAS): Establishing routes for sustainable education in Pakistan and India



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Introduction

We have conducted a pilot study of this work, assessing the feasibility of assessment and survey tools and access to children and families. For the pilot, we selected a range of regional settings in rural, urban and suburban / semi-urban areas to understand the initial response from communities and families, and to make improvements in the measurement tools and plans of the main study. In this pilot study work we were able to collect detailed information on children's response to learning, home environment, availability of learning resources, parental engagement and attitudes towards children's learning. This rich data is only part of the study, and we have recorded these observations for deeper understanding of facilitators and barriers towards children's cognitive learning in early years.

Research questions

a) How ready for school are young children aged 3.5 to 6 in India and Pakistan?
b) What level of progress in cognitive development is made by children who attend one year of formal pre-primary schooling (Kindergarten, Nursery, Reception, Grade 1) compared to those who do not?
c) What are the differences in health and learning attitudes between children attending and not attending school?

Research questions involve the survey, measurements and interviews in the Punjab province of Pakistan, and the state of Gujarat in India. The districts with the lowest score on the Human Development Index will be selected. From each of the districts, 2 villages will be selected and from each village 10 volunteering households will be invited to participate. The surveyor will ensure that households invited for participation have children of age 3.5 to 6. This will give a sample of around 720 households (360 from each district in Punjab and Gujarat), depending on the size and population of the village. Children aged 4 to 6 (according to parental reports of children's age) will be assessed.

Children's assessment selected for this study is International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) which is developed by the organisation Save the Children. IDELA has been adopted in 32 countries for assessing children's learning and development. The test has been translated into several languages. There are nearly 12 studies published in which this instrument has been used. The nature and research design of studies vary. However, there is evidence that shows IDELA can be successfully implemented with children, and the items in the major learning domains (See table 1) clearly demonstrate children's early years of development and learning profile.

Pilot of IDELA

International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) is a standardised assessment tool widely used for assessing learning development of children 3.5 to 6 year's old. Sample for the pilot study included only 7 children from a nursery school in England.

The test is individually administered for each child. The test has 22 items, which cover the following four domains of learning and development in early years.

Table 1: IDELA domains and subdomains

Emergent Literacy and Language	**Emergent Numeracy**	**Social-emotional Development**
Print awareness	Comparison by size and length	Peer relations
Expressive vocabulary	Number identification	Emotional awareness
Letter identification	Classification/ Sorting	Empathy
Emergent writing	Shape identification	Conflict resolution
Initial sound discrimination	Simple operations One-to-one correspondence	Self-awareness
Listening comprehension	addition and subtraction	
	Jigsaw	
Executive Function (short-term memory and inhibitory control)		
Approaches to learning		

The objective of this pilot was to assess the feasibility of implementing IDELA on children aged 3.5 to 4 years. This involved administering the test on individual children and assessing the following measures:

- Average time to administer the test per child
- Level of difficulty for each item
- Suitability of sequence for the items and sections
- Feasibility of using materials
- Children's level of engagement in the test
- Any implementation challenge or barrier for school, teachers, parents, children and assessor

The test administration involved the following steps in the same sequence:

1. Taken individual child with teacher's permission to a quiet corner of the classroom (or a designated area chosen by class teacher) where the test process could not be interrupted by any other activity.
2. Test was one-to-one administration in which individual child was assessed.
3. Test administration involved an assessor, a scorer and the identified child.
4. The assessor interacted with the child throughout the process while the scorer observed and scored each item.
5. A reward of stickers / chocolates was given to each child after the test.
6. The assessor recorded the time spent on individual test administration.
7. The child was taken back to the class after the test.
8. The assessor and scorer completed the last section, 'overall observation of child (7 items)' on mutual agreement

The test materials were already prepared and packed in a small test-kit, which included the following items.

1. Original copy of the test
2. Score sheets for 10 tests
3. Two cards for size comparison
4. Six cards for classification and sorting
5. One card for shape identification
6. One card for number identification
7. A box containing rolling balls / ice cream sticks for counting
8. Two cards for addition and subtraction

9. A jigsaw puzzle of four pieces and a full picture for reference
10. A card with simple triangle for copying the shape
11. A picture card of a child with crying face
12. A card with printed story text so that the assessor could read it to the child (only for the assessor)
13. A card with numbers printed to test child's term memory (only for the assessor)
14. Coloured pens / pencils for children to write name, draw a person and copy the triangle activities
15. A few sheets of plain white paper for writing name, drawing a person and copying the triangle

The tests were prepared well before time and the assessor practiced the test on four adults (who pretended to be 5 years old) before the test was administered on children. This practice session on adults helped the assessor in familiarising with the test content and be able to implement each item with sequence and fluency as expected in a standardised protocol. In the actual training of assessors and scorers, this practice can be followed on colleagues or volunteering adults.

The test administration was not interrupted at any stage and sequence in the sections and items was followed according to the standardised test protocol. No child showed any sign of boredom with test activities, which could have interrupted the test. In one case, the identified child showed lack of engagement earlier on and after initial five minutes of our efforts for engagement in the test activities, we stopped and ushered her back to the classroom. The teacher already identified that the child had several difficulties in speech, language and communication and had a delayed start in speaking since enrolled in the nursery. In home settings, we believe this information can be obtained from parents who can give indication of children's ability to communicate clearly or face difficulty.

Emergent Literacy and Language

In the original test this domain includes six activities (subdomains): Print awareness, expressive vocabulary, letter identification, emergent writing, first letter sound identification, and listening comprehension. We excluded print awareness for this pilot in order to reduce the test administration time.

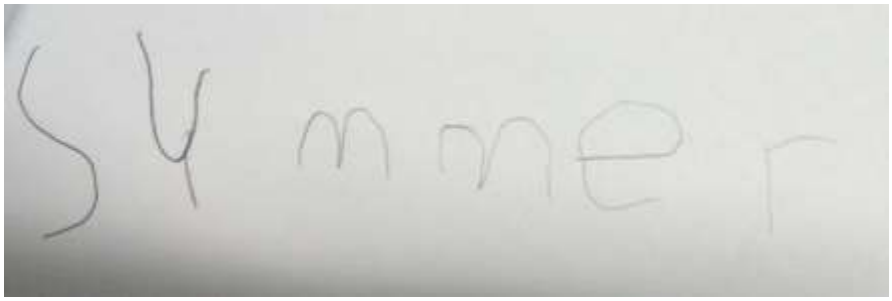
Expressive vocabulary: This is a one-to one correspondence in which the child was asked to give the names of items, as many as they can, we buy from grocery shops / vegetable markets. Children were also asked to give the names of animals as many as they know. The frequency of grocery / food items / vegetables and names of animals told by each child were recorded.

Letter identification: Each child was shown a grid of print letters in English on an A4 size card sheet. There were 20 capital letters. The assessor asked each child to say the letter, which the assessor pointed. The sequence of letters were left to right for English and Gujarati (E to I) and right to left for Urdu. For each correct identification of the letter score 1 was given. Where the child wrongly identified the score of 0 was recorded. If the child refused to tell said, "I don't know" 999 was recorded.

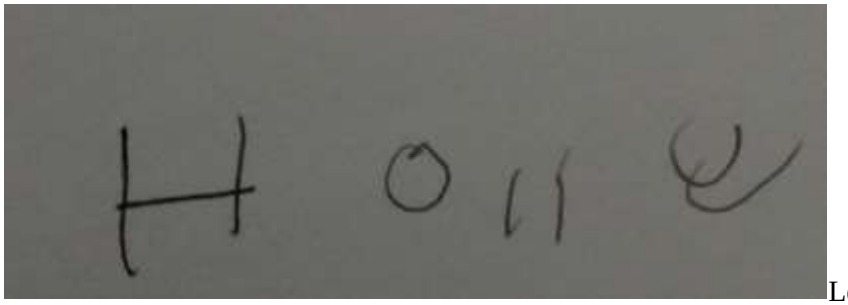
E	T	A	N	I
O	S	H	R	D
L	C	U	M	F
G	W	B	Y	P

This letter identification has been adapted in Gujarati and Urdu versions and used in the pilot study.

Emergent writing: This is a timed task (not more than 2 minutes). Each child was given a sheet of paper and a pencil. The assessor asked the child to write their name in any way they know. They were asked to do their best but if they can't write then clearly say, 'I don't know'. The emergent writing was assessed in 0-4 levels. If the child has not made any effort to write their names then it was 0 and if the name was written as such that the assessor can read it clearly then it was 4. Some children just wrote the first letter of their name for which they were given score of 1 and if they wrote more than two correct letters in their name then score of 2. If a child wrote first name but the quality of writing is poor than it was scored 3. See writing samples below:


Level 4 (Summer)


Level 3 (Essa)


Level 4 (Holly)


Level 1 (Rob)

There was no problem in conducting this activity. We just found that instead of a lead pencil the child could have been given a crayon or coloured marker. In case of children studying in Government pre-schools (Anganwadi centres) of Gujarat, they are not given an exposure to writing until they attain the age of 6 years. Therefore, the children who were enrolled in Anganwadis refused to do this task. The Anganwadi worker (the chief lady at the Anganwadi informed that they are not taught how to write).

First letter sound identification: This item was one-to-one correspondence. The activity involved saying a word aloud and asking a child to identify the initial sound by matching with three other words said by the assessor. We used exactly the same words for sound identification as mentioned in the test. There was one example activity for practice and three actual sound identification tasks. The scoring was 1 (for correct identification), 0 (for incorrect identification), and 999 (for refused or I don't know).

We did not face any problem in conducting this item. The assessor gave clear instructions and used one practice to model sound. Sometimes children rushed to identify the first sound without listening to the three words carefully. The assessor asked children to stop and wait for words to match initial sound.

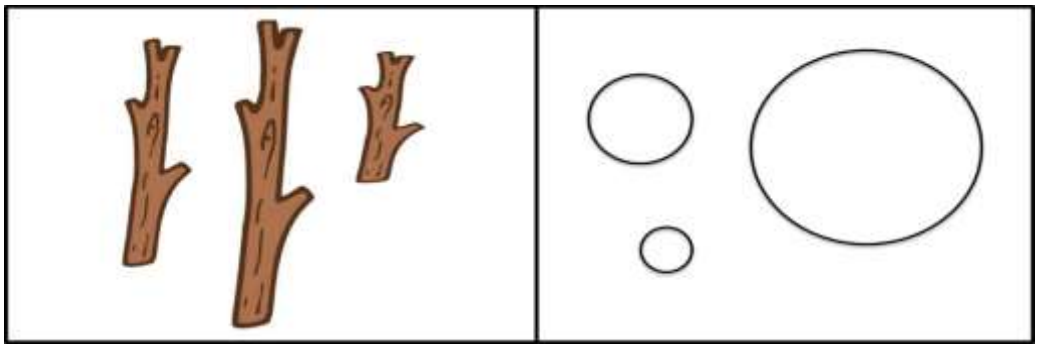
*Listening comprehension: "*The Mouse and the Cat" story was read from the story card. The story was read as it is written in the test. The assessor added emotions to make story interesting for children. There was no change in wording. The questions were also read as they were written in the test. In Guajarati and Urdu version, the story and the following comprehension questions will be literally translated and read to the child. There was no problem in conducting this activity. Children enjoyed listening to the story and most of them were very good at listening comprehension. The scoring was 1 (for correct answer), 0 (for incorrect answer), and 999 (for refused or I don't know). The test required scoring children's persistence and engagement this activity, which the scorer did simultaneously as she observed.

Emergent Numeracy

In the original test this domain includes six activities: Comparison by size and length, number identification, simple operations, classification/ sorting, shape identification, and addition and subtraction. There was no change implemented in this section of the test.

Comparison by size and length:

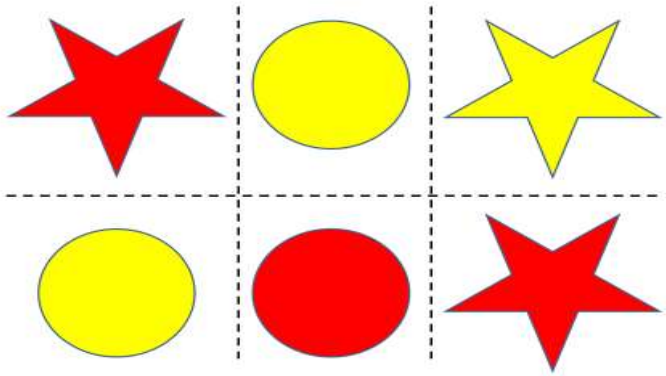
This item has two picture cards (as in stimulus file). We used the coloured prints of shapes as available in the pack of stimulus and laminated the prints as two separate cards.



The child was first shown the card with three sticks and the assessor asked the child to point finger at the longest stick and then asked them to point their finger at the shortest. Once the child answered, we showed the second card with three circles. The assessor asked the child to point their finger at the biggest circle and then asked to point their finger at the smallest circle.

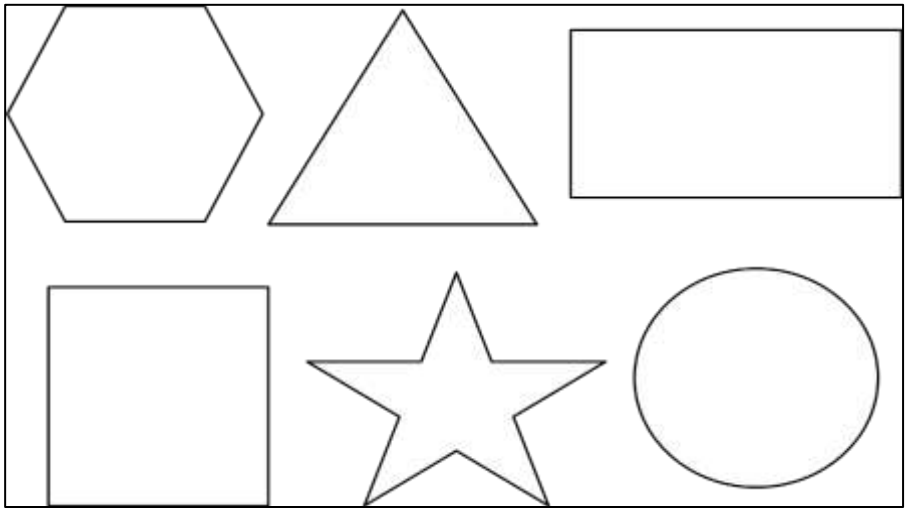
The scoring for both items was 1 (for correct answer), 0 (for incorrect answer), and 999 (for refused or I don't know).

Classification/ Sorting: This item involved six coloured cards. Picture cards of stars and circles (two red stars and one yellow stars, two yellow circles and one red circle). The activity was to sort the card in two groups. Children were just asked to sort the cards into two groups without any further instructions. This sorting was asked to be done two times and a child could use two different criterion as they wanted to. Most children could sort by colour and then by shape or vice versa. If the two groups were sorted on some specific criteria then then the child scored 1, if no criteria then 0, and 999 if refused or said 'I don't know'/ 'I can't do'.



We did not find any difficulty with this activity. We used the coloured prints of shapes as available in the pack of stimuli and laminated the prints as six separate cards so we could be use this several times.

Shape identification: This item involved identifying shapes printed on a card (as in stimulus file). The assessor asked child to identify circle, rectangle, triangle, and square on the card. The child was given instructions to point finger as they were asked. An additional question was to ask the child to look in the surroundings and identify something that is shaped like a circle.



There was no example activity for this practice. The scoring was 1 (for correct count of number), 0 (for incorrect count of number), and 999 (for refused or I don't know).

We found that the assessor conducted this activity slightly different from the instruction given in the test. The assessor pointed their finger at shapes, one after the other, and asked the child to say names of the four shapes. This was a mistake during early pilots conducted in Pakistan. In the second pilot, we were careful and strictly followed the instructions as given in the test.

Number identification: Each child was shown a grid of print numbers in English on an A4 size card sheet. There were 20 numbers in a random order. First two lines of number were single digit and the last two were double digits. The assessor asked each child to say the number, which the assessor pointed at. The sequence of numbers was right to left (2 to 7). For each correct identification of the number, score 1 was given. Where the child wrongly identified, the score of 0 was recorded. If the child refused to tell or said, "I don't know" 999 was recorded.

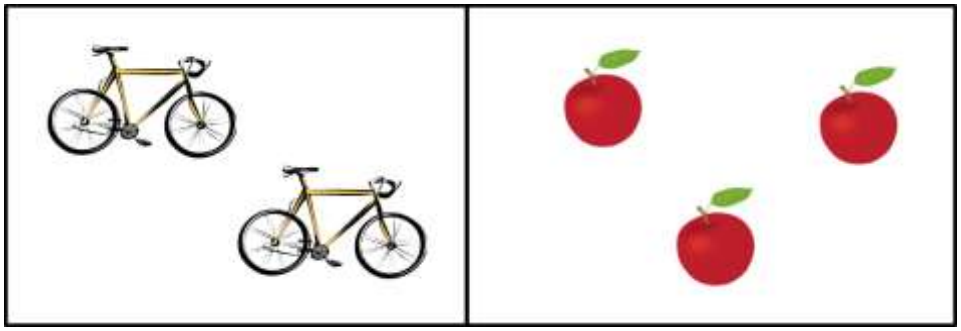
2	4	10	5	7
9	6	8	3	1
13	17	14	19	16
15	18	11	12	20

The number identification would remain be the same in Urdu version, but Gujarati version has digits in the Gujarati language. The digits and their sequencing remained the same as in the original test.

Simple operations: This item was one-to-one correspondence. The activity required small objects for counting. We used a set of 50 small balls / ice cream sticks kept in a box. Children were asked to pick balls / sticks from box according to the number said by assessor and put them aside. Three times the

assessor asked to pick balls and each time it was a number according to the test. We used exactly the same numbers (3, 8, 15) in our instructions as mentioned in the original test. There was no example activity for practice. The scoring was 1 (for correct count of number), 0 (for incorrect count of number), and 999 (for refused or I don't know).
The test required scoring children's concentration and motivation in this activity, which the scorer did instantly as she observed.

Addition and Subtraction: This item has two picture cards (as in stimulus file). We used the coloured prints of shapes as available in the pack of stimulus and laminated the prints as two separate cards.



The child was first shown the card with two bikes and was asked if you put two more bikes in the picture how many would there be altogether?. Once the child answered, we showed the second card with three apples and asked what you take / eat one apple away how many apples would be left?
The scoring for both items was 1 (for correct answer), 0 (for incorrect answer), and 999 (for refused or I don't know).

The test suggested a practice exercise but in order to save time we did not do the practice exercise. Children were able to do the subtraction correctly but made errors in addition. Perhaps, they were able to have a better cognition about apple than they had about the bicycle.

Puzzle completion: This activity was timed. The material required was a coloured picture of a cow / bull and the same picture cut into four pieces. We used the same picture as in the stimulus card. We coloured printed cards for reference and the picture cut into four pieces. All pictures were laminated for ease and repeated use.

Each child was first shown the complete picture of a cow and then the assessor displayed four cards on the table. The sequence of the four cards displayed on the table was always the same for each child and were asked to arrange it to make into a complete picture. The complete picture remained displayed on the table while the child was doing this task. The children really enjoyed doing the task.

Preliminary findings

In general children enjoyed the assessment activities and saw the tasks and learning games rather than test of their abilities. A few of them even asked "will you be coming daily / regularly?" and "When will you come again?" The answer to second question was obviously "We will come again, the next year".

The interaction was kept as informal as possible and whenever children wanted a break or to talk about other things we allowed them to do. Our common observation was that children who had a delay in language, struggled to communicate and to engage in activities. There could be several reasons of delay in language in the early years but children from families with modest educational attainments augmented with high level of poverty and deprivation clearly had limited opportunities of verbal engagement with parents. We also observed that some children, who were not attending school and whose parents were not at home during the day, children had long hours spent in isolation or with other siblings without presence of an adult in the house every day. This was observed in immigrant workers who moved from rural to urban settings and lived in temporary accommodation or rented servant quarters. Mostly immigrant women worked as domestic helpers while men worked as guards, drivers or domestic helpers. There was very limited verbal interaction between parents and children and possibly that was one of the reasons that children were behind their age in speech and language development.

Language development

Many migrant workers' native language or dialect is different from what people usually speak in urban areas of Punjab. Children struggled to communicate in a language or dialect not known to them and while not having any opportunity to learn language in school (as some were not enrolled in schools) delay in language development was clearly obvious in those children. A girl aged 6 years was asked what it was like when she was back in her village, she said:

> I had lots of friends. I used to go to school every day. I had many cousins to play with. When we came in the city it is better, but I don't go to school anymore and I miss all my friends and cousins who I used to play with. Here we have a TV only and I just spend all day watching dramas. There is no one to talk.

The issue of dialect was observed while interacting with children belonging to a particular community even in the urban area. Their dialect was very different from rest of the urbanites. Keeping this in mind, we already had one field investigator from that community. When she communicated with the children, they could relate with the questions / tasks and their involvement in the activities considerably improved. While their family members were able to understand the regular urban Gujarati, the children had little exposure to urban Gujarati since they communicate most of the time with their parents in their community dialect. This was observed even in school-going children because they were studying in English-medium schools. However, their exposure to English was also relatively less and therefore, the assessment had to be done in Gujarati, expect for numeracy skills, alphabets identification and phonics.

Enrolment and attendance in school was important for children where both parents were working outside. However, where children were not attending school but spent time with mother at home or accompanied her to the homes where she worked as domestic helper were also observed as not having a limited vocabulary and skills for verbal communication. When we asked a mother as a domestic helper and who worked in 10 different homes, how she spends time with her children, she said

> When I come back home after a long day of working in homes, I am too tired to talk with anyone. I can't talk and it is just so difficult. I can just make dinner and make sure they have

> eaten enough, and they have some food for breakfast in the morning as I leave home very early. On weekends I have so much cleaning and work at home.

Busy working routines are the reality of people living in urban settings. More women choosing to work means that attending schools should be essential for children rather than living in isolation and missing several opportunities of learning that are available in school. Moreover, parents are generally less aware of the importance of talk with children and this is more so for parents with no literacy. Talking with children, sharing experiences, telling stories or reading books are the activities that help children learn vocabulary and skills for communication. Parenting skills beyond caring for children's physical needs are not known to many parents. Parents playing with children was not commonly observed and informed by parents when they were asked how they spend time with their children. Most parents were busy in jobs and where mothers who were housewives could not tell more than just telling the daily chores in house. One mother said,

> There is so much to do at home. I spend all my day in cleaning, cooking and doing laundry. Children just play on their own.

A stark contrast is observed in urban areas in the upbringing of children among families with modest socioeconomic background and the elites. Surat, the district where pilot studies were undertaken in Gujarat shares a unique characteristic compared to other developed and urban districts of Gujarat. That is one of the reasons to choose Surat as one of the districts for this study. The uniqueness comes from the nature of industries based in Surat. The economy of Surat is driven largely by a number of small-scale textile, diamond and jari (brocade weaving) industries. Broadly, men with low-levels of education are employed as unskilled / semi-skilled workers in diamond and textile industries whereas women work in embroidery and allied tasks. These women work on job-based contracts and work from home. The children of these families where women work from home were found to be vocal and active. Their involvement in tasks was also observed to be higher. On the other hand, the children from elite families were found to be confident, vocal and have high involvement. The children from middle-income families, where both parents spend their time in 9-6 office jobs had a bit of supressed children. Here too, children living with grandparents were relatively vocal, whereas children from nuclear families were shy. Presence of parents also seemed to put pressure on them to perform better, which led to lower involvement, whereas children performed better in the absence of parents.

School is a place that provides structured learning activities, resources, space and various opportunities for children to learn language and practice skills. Children who spend their developmental years of life in home environment with very limited learning resources and opportunities, are behind their peers who attend school in language development. There is a scope for policy initiatives to promote parental learning following the model of Head Start and Sure Start centres in the US and UK, where parents from disadvantaged groups could be encouraged to take part in programmes to learn parenting skills where they can support children at home during their developmental years. In India, an Anganwadi centres (AWCs) are akin to formal pre-school. Though, AWCs were originally developed to cater to the nutritional needs of children, it has expanded its scope to overall development of the children. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) operates through AWCs and takes care of the nutritional needs of pregnant women, lactating mothers and children up to 6 years of age. AWCs run a pre-school for three hours a day, six days a week and teach the children to play in groups (socialization and sharing toys), identify the objects and pictures (cognition), play with the ball and toys (sensory-motor development). So, apart from writing skills, which is not taught in AWCs until the child reaches the age of 6 years, children enrolled in AWCs were found to have the said qualities well-developed. Some AWCs have kitchen gardens developed as an initiative to be self-sufficient. Children were found to have clear cognition of the eggplant / brinjal, since it is commonly grown in AWCs in Gujarat. Children studying in private schools were found to have well-developed writing skills but lower cognition for identifying vegetables or grocery items.

Recognition of emotions and feelings

We observed that many children not in schools struggled to identify emotions and feelings. This was not because they had no empathy or sense of feeling for pain, happiness and sadness but due to lack of vocabulary to name their emotions and feelings. Most children could identify what is happiness and what makes them happy, but identifying or recognising sadness and pain was difficult for many children not attending school. However, those who attended school attributed sadness to experiences at school such as, 'when teacher shouts at me', 'my friend hit me', 'when no one plays with me'.

We also observed that children living with single parent of a divorced family rationalise their sadness and pain more clearly than others. There were not many children in this category so this is just anecdotal evidence at this stage. We asked one such child what makes them sad and he said,

My mother does not live with us here. She has left us and now gone to another city and this makes me sad. I want her to come back home.

Coping with sadness was difficult for children to express in words. It is perhaps linked with their general experience of life at this stage that they do not understand or express sad emotions or possibly they do not have much vocabulary learned to communicate about sadness and coping strategy for sadness. It would be interesting to know the difference in children's language development and their ability to recognise and identify emotions and feelings after a year.

Despite this, most children were able to relate with sadness when showed the picture card of a crying girl. However, they fell short of vocabulary as mentioned earlier. They didn't know that crying is one manifestation of sadness. They said that "The girl is crying" and they came up with ideas for stopping her from crying. The most common answer from the children was "I will tell her, don't cry". Few of them said, "I will give her my toys" and some said, "I will play with her".

Quality and types of early years

There was a lot of difference in the quality of early years schools and nurseries so even children who were attending, not all of them were receiving high quality care and education as expected. High cost schools had a lot of resources and qualified teachers to support children's learning and there was a curriculum implemented, including assessments of children's learning. However, many low-cost nurseries were not sufficiently equipped with learning resources and qualified teaching staff. The number of children attending low-cost nurseries were quite high but it seemed that the private low-cost sector needed a lot of support and infrastructure but the same was observed in a government elementary schools in the suburban regions where staff-student ratio was very high and the resources were sparse. Children were sent to school with whatever resources parents could provide such as school uniform, a school bag and in some cases a packed lunch, however many low-cost private school and government elementary schools did not have basic resources and qualified teachers to support children. In India, the enrolment rate has increased drastically after the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA – the mission for primary education to all Children). Government schools provide mid-day meals and AWCs provide breakfast, lunch and take-home snacks / raw-materials to children. While, it is difficult to comment with certainty on the quality of food, poor parents prefer to send their children to school, more for their hunger needs with education being positive externality. However, government schools do face resource constraint in terms of teacher-student ratio and is more pronounced in rural and remote areas.

Parents with average income level chose low-cost nursery schools instead of government elementary school provisions mainly because the government elementary schools are not nearby. There was also a perception that government elementary schools are not sufficiently resourced with qualified teachers and sending children to these schools will not support their learning and on the contrary children early years will be damaged if they attend those schools. This perception was more prevalent among high income group where parents were both educated and had means to choose high cost private schools and they could also afford the additional cost of school.

Who choose school education for their children?

Sending a child to school is a choice and it remains a parents' choice even after early years. However, a large number of children are now attending schools which shows that more parents are choosing school for their children. More women are joining the labour workforce which is also the reason that more children are attending school. However, in urban settings the lowest income group who are mostly daily wage earners, immigrants from rural areas without any qualification or even school education, and those who have no stable source of income, choose not to send children to schools. Income constraints is the major barrier that prevents parents to send their children to school, and the other is distance to elementary government schools. Safety of children was concern when free school provision was not available near home. Children's education is not a priority when income resources are very limited and there is no government provision to support children's enrolment in school. A mother was asked why she does not send her daughter to school and she said,

> The school is not near, and I worry if she walks to school then it is not safe for her. It is at least safe that she is at home.

Another said,

> We decided to come to the city so that we could earn some money and make a pukka house in our village. If I spend on school fees, I can't save money.

A mother of four children said,

> I am dependent on my brother's income. My husband is in jail for a minor crime. And I have a few months old baby to look after. I can't even work under such conditions. I have no other means to support my children. Two of them used to go to school before but now I can't pay the fees, so they don't go to school anymore. These are very hard times.

These barriers and challenges to attend school are associated with extreme poverty and lack of support network from government. However, some children from average and above average income group were also not in attending school and their parents were also not rural immigrants to urban centres. The sample does not have a large number of such children but there were some common barriers informed by parents. Mostly these children were dropout from schools rather than never enrolled.

One of the reasons children drop-out from schools was that they were clearly in the category of children with learning difficulties. Their school experiences were not happy and teachers could have found them struggling to learn and were difficult to keep up with peers in the class. Children struggling in school never liked going to school and gradually parents stopped sending them to school.

A parent of one child said:

> He was always unhappy at school. He is slow in learning and the teacher always complained about him. We changed school as well, but he never liked going to school because it was difficult for him. He is at home now and we have arranged a private tutor for him. At least he is happy now and doesn't cry every morning.

Another child's father was informed why his child is a school dropout and he said:

> There were lots of family problems. His mother does not live with us anymore. It is difficult for me to manage my job and his education. We live in a joint family and there are always people around him to look after but responsibility for his school is something no one cares about. I am not able to do it myself so I can't expect others to do so. It is just so difficult to manage.

Children from above average income groups were mostly privileged as parental engagement in their learning process was clearly visible. The home environment had several learning materials and there was a lot of attention from parents to do learning activities in addition to attending school. Mother's engagement in this process was in the form of reading stories, helping with homework, attending parent teacher meeting, and studying together. Many families in the categories of average and above average income groups also had grandparents living in the household. Grandparents were helpful for working women as they provided support for childcare when mothers were working outside. Children had stronger social network in presence of grandparents and more opportunities for language development.

In India, the situation is different. Education is no more a choice but compulsion under the SSA. However, the system for pre-school / AWCs is more robust compared to enrolment in schools. Each village has at least one AWC and each urban ward has one AWC. There are two levels of employees – Anganwadi workers (AWWs) and Anganwadi helpers (AWHs), employed in each AWC. The AWH apart from having the responsibility of feeding the children with hot cooked breakfast and meals from time to time, also has an additional responsibility to go and pick up the child from her / his home, in case she / he is not dropped in by the parents. It is mandatory for a rural women to get registered for their pregnancies in an AWC and she is taken care of by the AWC till she lactates. This helps AWCs to keep track of number of children in the village. Thus, all children in village go to the AWC, if not to the private pre-schools. Under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan (the mission for complete education to all), government schools offer free education to everyone after the child attains the age of 6 years and until 12^{th} standard. However, free meals are offered only until primary education years, that is upto 8^{th} standard. Thus, there are hardly any dropouts until the age of 6 years and the dropout rate increases with higher standards of schooling. However, keeping a track of all the newborn children in urban area is a challenge. Moreover, it is difficult to identify which children will go to private nurseries and which ones will attend AWCs. Therefore, we are in the process of exploring poor pockets of the urban areas to identify children who are either not enrolled or they have dropped out. While, none of the children complained about going to school, one child, in response to the question of what makes you happy, said that "Sunday, because I have a holiday".