WAR
child

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN IRAQ AND JORDAN

in memory of Marion Lambert

Impact Evaluation Report

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"The program not only helped my child but also equipped me with tools to be a better parent"

A caregiver from Iraq, Mosul/Nineveh

ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
COVID - 19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPC	Child Protection Committe
CSI	Caregiver Support Intervention
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IDELA	International Development and Early Learning Assessment
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning
MMA	Moving Mind Alliance
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Impact Evaluation Report delves into the Early Childhood Development (ECD) program's implementation in Iraq and Jordan, focusing on its effectiveness and its impact on both children and caregivers. The IDELA Child Assessment serves as the primary tool, offering a comprehensive view of children's learning and developmental progress across various domains and subtasks.

The study employs a robust methodology, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches, drawing from primary and secondary data sources. This comprehensive approach includes the analysis of IDELA data from targeted child participants, qualitative insights from caregiver questionnaires, stakeholder input, policy documents, and a thorough data review. Building upon a baseline assessment conducted by War Child in June 2022, the IDELA was initially used to evaluate children's development across domains, including motor skills, emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, and socio-emotional development. Additionally, a caregiver questionnaire was administered to gather information about parenting practices and home environments.

The Impact Evaluation study demonstrates significant enhancements in children's developmental outcomes across various domains in both Iraq and Jordan. The intervention has positively impacted children's social-emotional learning, emergent literacy, and numeracy skills, as well as gross and fine motor skills. The data showcases substantial progress achieved through targeted interventions, effectively preparing children for primary education and future success. The results emphasize the intervention's success in promoting Social-Emotional development, early literacy and numerical skills, and physical motor abilities. The substantial percentage point gains observed in each domain underscore the intervention's effectiveness. Age-specific and gender-specific analyses highlight the intervention's impact across diverse age groups and genders.

These findings hold great significance for educational practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders in early childhood development, providing evidence of effective strategies to enhance children's developmental outcomes. The IDELA assessment results analyzed and discussed underscore the importance of tailored interventions that address specific developmental needs, contributing to improved educational outcomes and holistic child development.

> **In Iraq, the intervention led to a significant increase by 16.0% points in IDELA scores, demonstrating a substantial improvement in children's developmental outcomes, from a baseline of 48.9% to an endline score of 64.9%**

> **In Jordan, the intervention led to an impressive increase by 49.8% points in IDELA Scores, indicating a remarkable enhancement in children's developmental outcomes, from a baseline of 21.4% to an endline score of 71.1%**

The Early Childhood Development project in Iraq and Jordan stands out for its integration of caregiver support with psychosocial interventions for children. This comprehensive approach has led to multifaceted improvements in the well-being and development of both children and their families, across behavioral, emotional, and academic dimensions.

The Impact Evaluation study revealed significant improvements in children's developmental outcomes across various domains in both Iraq and Jordan through the IDELA assessment. The intervention showcased positive impacts on children's social emotional learning, emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, and gross and fine motor skills. The data indicates substantial gains achieved through targeted interventions, effectively enhancing children's overall preparedness for primary education and future success.

Comparing IDELA scores between control and treatment groups in Iraq and Jordan underscores the intervention's positive impact on developmental domains. The Treatment groups consistently outperform the control groups across all IDELA domains, demonstrating the effectiveness of the interventions in fostering children's holistic development. The consistent pattern of higher scores in the treatment groups underscores the positive impact of these interventions on children's overall development.

The program's effective use of adaptive learning, including flexibility in program delivery, strategic partnerships, tailored educational approaches, and robust internal communication and feedback loops, highlights its commitment to continuous improvement for better outcomes. These adaptive strategies enhance the program's current effectiveness while contributing to its long-term sustainability and scalability.

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive assessment of children's developmental skills and insights from caregivers and key stakeholders in Jordan and Iraq. The primary objective of this report is to evaluate the project's impact and provide solid evidence on the importance of ECD programs, promoting data-driven decision-making and advocacy at local and global levels.

1
INTRODUCTION

"

Learning through play holds immense significance, preparing children not only for school readiness but also equipping them to navigate their initial school experiences with ease

"

A caregiver from Iraq

1.1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

War Child implemented an Early Childhood Development (ECD) project, in Iraq and Jordan, in memory of Marion Lambert. The program aims to assist vulnerable children a in disadvantaged communities and refugee camps by offering essential ECD support to early child development through early education, parental engagement and in some cases, community engagement in child protection High-quality ECD services offer numerous long-term benefits for children, extending into adulthood. The project is particularly tailored to provide ECD services through direct service delivery targeting at-risk children in underprivileged areas and camps. These services include high-quality ECD sessions, a comprehensive caregiver support package, and the provision of psychosocial assistance to help both children and parents manage emotional challenges.

The program aims to provide all girls and boys with access to quality early childhood development, care, and education so that they are ready for primary education and demonstrated health well-being and developmental outcomes. The specific objectives of the project are:

Specific objective 1: To provide boys and girls with access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Specific Objective 2: To generate evidence and data across the two countries to develop valuable learning to inform programming and to engage with local, national & global humanitarian ECD actors.

1.2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

1.2.1. Early Childhood Development: A Global Perspective

Investing in early childhood development has emerged as an exceptionally effective and efficient way of accelerating progress for children, their communities, and societies at large across diverse countries. Research highlighted by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in "For Every Child 2021" emphasizes the transformative impact of nurturing, responsive, and stimulating interactions among young children, parents, and caregivers, which positively shape lifelong learning capabilities and even influence brain function. In crisis and conflict situations, young children are particularly susceptible to stress, compounded by exposure to violence, loss, separation from caregivers, and disruptions to support systems, all of which hinder both learning and psychosocial development. ECD often gets overlooked in crisis and conflict situations, especially in regions like Iraq and Jordan. The persistent crisis situations continue to pose significant challenges to prioritizing and implementing effective ECD programs. The disruption of education is a glaring example, with more than three million Iraqi children experiencing disrupted education, and frequent attacks on educational facilities being reported(1).

The circumstances highlight the need for a more structured and sustainable approach towards prioritizing ECD in crisis and conflict settings in Iraq, Jordan, and similar regions.

1.2.2. The Unique ECD Context of Iraq and Jordan

The foundational years of a child's life hold immense significance for optimal development, contingent on a stable environment. However, children born and raised in conflict- affected regions, such as Iraq and Jordan, confront significant challenges. These challenges encompass limited access to education and heightened insecurity, jeopardizing their prospects for survival and growth. Iraq and Jordan serve as prime examples, where conflicts, insecurity, and displacements have disrupted educational opportunities. ECD has gained recognition as a pivotal aspect of children's education, capable of shaping future learning outcomes. The significance of ECD is magnified especially in conflict-affected settings where the potential of quality ECD services to mitigate conflict-related adversities and foster optimal child development is underscored by evidence(2).This is particularly pertinent to the objectives of War Child, who assist refugees with restricted access to public ECD services and limited financial resources.

1.2.3. Iraq: A Landscape Marred by Conflict

Iraq's journey toward recovery from prolonged conflict and displacement has resulted in a deficiency in ECD services and government investment in pre-primary education. Amid the destruction of schools, infrastructure, and human services, Iraq faces challenges in ensuring quality education for its vulnerable populations. The consequences of violence manifest at individual, familial, and societal levels, with roughly 15% of Iraq's population displaced since 2014. Notably, the Government of Iraq, in partnership with UNICEF, launched the "National Strategy on Early Childhood Development (ECD)" in May 2022. This strategic initiative acknowledges various stages of child development and holds relevant authorities, providers, and communities accountable for safeguarding and promoting the needs of young children.

In Ninewa, where the current program operates, the situation is particularly dire. A substantial number of Iraqis have returned to homes ravaged by conflict and combat. Humanitarian resources primarily address immediate needs, leaving limited funding for education, including ECD. The services provided by War Child in Ninewa remain crucial in this context.

1.2.4. Jordan: Relative Stability, Persistent Gaps

In Jordan, the challenges lie not in conflict but in the sheer number of refugees it hosts—around 2.9 million(3). Limited access to early childhood education for Syrian refugee children and the broader ECD landscape in Jordan underscore the necessity for improvement. Government funding is insufficient, while private institutions play a substantial role in ECD provision.

1. https://www.warchildholland.org/iraq/#:~:text=More%20than%20three%20million%20Iraqi,to%20strengthen%20child%20protection%20structures
2. WHO and Partners, "Early childhood development in conflict-affected countries is key to life-long health, well-being, and prosperity
3. Jordan Ahlan Simsim & Play to Learn, "Early Childhood development IRC Jordan

Jordan's Education Strategic Plan and National Strategy for Human Resource Development prioritize access to early education, with a focus on universalizing kindergarten access.The Jordanian government aims to create over 2,000 new public and private-sector kindergarten groups by 2025 to achieve universal access to early childhood education. War Child's role extends beyond service provision, now encompassing sharing expertise and curricula to support others in initiating ECD services. Over the past 6 months, significant advancements have been made in ECD in Jordan, with a strong focus and prioritization from The National Council for Family Affairs. The establishment of the National Team for Early Childhood, comprising representatives from diverse institutions, has played a crucial role in ensuring effective coordination and synergy in plans and programs related to ECD throughout the country. This collaborative effort aligns with the economic modernization vision introduced by King Abdullah II in 2022, which places great importance on holistic approaches to local communities. Recognizing the critical significance of providing proper development services to young children, this vision emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive and targeted initiatives that cater to the needs of the children in society.War Child's role in Jordan has expanded from merely providing services to sharing expertise to further the establishment of ECD programs. Recent developments, including initiatives from the National Council for Family Affairs, have given ECD a more centralized role in national planning.

1.2.5. Implications for War Child Operations
War Child plays a critical role in both Iraq and Jordan, not just by providing ECD services but also by contributing expertise to various stakeholders. In Iraq, the focus could be on leveraging the momentum provided by the recently launched national ECD

strategy. In Jordan, partnering with local councils and international organizations can offer routes to sustainable improvements. The context analysis underscores the irreplaceable role of quality ECD services in mitigating the detrimental impacts of conflict and displacement on children. Hence, the targeted intervention of War Child in these areas remains not just vital but also aligned with broader strategic objectives in both nations.

1.3 EVALUATION BACKGROUND
The Impact Evaluation is designed to thoroughly assess the extent to which the project has achieved its intended impact and to generate compelling evidence for advocating the significance of ECD programs and data-driven decision- making at various levels within countries and on a global scale.

1.3.1. Audience and use of endline evaluation

The findings of this study will play a pivotal role in informing future enhancements of the ECD program. By designing and implementing appropriate interventions, the aim is to bolster the learning outcomes and overall development of young children in both countries.
The audience for this endline evaluation includes key stakeholders such as War Child, project beneficiaries, donors, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development officials, teachers, facilitators, community education actors, local education directorates, site managers, Child Protection Committees, and others involved in the field of ECD in humanitarian settings. The evaluation findings will be used for advocacy purposes to highlight the importance of early childhood development programs and data-driven decision-making at various levels within countries and globally. The results will inform the future design of ECD programs by providing evidence-based insights to enhance the learning outcomes and development of young children in Iraq and Jordan.

1.3.2. Evaluation Purpose and objectives

The primary purpose of this impact evaluation study is to assess the extent to which the project has achieved its desired impacts. Additionally, it seeks to generate robust evidence that advocates for the significance of early childhood development programs and data-driven decision-making at various levels within countries and on a global scale. The key objectives of this impact evaluation include:

1. Assessing the impact of the ECD program on children's learning outcomes.
2. Evaluating the program's effectiveness in enhancing the well-being of both children and caregivers.
3. Gaining insight into the perspectives of multiple stakeholders regarding their experiences and perceptions of the program's effectiveness. This encompasses identifying challenges that influenced project implementation, highlighting key lessons and best practices, and providing potential insights into ECD programming. These insights are invaluable for advocating the expansion of ECD programs in both countries.

1.3.3. Main Research questions

The evaluation will address the following key research questions:

- Has the intervention positively impacted children's learning outcomes?
- What is the impact of the intervention on the well-being of both children and their caregivers?
- How effectively did the program adapt to changes in context and emerging needs?
- What factors hindered or enabled program implementation and progress?

- How efficient and timely was the implementation the program
- What were the intended and unintended consequences of the program's activities?
- To what extent did the advocacy efforts under the program influence policy change?

Additionally, the evaluation will explore the complementarity of early childhood education and psychosocial support interventions, the effectiveness of different delivery modalities, and the impact of different parenting programs on child development outcomes.

1.3.4. Scope of evaluation

The evaluation study covers the impact and effectiveness of the ECD project implemented in Iraq and Jordan. The evaluation focuses on the extent to which the project has achieved its intended outcomes, including children's learning outcomes and caregivers' well-being. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to assess the impact, using the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) tool for quantitative data collection. Qualitative data was gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to gain deeper insights into the program's effectiveness, challenges, and lessons learned. The evaluation also explored the relationship between early childhood education and psychosocial support interventions, as well as the success of advocacy efforts aimed at policy change. The evaluation was carried out by a consultant with expertise in humanitarian evaluations and ECD.

> **Children who were initially reluctant to engage in educational activities have now become more enthusiastic learners**
>
> Participant, Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan

2
METHODOLOGY

2.1. APPROACH OVERVIEW

The Impact Evaluation Study of ECD utilized a comprehensive methodology that integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches, drawing on primary and secondary data sources. This encompassed the analysis of IDELA data collected from the targeted child participants, caregiver questionnaire qualitative data, insights from stakeholders, policy documents, and a thorough data review.

This study built upon a baseline assessment of children's learning and development conducted by War Child at the inception of project implementation cycles in June 2022. During the baseline assessment, IDELA was employed to evaluate children's learning and development across four crucial domains: motor development, emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, and socio-emotional development. Additionally, a caregiver questionnaire was administered to capture information about parenting practices and home environments.

In light of the baseline assessment, War Child endeavored to undertake an endline assessment using IDELA, which encompassed both the Child Assessment Tool and the Caregiver Questionnaire. Furthermore, the evaluation process leveraged data from a control group to augment the depth of analysis. To ensure a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective, the impact evaluation study adopted a combination of qualitative research methods. This approach aimed to triangulate results wherever possible, leading to a robust and holistic comprehension of the program's impact.

Recognizing the limitations in statistical possibilities, the evaluation design strategically employed data triangulation to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings. The following forms of triangulation were implemented:

1.Source Triangulation: This entailed comparing data from diverse sources, including project participants and local stakeholders, as part of the data analysis process.

2.Method Triangulation: A comprehensive analysis was performed by integrating data collected through various methods, such as desk reviews (incorporating project data amassed during the implementation phase), IDELA data, insights from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). This multi-pronged approach reinforced the robustness of the analysis.

This triangulation approach is central to ensuring that the findings derived from the evaluation study are robust, credible, and truly reflective of the program's impact and outcomes.

2.2. ASSESSMENT/MEASUREMENT TOOLS

This section outlines the diverse set of evaluation tools and measurement methodologies employed during the study. The evaluation encompassed the utilization of multiple assessment instruments designed to comprehensively assess the impact of the War Child ECD Program. The following evaluation tools were employed:

Tool 1: The IDELA tool
The IDELA was used to measure child development and learning and the IDELA Caregiver Questionnaire was used to interview parents/caregivers. IDELA is an international assessment tool developed by Save the Children which has been used in 40 countries to measure child development and learning and was used as to assess children aged 3.5-6 years old. The IDELA child assessment contains 22 direct assessment items covering four domains: motor development, emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, and socio-emotional development. The full list of Items included in IDELA are listed in Table 1. In this study, only 2 subtasks per domain were considered as highlighted in the Table (1) below. The short form is exactly what it suggests – a shortened version of a full-length assessment, that offers faster assessments, reduced training for enumerators, and even the opportunity to assess more children in a given time period. In the case of this study, the short form was considered as it would pose fewer questions to the child and thus take less time to administer. The short assessment was also important since the teams had to work with young children with short attention spans.

Table 1: IDELA Child Assessment Subtasks

Gross and Fine Motor Development	Emergent Literacy	Emergent Numeracy	Social - emotional Development
Hopping	Print Awareness	Comparison by Size and Lengh	Peer relations
Copying a Shape	Emergent Vocabulary	Sorting and Classification	Emotional Awareness/ Regulation
Drawing a Person	Letter Identification	Number Identification	Empathy/Perspective Taking
Folding Paper	Emergent Writting	Shape Identification	Sharing/Solving Conflict
	First Letter Sounds	One-to-One Correspondence	Self-Awareness
	Oral Comprehension	Addition and Subtraction	
		Puzzle Competition	

Source: Save the Children, IDELA Guidelines

Tool 2: Parents/Caregivers questionnaire

The objective of parents/caregivers' survey was to identify existing care giving practices. The survey with parents/caregivers collected the information about parenting knowledge, care giving practices and various adversity and protective factors. The IDELA Caregiver Questionnaire contains questions about children's family and household environments.

Specifically, caregivers are asked about their educational background, daily play, and learning interactions with children, feeding and health practices, and disciplinary behaviours, Health and Nutrition knowledge and practices. They are also asked about their expectations and attitudes regarding their children's development and the importance of education for their future.

Table 2: IDELA Caregiver questionnaire

	Section	Description
1.	General family information	Sex of child, child age, number of children at home, parental literacy, parental education, languages spoken at home
2.	ECD experience and educational expectations	Child participation in ECD programs, details of participation, parental expectation and aspirations of child's educational attainment
3.	Access to early learning materials and resources at home	Types of reading materials at home, types of toys at home
4.	Parenting practices and support for learning and development	Adults in the home engaging with children to promote learning and development
5.	Inadequate care	Children left alone or in the care of another young child
6.	Caregiver self-efficacy	What is the attitude about parent's role in child's development? • Do caregivers participate in parenting programmes? • Are caregivers'members of any community support groups?
7.	Socio economic status	Housing materials, objects/appliances owned, land/animals owned

Source: Save the Children, IDELA Guidelines

Tool 3: Key Informant Interviews

Structured interviews were carried out with key informants who possessed in-depth knowledge of the program's implementation and impact. These KIIs offered perspectives from individuals closely associated with the program. A total of 5 KIIs were conducted in each country, resulting in 10 interviews across both countries.

Tool 4: Focus Group Discussions

Focused group discussions were organized to facilitate open conversations with Caregivers and Facilitators. These discussions allowed participants to share their observations, experiences, and viewpoints regarding the program's effects. The FGDs were organized in each country, with 4-8 participants per group, consisting of both males and females. A total of 11 FGDs were conducted for this study. The table below summarizes FGDs conducted in Iraq and Jordan, detailing the type of FGD, location, and the number and gender of participants.

Table 3: Summary of FGDs conducted in Iraq and Jordan

Country	FGDType	Location	# FGD Participants
Iraq	Caregiver FGD	West Mosul/Nineveh	8, Female
		West Mosul/Nineveh	5, Male
	Facilitators FGD	West Mosul/Nineveh	8 (4 Male, 4 Female)
Jordan	Caregiver FGD	Azraq	5 (2 Male, 3 Female)
		Emirati Jordanian camp	6 (3 Male, 3 Female)
		Mansheya Bani Hasan	6 (2 Male, 4 Female)
		Zaatari Refugee Camp	6 (3 Male, 3 Female)
	Facilitators FGD	Azraq	4, Female
		Emirati Jordanian camp	4, Female
		Mansheya Bani Hasan	5 (1 Male, 4 Female)
		Zaatari Refugee Camp	4, Female

2.3. SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The IDELA child assessment was conducted in-person by War Child trained Enumerators in project targeted locations of Al Risala in Iraq (West Mosul) and Al Aoun, Al Keeram, Al Mansheya local community center, Emirati Jordanian Camp, Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan. The sampling strategy followed that described in the Terms of Reference for Impact Study of the ECD.

The sampling method used for [IDELA/KIIs/focus groups] was probability sampling methods through a simple random sampling. Since the data collection methods were different in the two countries from the start of the project, an adoptive uniform approach for both countries focusing on the endline assessment of one cycle.

2.4. TRAINING AND FIELD TESTING

2.4.1. Training on quantitative data collection using IDELA

At the inception of the project, War Child engaged a consultant to develop an IDELA Enumerator Training Guide. This guide was utilized by the IDELA Trainers to conduct training sessions for enumerators, focusing on the administration of IDELA with children. The training was led by a minimum of two MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning) staff, either Master IDELA Trainers or Trainer of Trainers, to ensure proper support and mentoring for the enumerators. These enumerator trainers had prior experience with IDELA, having undergone a Master IDELA training and worked with the tool for at least 15 children.

The training approach encompassed various methods, including lectures, discussions, group work, case studies, simulations, and role plays. The emphasis was on active learning, incorporating practical and illustrative examples with a participatory approach. This training equipped enumerators with the necessary skills to effectively collect quantitative data.

2.4.2. Enumerator Training on Qualitative Data Collection Tools

In consideration of the in-house data gathering by War Child teams across the two target countries, a comprehensive virtual training was undertaken by an external consultant.The training took place on the 24th of July 2023 (full day) and the 25th of July 2023 (half day). Its primary objective was to provide hired enumerators with the skills and knowledge required for objective data collection.The training approach utilized a variety of techniques, including lectures, discussions, group work, case studies, simulations, and role-plays.

These interactive methods ensured that enumerators were well-prepared to carry out their data collection responsibilities. Following the enumerator training, the enumerators commenced the qualitative endline data collection phase, involving FGDs and KIIs. This data collection phase took place from the 25th of July to the 6th of August 2023.

To uphold data quality, designated personnel from both project locations in the respective countries provided rigorous oversight. They monitored the data collection process, ensuring adherence to established protocols and guidelines. Once the data collection phase was concluded, the raw data was translated and sent to the consultant for final analysis and documentation.

The enumerator training aimed to achieve four key objectives, and the training schedule was tailored to meet these goals:

- Enhanced enumerators' skills in conducting effective FGDs and KIIs, including techniques for active listening, probing, and managing group dynamics.

- Provided training on data quality assurance measures, including accurate notetaking, data verification, and recording protocols, to ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data

- Equipped enumerators to navigate potential challenges and sensitivities that might arise during data collection, such as addressing sensitive topics or managing difficult participants.

- Ensured enumerators understood the significance of accurate and comprehensive documentation, including thorough completion of data collection forms and timely submission of collected data.

2.5. DATA ANALYSIS

2.5.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the IDELA assessment was collected at both baseline and endline stages. A comparative analysis was conducted using this data to establish the progress made in each of the IDELA domains. Furthermore, during the endline assessment, data was collected from both the control group and the treatment group, and a comparative analysis between these two groups was carried out.

The quality of data collection was ensured by the MEAL Officers deployed in project locations within each country. The IDELA data was collected using the IDELA Kobo Collect mobile application files. The collected raw data was subsequently exported to Excel for analysis. The analysis process employed MS Excel IDELA templates to compute variable summaries. For the purpose of accurate analysis, each dataset was scored in accordance with the IDELA scoring guidelines.

The primary objective of this analysis was to investigate the learning and developmental status of children across the various domains and subtasks of the IDELA Child Assessment. Additionally, the analysis aimed to explore the relationship between learning and development status and background characteristics of the children. Each dataset was scored using the IDELA scoring guidelines as follows:

- **Question & Responses**: Each correct response was assigned a score of 1 (one), while incorrect or "Do not know" responses received a score of 0 (zero). Responses marked as "Refused" or "Skipped" were scored as 999.

- **Checking for Missing Data**: This step involved inserting a row above the data labels in the Excel sheet and utilizing the =COUNTIF formula to count the occurrences of 999 values for each item. Any variables with more than 20% missing data (count of 999) were carefully examined to determine potential issues with translation, adaptation, or scoring of specific items. All 999 values in the data sheet were then replaced with 0.

- **Identification of Letters and Numbers**: For correct identification of letters, numbers, shapes, and sizes, a score of 1 was assigned. Incorrect identifications received no score.

- **Performance-Based Score**: Items such as hopping and drawing were scored based on performance as outlined in the scoring guidelines.

- **Total Domain Scores**: The total domain scores were calculated by summing the weighted scores of each item within a domain, ensuring equal contribution of all items to the domain score.

Total Direct Child Assessment Score: This score was calculated by summing the weighted total scores across all domains (motor, literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional) to create an overall score that equally incorporated performance in all domains.The analysis results are presented in a concise overview of the early learning and developmental status of the average child in the sample. Average scores for each subtask are discussed, as are composite scores summarizing learning and development across core domains: Motor Development, Emergent Numeracy, Emergent Literacy, and Social-Emotional Development. The analysis also explores relationships between children's IDELA scores and their gender, age, and township.

2.5.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis involved the examination of information gathered through KIIs and FGDs. These qualitative methods provided valuable insights into the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of participants related to the assessed domains. The analysis focused on identifying themes, patterns, and narratives within the qualitative data, shedding light on the contextual factors that contribute to the observed quantitative outcomes.

2.4. LIMITATIONS

In the section discussing limitations, several factors emerged during both the baseline and endline assessments that must be taken into account when interpreting the subsequent results and findings:

1. **Diverse Data Collection Teams:**
Data collection was carried out by two separate teams, located in Iraq and Jordan, respectively. Consequently, the sampling methods differed between these two locations. Notably, in the case of Jordan, the IDELA assessment tool was not administered to any treatment group children aged 6 years at baseline. This was attributed to the fact that 6 years is the age of school entry, and parents typically registered their children before reaching this age. This resulted in an uneven representation of age groups.

2. **Home Environment Assessment Challenges:**
The assessment of home environments required visits to the residences of participating children. However, due to cultural sensitivities and logistical challenges, the home environment assessment was conducted within ECD centers through caregiver interviews.

This approach was chosen as it was not feasible to directly observe the households and neighborhoods where the children resided.
Unfortunately, this limitation prevented the acquisition of firsthand information about the immediate surroundings of the children's homes, which is crucial for understanding the impact of the home learning environment on early childhood development.

3. **Baseline Data Collection Discrepancy**:
Only the treatment group's IDELA data was collected during the baseline assessment. Consequently, a direct comparison between the treatment and control groups at baseline was not possible, limiting the comprehensive understanding of the initial differences between the two groups.

It is essential to acknowledge these limitations and exercise caution when interpreting the findings. These constraints underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the impact evaluation results, emphasizing the importance of considering these factors when drawing conclusions from the assessment.

" The project yielded considerable positive changes among the caregivers we targeted. Societal norms and long-held customs underwent transformations "

- Project staff in Iraq

3

EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the key findings derived from the study's data analysis. It encompasses details related to the performance of the IDELA results, insights gained from the Caregiver questionnaire, and the factors associated with the IDELA results. The findings also include a comparative analysis between the baseline and endline results of the IDELA assessment.

3.1. OVERVIEW OF THE POPULATION

In this section, we provide an overview of the population under study, focusing on the distribution of children sampled at both the baseline and endline stages.The sample population is broken down by child age, gender, and treatment/control groups, giving us insights into the impact evaluation's progress across different categories.

The table below illustrates the distribution of children within the sample population at both the baseline and endline stages, categorized by child age, gender, and treatment/control groups. The population is analysed separately for Iraq and Jordan.

The table's layout facilitates a clear comparison between the child age groups, genders, and treatment conditions at both the baseline and endline stages for both Iraq and Jordan. This breakdown of the sample population forms an integral part of the impact evaluation, shedding light on the demographic context of the study's findings.

Table 4: Distribution of Children sampled at Baseline and Endline by child age

		Baseline			Endline					
		Treatment Sample			Control Sample			Treatment sample		
	Child Age	Boys	Girls	Grand Total	Boys	Girls	Grand Total	Boys	Girls	Grand Total
Iraq	4 years	1	1	2	16	8	24	24	19	43
	5 years	26	25	51	23	14	37	18	22	40
	6 years	13	17	30	10	16	26	11	7	18
	Iraq Total	40	43	83	49	38	87	53	48	101
Jordan	4 years	42	47	89				5	1	6
	5 years	12	15	27	25	31	56	40	37	77
	6 years				6	5	11	5	11	16
	Jordan Total	54	62	116	31	36	67	50	49	99
	Grand Total	94	105	199	80	74	154	103	97	200

3.2. CHILD DEVELOPMENT:IDELA

This section describes children's performance on the IDELA assessment. Total domain scores are calculated by adding the weighted score of each item in the domain so that all items contribute equally to the domain score. The total direct child assessment score is calculated by adding the weighted total scores from the core domains (Social Emotional Learning, Emergency numeracy, Emergency literacy and Gross and Fine Motor skills) so that all domains contribute equally to the total score. Therefore, the analyses presented below display the proportion of IDELA questions answered correctly out of all possible correct answers. The analysis presents comparative performance of children in the IDELA developmental domains which have been the focus of intervention of War Child ECD Program.

The purpose of the analysis is to understand the extent to which the intervention has been able to change baseline positions and provide boys and girls with access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre- primary education so that they are ready for primary education. The chart given for each of the domains presents baseline and gain scores (percentage points) separately for Iraq and Jordan, boys, and girls of three age groups, and for total sample (boys and girls combined).

In **Iraq**, at baseline, the children in the treatment group had an IDELA score of 48.9%. This baseline score represented the overall developmental level of the children across four key IDELA domains: Social Emotional Learning, Emergent Literacy, Emergent Numeracy, and Gross and Motor Development. As the intervention progressed, the endline IDELA score for the treatment group in Iraq increased significantly gaining a notable 16.0% point to reach an endline score of 64.9%. This indicates a notable positive impact of the intervention on the developmental outcomes of the children. See Figure 1 below.

In **Jordan**, the treatment group's baseline IDELA score was 21.4%. Over the course of the intervention, this score showed substantial progress, gaining an impressive 49.8% points to reach an endline score of 71.1%. This indicates a remarkable positive impact of the intervention on the developmental outcomes of the children in the Jordanian context.

Particularly noteworthy is the observation that the difference between baseline and endline results is more pronounced in Jordan than in Iraq. This distinction can be attributed to our work with children in Jordan living in refugee camps, lacking prior exposure to any form of education, while in Iraq, we worked with internally displaced families whose children may have had some cognitive and social stimulation in formal or non formal ways.

The chart below presents an overall comprehensive analysis of the developmental progress achieved by the participating children in Iraq and Jordan. The graph and the narrative highlight the IDELA scores at both baseline and endline, showcasing the gains made as a result of the intervention.
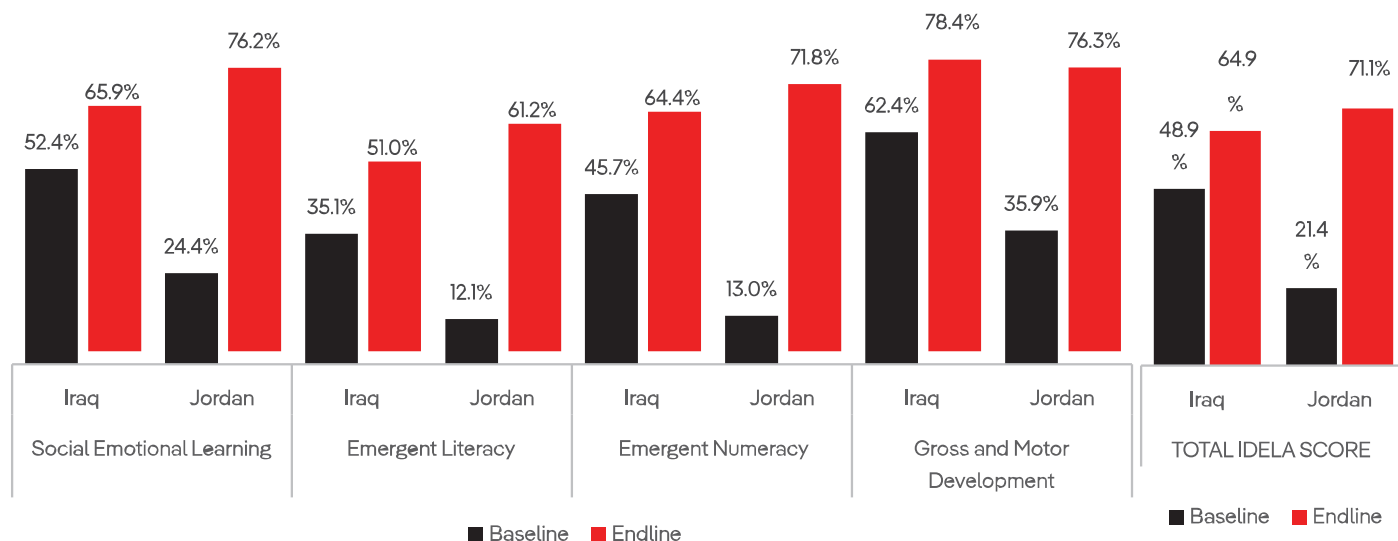

Figure 1: Average domain scores and Total IDELA score gains of the Treatment Group at endline, by Country.

a) Social Emotional Learning

In Iraq, the treatment group started with a baseline IDELA score of 52.4% in the Social Emotional Learning domain. Over the course of the intervention, the children demonstrated remarkable progress, gaining an impressive 13.5% points to reach an endline score of 65.9%. This substantial gain underscores the positive impact of the intervention on nurturing the children's socio-emotional skills.

In Jordan, the baseline IDELA score for Social Emotional Learning was 24.4%. The intervention yielded exceptional results, leading to a significant gain of 51.7% points. This brought the endline score to an impressive 76.2%, highlighting the program's effectiveness in promoting emotional and social development among the children.

b) Emergent Literacy

In Iraq, the treatment group had a baseline IDELA score of 35.1% in the Emergent Literacy domain. Through the intervention, the children experienced substantial growth, gaining 15.9% points to reach an endline score of 51.0%. This progress indicates the intervention's success in enhancing the early literacy skills of the children.

Similarly, in Jordan, the treatment group had a baseline IDELA score of 12.1% in the Emergent Literacy domain. Through the intervention, the children experienced a remarkable gain of 49.1% points. This brought the endline score to an impressive 61.2%, highlighting the project's effectiveness in promoting early literacy development.

c) Emergent Numeracy

In Iraq, the treatment group began with a baseline IDELA score of 45.7% in the Emergent Numeracy domain. The intervention led to substantial growth, resulting in a gain of 18.7% points, bringing the endline score to 64.4%. This highlights the intervention's success in fostering numerical and mathematical abilities.

In Jordan, the baseline IDELA score for Emergent Numeracy was 13.0%. The intervention had a significant impact, leading to a gain of 58.8% points. This brought the endline score to an impressive 71.8%, indicating the program's effectiveness in promoting numerical and mathematical development.

d) Gross and Motor Development

The treatment group in Iraq started with a baseline IDELA score of 62.4% in the Gross and Motor Development domain. Over the course of the intervention, the children made significant progress, gaining 16.0% points to reach an endline score of 78.4%. This highlights the intervention's role in enhancing the children's physical and motor skills.

In Jordan, the baseline IDELA score for Gross and Motor Development was 35.9%. The intervention had a substantial impact, leading to a gain of 40.3% points. This brought the endline score to 76.3%, indicating the program's effectiveness in promoting physical and motor development.

In conclusion, the data from the Impact Evaluation study in both Iraq and Jordan demonstrates the substantial gains achieved by the treatment groups in various IDELA domains. The intervention effectively contributed to the children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development, underscoring its positive impact on their overall developmental progress.

3.2.1. Social Emotional Learning

This section presents the impact evaluation findings of the intervention group's progress in two crucial sub-domains of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): Emotional Awareness/ Regulation and Empathy/Perspective Taking. The report also outlines the combined impact by calculating the average of the SEL scores within these sub-domains. The evaluation sheds light on the progress made by boys and girls within each country and provides insights into age-specific trends.

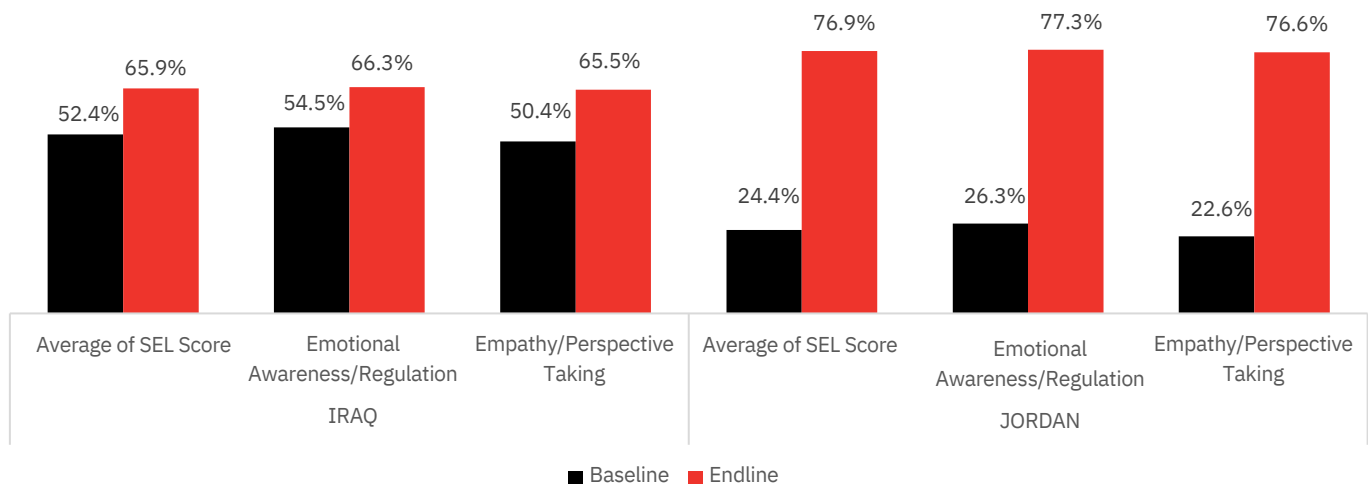*Table 5: Baseline & Endline of Social Emotional Learning sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country*

Country	SEL sub domains	Baseline			Endline		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
JORDAN	Emotional Awareness/Regulation	19.9%	31.9%	26.3%	75.5%	79.1%	77.3%
	Empathy/Perspective Taking	25.2%	20.3%	22.6%	78.0%	75.1%	76.6%
	Average of SEL Score	22.5%	26.1%	24.4%	76.8%	77.1%	76.9%
IRAQ	Emotional Awareness/Regulation	58.8%	50.6%	54.5%	60.4%	72.9%	66.3%
	Empathy/Perspective Taking	56.0%	45.1%	50.4%	62.3%	69.2%	65.5%
	Average of SEL Score	57.4%	47.8%	52.4%	61.3%	71.0%	65.9%

In **Jordan**, the **Emotional Awareness/Regulation** sub-domain exhibited substantial changes, with a baseline score of 26.3%. The endline assessment witnessed a substantial gain of 47.2% points to reach 79.1% for girls and 55.6% points to reach 75.5% for boys, resulting in a 51.0% overall improvement to reach 77.3%. The **Empathy/Perspective Taking** sub-domain displayed a gain of 54.8% points to reach 75.1% for girls and 52.8% points to reach 78% for boys, contributing to a 54.0% overall enhancement to reach 76.6%. The Average SEL Score, combining both sub-domains, experienced a gain of 51.0% points to reach 77.1% for girls and 54.2% points to reach 76.8% for boys, leading to a 52.5% overall improvement to reach 76.9%.

In **Iraq**, the children in the treatment group scored 54.5% at the baseline within the **Emotional Awareness/Regulation** sub-domain with girls slightly lower at 50.6% and boys at 58.8%. By the Endline, there was a remarkable gain of 22.3% points to reach 72.9% for girls and 1.6% points to reach 60.4% for boys, contributing to an overall increase of 11.8% points to reach 66.3% in this sub-domain. The **Empathy/Perspective Taking** sub-domain displayed similar trends, with girls experiencing a higher gain of 24.1% to reach 69.2% compared to boys at 6.3% to reach 62.3%, leading to a 15.2% overall improvement to reach 65.5%. The Average SEL Score, representing the combined impact of both sub-domains, gained by 23.2% points to reach 71% for girls and 3.9% point to reach 61.3% for boys, culminating in a 13.5% overall gain to reach 65.9%.

The figure 2 below presents an analysis comparison of baseline and gains of Social Emotional Learning sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country.

Figure 2: Baseline & Endline of Social Emotional Learning sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country

In conclusion, the impact evaluation underscores the positive influence of the SEL program on Emotional Awareness/Regulation and Empathy/Perspective Taking within the Treatment group in Iraq and Jordan. The analysis by gender and age emphasizes the value of targeted interventions in enhancing children's social and emotional development, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and success.

3.2.2. Emergent literacy

This section delves into the impact evaluation of the emergency literacy intervention, focusing on expressive vocabulary and letter identification sub-domains across age groups and countries (Iraq and Jordan). The results underline the gains achieved by the intervention in critical literacy areas. The table presents baseline and gains data for expressive vocabulary and letter identification in Iraq and Jordan. Notable improvements in both sub-domains are highlighted.

Table 6: Baseline & Endline of Emergent Literacy Sub-domains of the Treatment group, by gender and Country

		Baseline			Endline		
	Emergent Literacy Sub-domains	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Baseline**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Endline**
JORDAN	Expressive Vocabulary	20.3%	21.1%	20.7%	68.8%	64.9%	66.8%
	Letter Identification	2.9%	2.5%	2.7%	74.5%	67.5%	71.0%
	Average of Emergent Literacy	**11.6%**	**11.8%**	**11.7%**	63.5%	60.0%	61.8%
IRAQ	Expressive Vocabulary	62.1%	48.5%	55.3%	72.5%	75.4%	73.9%
	Letter Identification	15.5%	14.7%	15.1%	26.4%	29.8%	28.0%
	Average of Emergent Literacy	**38.8%**	**31.6%**	**35.2%**	49.5%	52.6%	51.0%

In **Jordan**, the baseline *expressive vocabulary skills* were at 20.3% for boys and 21.1% for girls. By the endline, these skills demonstrated significant advancement, with gains of 48.5% point to reach 68.8% for boys and 43.8%-point gains to reach 64.9% for girls, contributing to an overall increase of 46.2% to reach 66.8% points in this sub-domain. The *letter identification skills* for boys and girls began with baseline of 2.9% and 2.5%, respectively, and by the endline, these skills experienced dramatic improvements, with gains 71.6% points to reach 74.5% for boys and gains of 65% points to reach 67.5% for girls. The overall Emergent Literacy Score, combining both sub-domains in Jordan, experienced a gain of 51.9% points to reach 63.5% for girls and gains of 48.2% points to reach 60% for boys, leading to a 50.1% overall improvement to reach 61.8%.

In **Iraq**, baseline *expressive vocabulary skills* stood at 62.1% for boys and 48.5% for girls. By the endline, there was a notable gain of 10.4% points to reach 72.5% for boys and an impressive 26.9% points to reach 75.5% for girls, contributing to an overall gain of 18.6% points to reach 73.9% in this sub- domain. The *letter identification skills* displayed similar trends, with girls experiencing a higher gain of 15.1% point to reach 29.8% compared to boys' gains at 10.9% point to reach 26.4%, leading to a 12.9% point gain to reach 28%. . The Average Emergent Literacy Score, representing the combined impact of both sub-domains, gained by 21.0% points to reach 52.6% for girls and 10.7% points to reach 49.5% for boys, culminating in a 15.8% points overall gain, to reach 51%. These gains underscore the intervention's success in enhancing children's ability to articulate and comprehend vocabulary and its effectiveness in promoting letter recognition abilities.
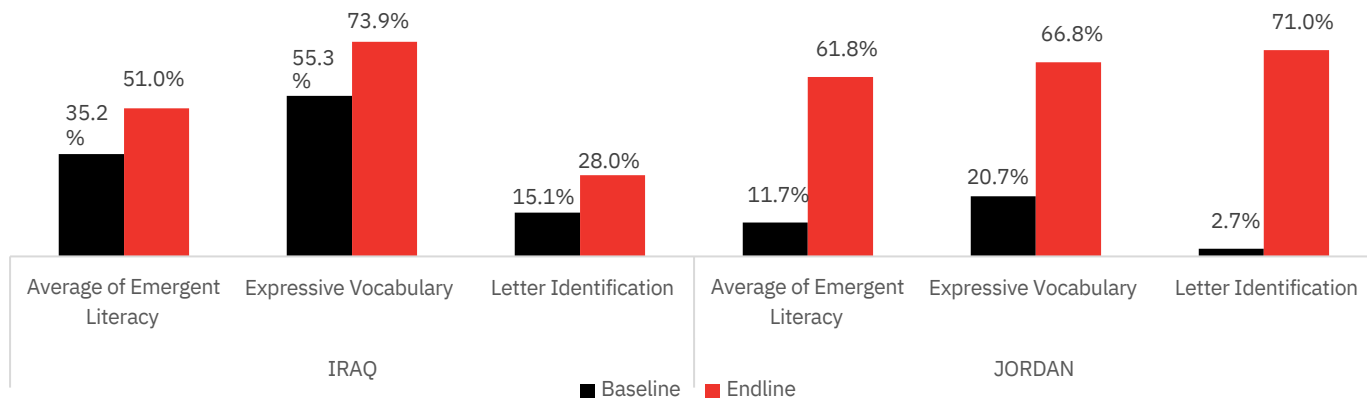
Figure 3: Baseline & Endline of Emergent Literacy sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country

3.2.3. Emergent numeracy

This section presents the impact evaluation findings of the intervention group's progress in two crucial sub-domains of Emergent Numeracy sub-domain: Number Identification and One-to-one Correspondence. The aim is to compare the baseline and endline data, shedding light on the improvements achieved by the treatment group. The following table (Table 9) provides a comprehensive overview of the baseline values and gains for the Emergent Numeracy sub-domain within the Treatment group, categorized by gender and country.

Table 7: Baseline & Endline of Emergency numeracy sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country

		Baseline (TR)			Endline		
	Emergent Numeracy Sub-domains	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Baseline (TR)**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Endline**
JORDAN	Number Identification	7.2%	8.4%	7.8%	75.1%	74.0%	74.5%
	One-to-one Correspondence	17.9%	18.3%	18.1%	74.7%	83.0%	78.8%
	Average of Emergent Numeracy	**12.6%**	**13.3%**	**12.9%**	71.1%	73.9%	72.5%
IRAQ	Number Identification	38.3%	31.4%	34.8%	51.3%	60.0%	55.4%
	One-to-one Correspondence	57.5%	55.8%	56.7%	67.9%	79.2%	73.3%
	Average of Emergent Numeracy	**47.9%**	**43.6%**	**45.7%**	59.6%	69.6%	64.4%

In **Jordan**, the baseline for **Number Identification** scores were 7.2% for boys and 8.4% for girls. By the endline, these skills demonstrated remarkable progress, with boys gaining 67.9% points to reach 75.1% and girls gaining 65.6% points to reach 74%, leading to an overall gain of 66.7% points to reach 74.5% in this sub-domain. The **One-to-one Correspondence** also improved significantly, with boys gaining 56.8% points to reach 74.7% and girls gaining 64.7% points to reach 83%, leading to a 60.7%-point overall improvement to reach 78.8% withing the sub domain. The Average of Emergent Numeracy showed substantial improvements as well, with gains of 58.6% points to reach 71.1% for boys and 60.6% points to reach 73.9% for girls, leading to a 59.6%-point overall improvement to reach 72.5%.

In **Iraq**, the baseline score for Number Identification was 38.3% for boys and 31.4% for girls. By the endline there was a notable gain of 13.1% points to reach 51.3% for boys and an impressive 28.6% points to reach 60% for girls, contributing to an overall increase of 20.6% points to reach 55.4% in this sub-domain. Similarly, for One-to-one Correspondence, there were similar trends displayed, with girls experiencing a higher gain of 23.4% points to reach 79.2% compared to boys at 10.4% points to reach 67.9%, leading to a 16.6%-points overall improvement to reach 73.3%. The Average Emergent Numeracy Score, representing the combined impact of both sub- domains, gained by 26 % points to reach 69.6% for girls and 11.7% points to reach 59.6% for boys, culminating in a 18.6% points overall gain to reach 64.4%.
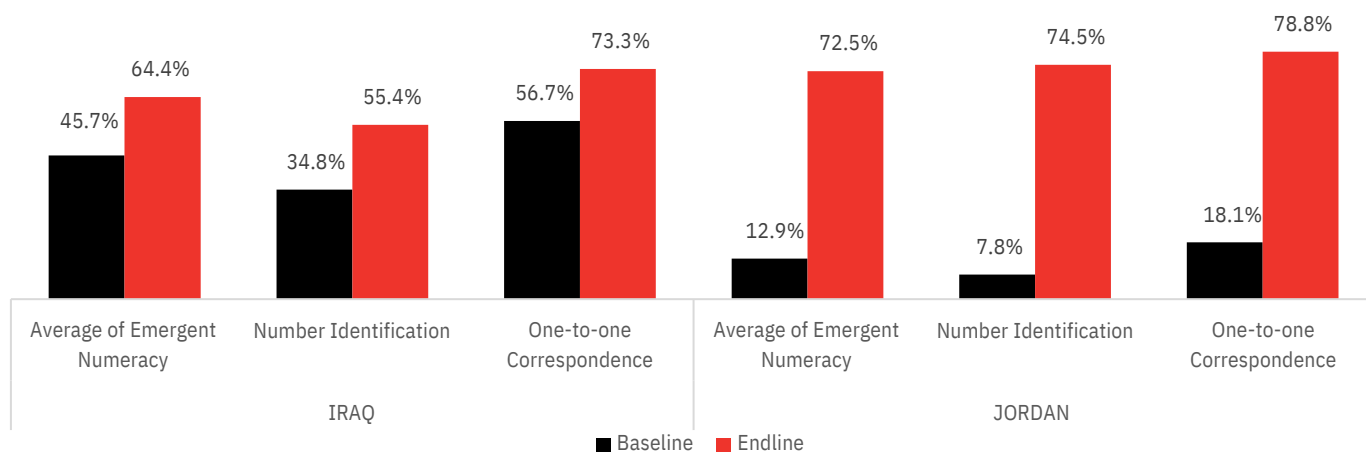

Figure 4: Baseline & Endline of Emergency numeracy sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country

3.2.4. Gross and Fine Motor skills

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the Gross and Fine Motor skills scores within the IDELA sub-domain. The analysis focuses on the Fine Motor Skills (Drawing a Person) and Gross Motor Skills (Hopping) indicators, comparing baseline and endline data for the treatment group in two countries, Iraq and Jordan. It includes baseline measurements and the gains at endline, which were calculated by subtracting the baseline scores from the endline scores.

In **Jordan**, the baseline for the Fine Motor Skills (Drawing a Person) scores were 15% for boys and 29.6% for girls. By the endline, these skills demonstrated remarkable progress, with boys gaining 55.7% points to reach 70.8% and girls gaining 47.9% points to reach 77.6%, contributing to an overall gain of 39.4% points to reach 74.1% in this sub-domain. The Gross Motor Skills also improved significantly, with boys gaining 34.9% points to reach 81.4% and girls gaining 25.8% points to reach 76.9%, contributing to a 20%-point overall improvement to reach 74.1% within the sub domain. The Average of Gross and Motor Development showed substantial improvements as well, with gains of 46% point to reach 76.8% for boys and 39.9% points to reach 77.2% for girls, contributing to a 30.1% point overall improvement to reach 77% within the domain.

Table 8: Baseline & Endline of Gross and Fine Motor skills sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country

	Gross and Motor Development Sub-domains	Baseline			Endline		
		Boys	Girls	Baseline	Boys	Girls	Endline
JORDAN	Fine Motor Skills (Drawing a Person)	15.0%	29.6%	34.7%	70.8%	77.6%	74.1%
	Gross Motor Skills (Hopping)	46.5%	51.1%	59.1%	81.4%	76.9%	79.2%
	Average of Gross and Motor Development	**30.8%**	**40.4%**	**46.9%**	76.8%	77.2%	77.0%
IRAQ	Fine Motor Skills (Drawing a Person)	47.5%	54.9%	51.4%	63.2%	72.1%	67.5%
	Gross Motor Skills (Hopping)	72.3%	74.4%	73.4%	87.0%	91.9%	89.3%
	Average of Gross and Motor Development	**59.9%**	**64.7%**	**62.4%**	75.1%	82.0%	78.4%

In **Iraq**, the children in the Treatment group scored 51.4% at the baseline within the Fine Motor Skills (Drawing a Person) sub-domain with boys at 47.5% and girls at 58.8%. By the endline, there was a notable gain of 15.7% points to reach 63.2% for boys and 17.2% points to reach 72.1% for girls, contributing to an overall gain of 16.1% points to reach 67.5% in this sub-domain. The Gross Motor Skills (Hopping) displayed similar trends, with girls experiencing a slightly higher gain of 17.5% points to reach 91.9% compared to boys at 14.7% points to reach 87%, leading to a 15.9% points overall improvement to reach 89.3%. The Average Gross and Motor Development Score, representing the combined analysis of both sub-domains, gained by 17.3% points to reach 82% for girls and 15.2% points to reach 75.1% for boys, culminating in a 16% points overall gain to reach 78.4%.
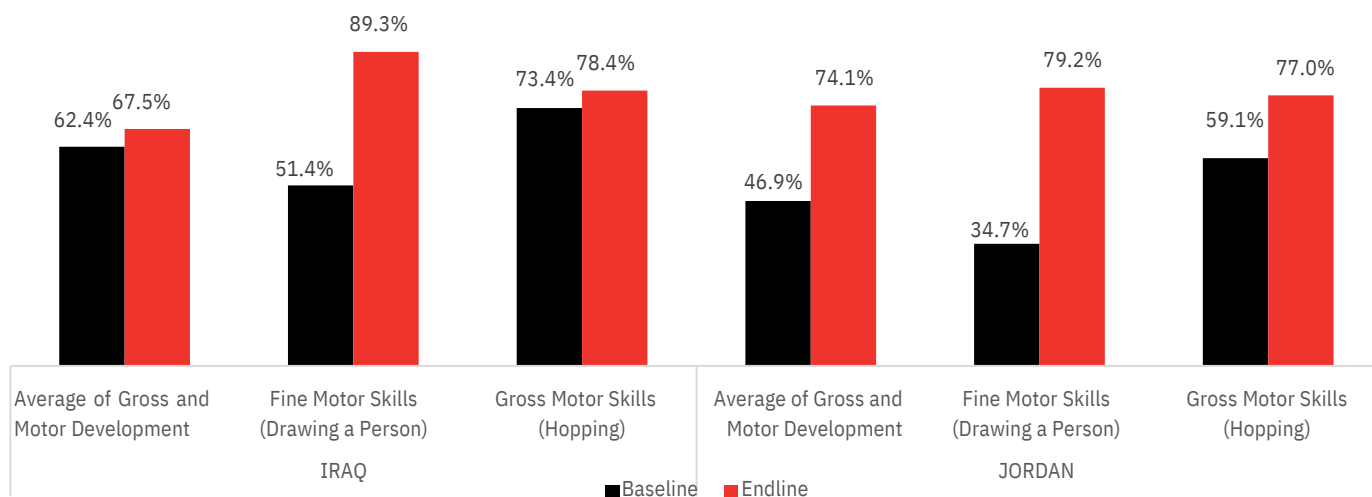

Figure 5: Baseline & Endline of Gross and Fine Motor skills sub-domain of the Treatment group, by Country

The Impact Evaluation study has revealed significant improvements in children's developmental outcomes across various domains in both Iraq and Jordan through the IDELA assessment. The intervention showcased positive impacts on children's social emotional learning, emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, and gross and fine motor skills. The data indicates substantial gains achieved through targeted interventions, effectively enhancing children's overall preparedness for primary education and future success. The results highlight the success of the intervention in promoting social emotional learning, early literacy skills, numerical abilities, and physical motor skills. The intervention's positive impact is particularly evident in the substantial percentage point gains observed in each domain. Additionally, age-specific and gender-specific analyses underscore the intervention's effectiveness across diverse age groups and highlight gender-related impacts.

These findings are crucial for educational practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders in early childhood development, as they provide evidence of effective strategies to enhance children's developmental outcomes. The success of the IDELA intervention underscores the importance of tailored interventions

that address specific developmental needs, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and holistic child development.

3.3. CAREGIVER RESULTS

This section describes the findings from the caregivers interviewed using the caregiver questionnaire. The analysis focuses on the responses provided by caregivers from Iraq and Jordan regarding family and caregiver characteristics, early childhood development expectations, and attitudes about children's development. A total of 64 Caregivers: 45 (24 Female, 21 Male) in Jordan and 19 (12 Female, 7 Male) in Iraq, were reached during the endline assessment. The results are analyzed and presented in the subsections below.

3.3.1. Family and caregiver characteristics

This section describes basic background characteristics about the families who were sampled for the baseline and the endline assessment. To understand the general family characteristics, the caregivers were asked about the child age, number of children at home, parental literacy, parental education, and languages spoken at home.

Table 9: Family characteristics, by country

	Baseline			Endline		
	Iraq (N=26)	Jordan (N=18)	Average (N=144)	Iraq (N=19)	Jordan (N=45)	Average (N=64)
Caregiver education (0=None; 4=Higher/University education)	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.7	2.4
# Children in family	1.2	4.3	3.8	4.3	4.0	4.1
Lessons Follow up (Parents able to follow up the lessons with the children?)	92.10%	93.20%	92.70%	100%	100%	100%
Home language as Arabic (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

3.3.2. ECD Experience and Educational Expectations

In order to assess the impact of ECD initiatives, structured interviews guided by the Caregiver questionnaire were conducted with caregivers in Iraq and Jordan to explore their experiences and anticipations. The inquiry was guided by the following key questions:

- What are your views on enrolling your child in an Early Childhood Education program?
- What do you expect to achieve during the program's course, and in what ways has it already benefited your child?
- What are your long-term academic aspirations for your child?

The information collected was primarily qualitative in nature. Hence, a qualitative analytical approach was employed to distill the recurrent themes around opinions, expectations, observed benefits, and future academic aspirations for their children. The synthesis of these findings is presented in the subsequent sections.

Caregiver opinions on ECD Enrolment

An overwhelming majority of caregivers from both Iraq and Jordan expressed immense satisfaction with their children's participation in the ECD programs. The term "outstanding" was frequently used by caregivers in Iraq to describe their children's involvement. The quotes below indicates a high level of satisfaction with the ECD program in Iraq and Jordan.

> **"Their participation in the program was outstanding. It helped them learn and write letters and hold the pen properly."**
> Female caregiver from Iraq

> **"My child is now able to learn letters, numbers, and numbers."**
> Male caregiver from Jordan

Caregiver Expectations and Perceived Benefits During Program Duration

The Caregivers shared their expectations and perceived benefits during the course of the ECD programs. Some of the common themes include:

a) Skill Development : Caregivers from both countries noted tangible skills that their children acquired. In Iraq, children reportedly learned to "write letters and hold the pen properly," while in Jordan, caregivers observed their children acquiring "pen-handling skills" and "better communication with people."

b)Behavioural Changes: Many caregivers, particularly in Iraq, noticed positive behavioural changes in their children. For instance, one caregiver in Iraq mentioned that the program had a positive impact on her child's "psychological well-being."

c)Social Integration: In Jordan, caregivers highlighted the social benefits, such as "integration with children" and "strengthening her personality." One caregiver from Iraq pointed out that her child "seamlessly integrated with the other children, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment."

d)Academic Readiness: Several caregivers in Iraq commented on how the program prepared their children for more formal education. One caregiver felt that the program made it easier for her child to transition to kindergarten, stating:

> **"The courage to enrol in school without hesitation will have positively shaped our journey, making it smoother for the future."**

Academic Aspirations for Children

When asked about their long-term academic aspirations for their children, caregivers revealed their hopes for their children's future careers and educational achievements. These quotes illustrate the caregivers' dreams for their children to excel academically and contribute positively to society:

> **"My child has achieved a remarkable achievement, becoming self-reliant in everything, learning letters and numbers, sharing, and memorizing verses from the Qur'an."**
> Male caregiver from Jordan

> **"I am thrilled and filled with excitement about his journey toward completing his studies."**
> Male caregiver from Iraq

> **"I have high hopes that she will successfully complete her studies and become a teacher."**
> Female caregiver from Iraq

In summary, caregivers in Iraq and Jordan demonstrated strong support for enrolling their children in Early Childhood Education programs. They held high expectations for their children's development during the program's duration and had ambitious academic aspirations for their future. These caregiver insights underscore the positive impact and importance of Early Childhood Education initiatives in the region.

Qualitative Insights

a)Caregiver Experiences and Attitudes: Caregivers in both countries expressed enthusiasm about their children's participation in early learning programs. For example, one caregiver from Iraq said, "Their excellent participation has led to significant improvements in learning and writing." Another highlighted the program's positive impact on their child's psychological well-being.

b)Availability of Educational Resources at Home: Educational materials at home varied among households, including government curriculum books,

reading materials, and digital resources. One caregiver from Iraq mentioned cube-shaped games with letters, while another noted access to educational channels via television and the internet.

3.3.3. Access to early learning materials and resources at home

The provision and availability of early learning materials in homes are recognized as critical components for childhood development. This section focuses on the changes observed in the availability of early learning materials in homes in Iraq and Jordan, based on caregivers' surveys conducted at the baseline and endline stages of the program. The data from **Iraq** highlights a profound transformation in the accessibility of educational materials at home. At baseline, almost a quarter of households (23.1%) reported having no educational materials available. At endline, this number dropped to zero, a remarkable achievement signifying that every surveyed home had at least one form of educational material available for children.
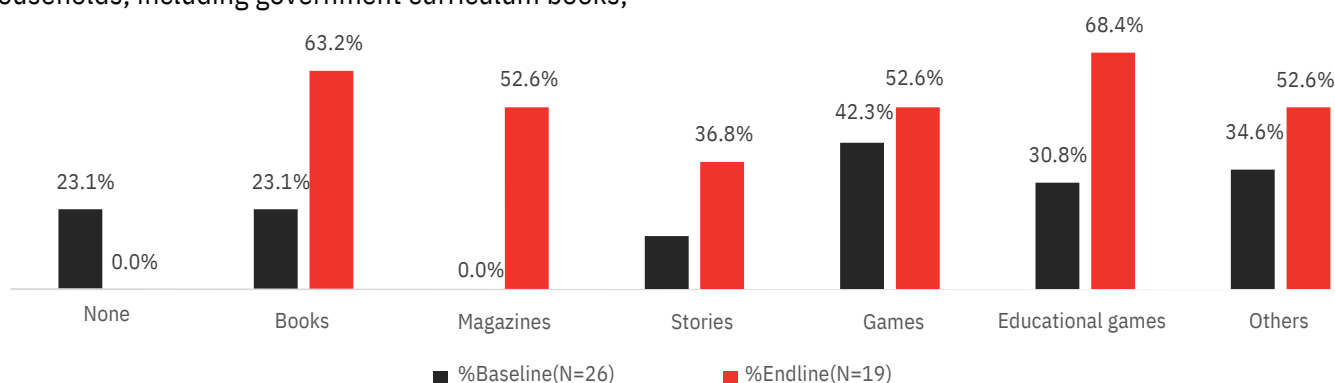

Figure 6:Types of education materials are available at home - Iraq

The availability of books saw an impressive rise from 23.1% to 63.2%. Educational games similarly increased from 30.8% at baseline to 68.4% at endline. The introduction of magazines as a new category was notable, with over half of the respondents (52.6%) reporting their availability at endline. The 'Others' category, which includes a variety of items such as smart devices and educational TV channels, increased from 34.6% to 52.6%. The 'Others' category also deserves attention. At baseline, this mainly included smart devices and educational TV channels. By the endline, the category had diversified to include acoustic dolls, notebooks, sketchbooks, and even educational photos.
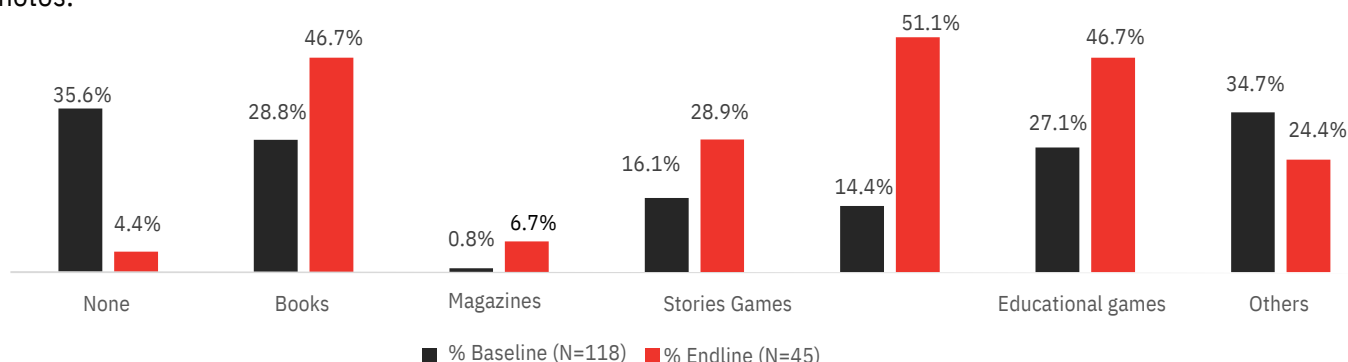
Figure 7: Types of education materials are available at home - Jordan.

In **Jordan**, the situation was not dissimilar. The percentage of households with no educational materials dropped dramatically from 35.6% at baseline to 4.4% at endline. The availability of books nearly doubled, rising from 28.8% at baseline to 46.7% at endline. Games and educational games saw a significant uptick, increasing to 51.1% and 46.7% at endline, respectively. However, it's worth noting that the 'Others' category reduced from 34.7% to 24.4%, perhaps indicating a shift towards more traditional forms of educational materials. At baseline, this predominantly included smart phones, pens, and drawing notebooks. Although the specifics at endline were not captured, the decline might be explained by the fact that, at the beginning of the program during the post-COVID era, it was almost entirely online. Later, it shifted to almost entirely face-to-face. So, while there is no data, there could be a correlation with a decrease in the use of smartphones.

The data tells a story of transformation. In **Iraq**, the absence of educational materials at baseline might have reflected the pressing challenges of accessibility and affordability. However, the endline data suggests that these barriers have been significantly reduced, if not entirely eliminated. In Jordan, the broader variety in the 'Others' category at baseline might indicate a somewhat more eclectic approach to early learning. The endline data confirms a shift towards more structured learning resources, although digital platforms like smartphones continue to play a role.

In both Iraq and Jordan, the program has effectively broadened the range of educational materials available in homes. The shift is not merely quantitative but also qualitative, with an evident move towards a blend of traditional and digital learning resources.

3.3.4. Attitudes about children's development

The caregivers' attitudes about their children's development and their roles in fostering that development are evident in their responses. In both Iraq and Jordan, caregivers emphasize their active engagement in their children's education and well-being. They take pride in monitoring progress, offering support, and encouraging learning at home. Caregivers participate in various educational activities, such as teaching their children how to read, playing educational games, and even involving them in daily tasks. Caregivers recognized the benefits of educational programs and the importance of fostering various skills. A caregiver from Iraq noted:

"*My role with my child is to support and nurture their learning development, including enhancing their drawing skills and teaching them how to hold a pen correctly.*"

This demonstrates their active involvement in guiding and nurturing their children's learning journeys.

In **Iraq**, caregivers express their roles as nurturers and facilitators of their children's education. They provide resources such as books, educational tools, mobile devices, and even TV programs to supplement their children's learning. Caregivers prioritize spending quality time with their children and valuing their opinions.

In **Jordan**, caregivers echo a similar sentiment, emphasizing the importance of encouragement, motivation, and creating a safe and supportive environment. They provide their children with educational materials, engage in learning activities, and make efforts to understand their preferences and opinions. The caregivers also highlighted their involvement, with one saying:

"*I support him and give him favourite things like toys, and I can draw and colour with him.*"

This highlights the caregivers' role in creating a supportive and engaging learning environment for their children. The caregiver responses from both Iraq and Jordan underline the vital role that caregivers play in children's development. They actively engage in their children's education, encourage their aspirations, and provide valuable support for their growth. The ECD programs are making a positive impact on children's learning, behaviour, and self-confidence, leading to optimistic attitudes about their future potential. These insights from caregivers emphasize the importance of continued investment in early childhood education and development programs to empower children to reach their full potential.

3.4. COMPARISON OF TREATMENT AND CONTROL GROUPS AT ENDLINE

3.4.1. Overview: Treatment vs Control groups

In this section, we delve into the assessment of the program's effectiveness in promoting various dimensions of well-being among children and caregivers. Through rigorous analysis, we examine the impact of the intervention on the domains of Social Emotional Learning, Emergent Literacy, Emergent Numeracy, and Gross and Motor Development.

The statistical analysis shows significant differences in all four IDELA domains between the treatment and control groups in both Iraq and Jordan. In both locations the analysis of the IDELA Child Assessment Data reveals highly significant differences between the treatment and control groups across all IDELA domains in both Iraq and Jordan. The p-values [4] for all tests were less than 0.01, indicating highly significant differences (**).

Table 10: Total domain scores and Total IDELA score at endline, by Country.

IDELA Domains	Country	Control Mean	Treatment Mean	p-value	Significance
1. Social Emotional Learning	Iraq	0.533	0.659	0.001	**
	Jordan	0.321	0.762	0.0	**
2. Emergent Literacy	Iraq	0.282	0.51	0.0	**
	Jordan	0.231	0.611	0.0	**
3. Emergent Numeracy	Iraq	0.351	0.644	0.0	**
	Jordan	0.338	0.718	0.0	**
4. Gross and Motor Development	Iraq	0.594	0.784	0.0	**
	Jordan	0.412	0.763	0.0	**
TOTAL IDELA SCORE	Iraq	0.44	0.649	0.0	**
	Jordan	0.319	0.711	0.0	**

Note: The term 'significant' is used to indicate results where the p-value was less than 0.05 (*), and 'highly significant' for results where the p-value was less than 0.01 (**).

3.4.2. Domain-Specific Comparison

a) Social Emotional Learning

The Social Emotional Learning (SEL) sub-domains were assessed at endline for both the control and treatment groups in Iraq and Jordan. Figure 7 presents children's average scores on the subtasks of the Social-Emotional Learning Domain. In both countries, the treatment group significantly outperformed the control group across all sub-domains.

In **Iraq**, the Treatment group significantly outperformed in Emotional Awareness/Regulation with a score of 66.3%, compared to the Control group's 56.0%. Similarly, the Treatment group outperformed the Control group in Empathy/Perspective Taking with scores of 65.5% and 50.6%, respectively. The average SEL score for the treatment group was 65.9%, a notable out performance from the control group's average of 53.3%.

In **Jordan**, the treatment group demonstrated a remarkable higher score in both Emotional Awareness/Regulation and Empathy/Perspective Taking, scoring 77.3% and 76.6% respectively, as opposed to the control group's scores of 32.1% and 32.2%. The average SEL score for the treatment group in Jordan was 76.9%, more than double the control group's average of 32.2%.

Figure 8: Social Emotional Learning sub-domain scores by treatment and control groups at endline, by country
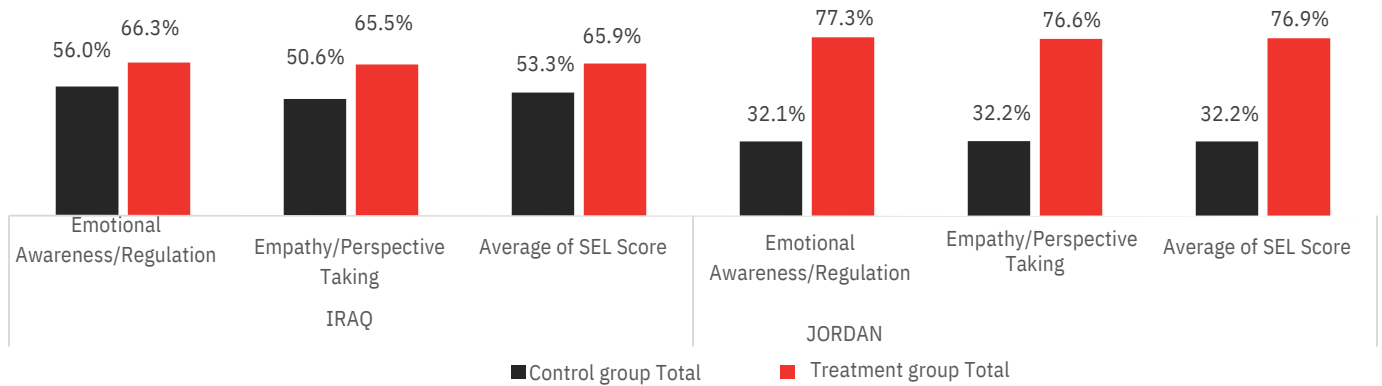
b) Emergent Literacy Sub-Domains

Figure 9 presents children's average scores on the subtasks of the Emergent Literacy domain. Across both countries and sub-domains, children in the treatment group consistently outperformed those in the Control Group.

In **Iraq**'s Emergent Literacy sub-domains, the Treatment group outscored the Control group by significant margins. The Treatment group recorded a score of 73.9% in Expressive Vocabulary, compared to the Control group's 51.3%. Additionally, in the Letter Identification sub-domain, the Treatment group scored 28.0%, substantially higher than the Control group's 5.2%. On average, the Treatment group's Emergent Literacy score was 51.0%, while the Control group averaged at 28.2%.

In **Jordan**, the Treatment group scored 66.8% in Expressive Vocabulary and 71.0% in Letter Identification. These scores markedly exceeded the Control group's performance, which was 32.0% in Expressive Vocabulary and 19.6% in Letter Identification. The average score for Emergent Literacy was 61.8% for the Treatment group, far above the Control group's average of 23.4%. This suggests that the interventions are having a positive impact on Emergent Literacy skills.

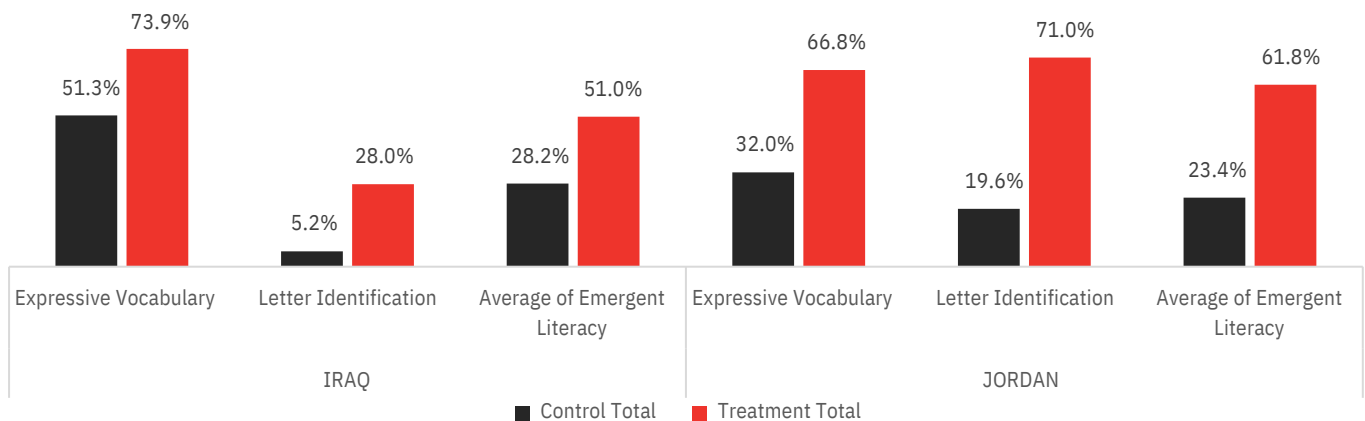*Figure 9: Emergent Literacy sub-domain scores by treatment and control groups at endline, by gender and per country*

c) Emergent Numeracy Sub-Domains

Figure 10 presents children's average scores on the subtasks of the Emergent Numeracy domain. We do observe that the children in the Treatment Group showed significantly higher scores in both sub-domains across the two countries compared to those in the Control Group.

For **Iraq**'s Emergent Numeracy sub-domains, the Treatment group scored 55.4% in Number Identification and 73.3% in One-to-one Correspondence. These scores were significantly higher than the Control group's scores of 26.9% and 43.3%, respectively. The average score for the Treatment group in this domain was 64.4%, exceeding the Control group's average of 35.1%.

In **Jordan**, the Treatment group's scores in Number Identification (74.5%) and One-to-one Correspondence (78.8%) were considerably higher than the Control group's scores of 31.3% and 38.8%, respectively. The Treatment group's average score in Emergent Numeracy was 72.5%, which was substantially higher than the Control group's average of 33.4%. This indicates that the interventions are positively impacting Emergent Numeracy skills.
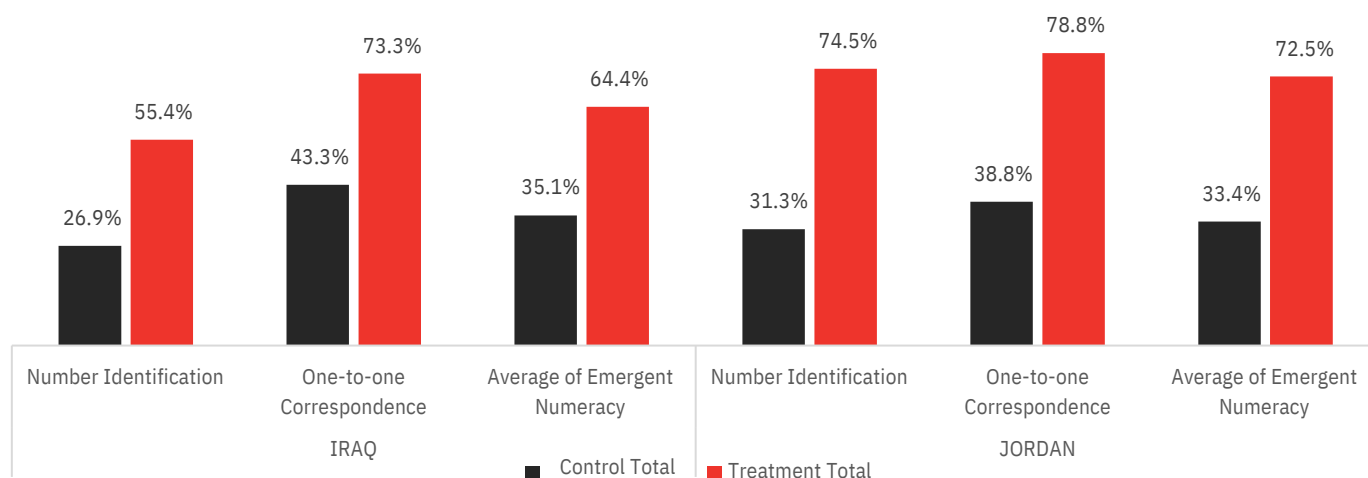

Figure 10: Emergency numeracy sub-domain scores by treatment and control groups at endline, by gender and per Country

d) Gross And Motor Development Sub-Domains

Figure 11 presents children's average scores on the subtasks of the Gross and Motor Development domain. The results indicates that children in the Treatment Group consistently scored higher in both Gross and Motor Development sub-domains across both countries.

In **Iraq**, the Treatment group scored 67.5% in Fine Motor Skills (Drawing a person) and 89.3% in Gross Motor Skills (Hopping), both higher than the Control group's scores of 44.3% and 74.5%, respectively. On average, the Treatment group scored 78.4% across both Gross and Fine Motor Skills, compared to the Control group's average of 59.4%.

In **Jordan**, the Treatment group's scores were also notably higher: 74.1% in Fine Motor Skills and 79.2% in Gross Motor Skills. These scores were substantially higher than the Control group's scores of 36.4% and 47.0%, respectively. The average score for Gross and Fine Motor Skills for the Treatment group was 77.0%, greatly exceeding the Control group's average of 41.8%.

The results clearly suggests that the interventions are having a positive and substantial impact on children's Gross and Motor Development skills. The effect is more pronounced in Jordan, particularly in Fine Motor Skills.
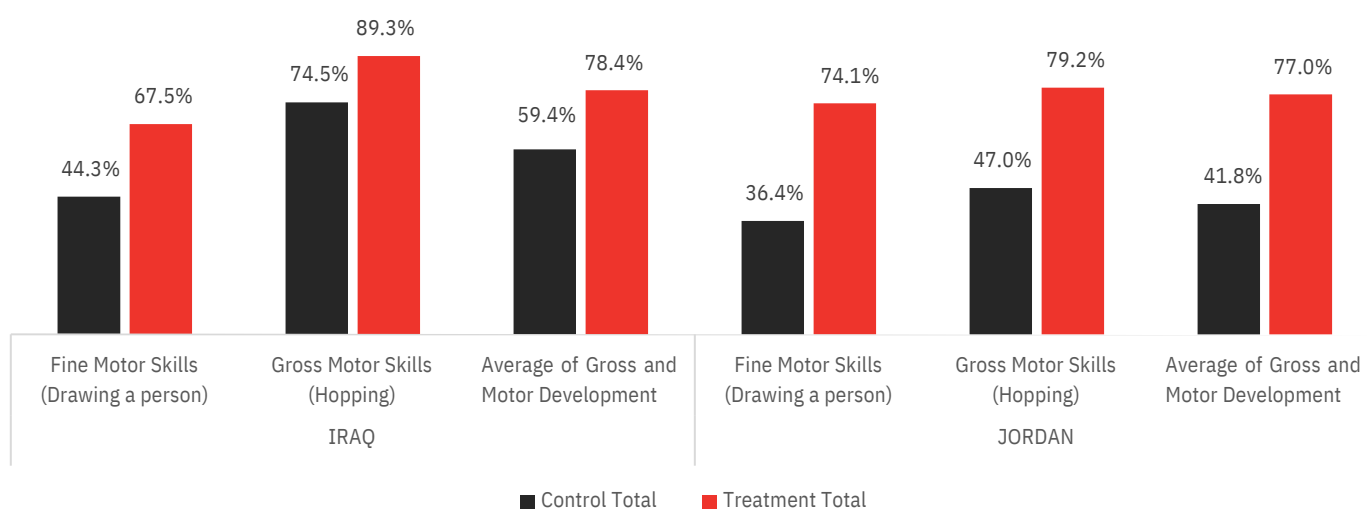
Figure 11: Gross and Fine Motor skills sub-domain scores by treatment and control groups at endline, by gender and per Country

In conclusion, the analysis of IDELA scores in the control and treatment groups across different domains and sub-domains highlights the efficacy of the intervention strategies in enhancing children's social, emotional, literacy, numeracy, and gross motor development. The consistent pattern of higher scores in the treatment groups, as observed in both Iraq and Jordan, underscores the positive impact of these interventions on children's holistic development. These findings serve to underscore the significance of targeted interventions in promoting positive outcomes in children's educational and developmental journeys.

4
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

" **In situations of disasters and wars, we find that mothers suffer from breakdowns and are unable to provide support for their children. War Child has this needs**
- A representative from the Ministry of Education in Jordan "

In this section, we delve into the comprehensive findings of our impact evaluation, systematically addressing the key evaluation questions. These questions, pivotal to understanding the program's depth and breadth of influence, have been categorized under several thematic areas including Relevance and Appropriateness, Coverage, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability and Connectedness. They explore essential topics such as the perceived value of the intervention by its users, the reach and adaptability of the program, the tangible outcomes versus intended goals, the cost-effectiveness, and the lasting impact on children and caregivers alike.

Additionally, the report incorporates the insights from the 'Good To Know Questions', offering a nuanced perspective on the complementarity of education and psychosocial support interventions, modalities of delivering education, and the ripple effects of our program's activities. Collectively, these findings not only measure the success of the intervention but also shed light on areas of improvement, lessons learned, and potential pathways for future ECD programming.

4.1. RELEVANCE AND APPROPRIATENESS

4.1.1. Stakeholder engagement and perspectives

The ECD project involved a range of stakeholders who shared valuable insights based on their expertise and experiences. The stakeholders provided positive feedback regarding the project's relevance. They acknowledged that the interventions effectively addressed the immediate needs of children. However, considering the enduring impact of conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders highlighted the need for a longer project duration to maximize the benefits.

Stakeholders widely perceived the project as relevant for addressing the needs of learners, especially those affected by conflict and post-war challenges. The project successfully addressed a spectrum of needs, encompassing education, psychological support, safety, and overall well-being. Noteworthy examples included the distribution of medical earphones and glasses, safety advocacy around schools, awareness poster distribution, and engaging educational activities. Some stakeholders also suggested including recreational activities for mothers to cater to their needs.

While the Ministry of Education and provincial authorities were instrumental in approvals and training, there was a divergence of opinion regarding their engagement level. One project staff member mentioned, "*We have had some challenges in aligning the project goals with the Ministry's curriculum and policies. Improved communication is needed*". This is further pointed out by a project staff who stated that:

"*Throughout our initiatives, we have faced challenges stemming from the extended duration required to secure approval from the Ministry of Education for the initiation of our programs within kindergartens and schools. This delay is attributed to intricate legal procedures that are inherent to the process.*"

Collaboration with schools and kindergartens was pivotal, and stakeholder involvement in committees and awareness efforts was instrumental. However, some stakeholders highlighted mixed perspectives on the engagement of the Ministry of Education and other educational entities. While some indicated minimal engagement, others underscored the importance of strong partnerships between organizations and the Ministry. Challenges in aligning project goals with curriculum and policies were noted, emphasizing the need for improved communication and collaboration for successful implementation and scalability.

To help in scaling the Project, a Representative from Ministry of Education, in Jordan notes that the ministry "*should establish a formal policy in delegating powers to local organizations and associations to carry out their roles and responsibilities in kindergartens. The Ministry of Education should welcome any association that can help them because the organizations provide them with large sums of money and support them financially. There should be a partnership between the organizations and the ministry. The ministry is still powerless due to the lack of clear policies and instructions to provide any support from organizations to kindergartens. There should be formal policies and grounds that the responsible person can refer to.*"

In summary, stakeholder engagement and perspectives underscored a shared commitment to addressing the diverse needs of children and caregivers amid challenges posed by conflict and post-war recovery. Collaborations with stakeholders, including government bodies, schools, and communities, were crucial for effective project implementation. However, stakeholders acknowledged budget constraints as a limitation to fully realizing the project's potential impact.

4.1.2. Complementarity between caregiver's support and ECD / Psychosocial support

The War Child ECD project in Iraq and Jordan has successfully integrated caregiver support with psychosocial interventions for children. This complementary approach has led to multifaceted improvements in the well-being and development of both children and their families. This comprehensive approach has led to numerous positive outcomes in the behavioural, emotional, and academic realms for both children and their caregivers.

Confidence and Social Skills

The program also made strides in children's social development. Through the FGDs, the caregivers observed enhanced interactions between their children and their siblings or peers. Beyond academic enthusiasm, the project also enhanced children's confidence and social interactions. One male participant from West Mosul/Nineveh vividly highlighted the program's real-world impact, stating, *"An illustrative example is my child teaching me to walk on the sidewalk and avoid getting close to the street during traffic."* His comment underscores the tangible benefits of the program's teachings on children's social awareness and responsibility. In addition to the enhancement of academic enthusiasm and life skills,

caregivers have also noted a marked increase in their children's confidence and social capabilities. The dual support system provided by the project has been particularly effective in this regard. For instance, a female participant from Zaatari Refugee Camp recounted a change in her daughter's behaviour:
"My daughter used to hit her sister, and I began to reinforce that her sister loved her from what I have learned. After that, she kept asking about her when she went to kindergarten, and she started to love her more, and she stopped hitting her."
This testimonial highlights how the program's integrated approach has been instrumental in improving sibling relationships and fostering emotional growth.

Behavioral Development

The psychosocial component of the project has had a profound influence on the children's behavior, notably stimulating their interest in learning. The caregivers reported a noticeable change, and the statements below underscore how the caregiver support worked in tandem with psychosocial interventions to foster a positive learning environment.

> **"Children who were initially reluctant to engage in educational activities have now become more enthusiastic learners."**
> Participant, Zaatari Refugee Camp.

> **"The program not only helped my child but also equipped me with tools to be a better parent."**
> A caregiver from Iraq, West Mosul/Nineveh

Academic Preparedness

An integral part of the program's success has been its impact on children's academic preparedness. The program's innovative teaching methodologies were highly commended by caregivers, who felt these strategies significantly contributed to their children's readiness for formal education. Through the FGDs, the participants consistently highlighted that the program made significant strides in preparing children for formal education, both academically and emotionally. The following components were cited for their effectiveness in enhancing children's readiness for formal schooling.

a) Innovative Teaching Methodologies:

Caregivers particularly emphasized the role of innovative teaching methods in capturing children's interest and setting them on the path to academic readiness. One Caregiver from West Mosul commented:
"The most compelling segment is undoubtedly the educational play aspect. Learning through play holds immense significance, preparing children not only for school readiness but also equipping them to navigate their initial school experiences with ease."
This sentiment was echoed in Jordan, where the encouragement provided by the facilitators and teachers was lauded for instilling a love for learning.

b) Socio-Emotional Development:

Besides academic preparedness, participants also noted the program's role in emotional and social development. A caregiver in West Mosul observed:
"My daughter, who struggled to engage with peers, displayed signs of shyness and social apprehension. However, her participation in the Little Fellow* program transformed her self-confidence."
Similarly, participants in Jordan mentioned how making friends in the program encouraged children to attend kindergarten.

c) Comprehensive Benefits:

The program was seen as offering a holistic developmental approach, bridging gaps that conventional education often overlooks. A male participant from West Mosul captured this sentiment when he stated:
"Their cognitive abilities, learning comprehension, mental well-being, and overall behaviour have been markedly enhanced. These programs have filled a gap that conventional education failed to address."

*Little Fellows is a Psycho-Social Support Programme which has been specifically designed for conflict-affected girls & boys aged 6 to 9. The programme focuses on supporting children to strengthen their resilience, selfesteem, and develop positive coping mechanisms to process their experiences and emotions in the aftermath of conflict.

4.2. EFFECTIVENESS/COVERAGE

Through this evaluation, it is evident that both War Child in Jordan have been effective in providing boys and girls with access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education, as well as generating evidence and data across the two countries to develop valuable learning and to engage with local, national & global humanitarian ECD actors.

4.2.1. Stakeholder perspectives on the effectiveness of the program

Key stakeholders, including caregivers, Facilitators, and representatives from the Ministry of Education, have highlighted the significant relevance of the ECD intervention in addressing the needs of learners, especially in post-conflict and economically disadvantaged areas. This program has played a pivotal role in preparing children for school and equipping caregivers with essential tools to support their children's development. The program's multifaceted approach, encompassing education, skill development, and psychological well-being, has resonated deeply within the community.

Stakeholders acknowledge the importance of addressing critical needs, such as education, skill development, and school readiness, through the ECD intervention. In conflict-affected regions like West Mosul/Nineveh in Iraq, participants emphasize the ransformative impact of the program on children traumatized by war. Parents eagerly enrolled their children in the program, witnessing positive changes in in their children's behaviour, self-confidence, and

interactions with peers. The program's holistic approach, including educational play, has significantly contributed to children's academic, psychological, and social development.

4.2.2. Extent of Reach to Target Groups

The project has made significant strides in reaching various target groups, albeit with some limitations. In Iraq, the project has been praised for its efforts to cover a broad spectrum of targeted areas. As noted by a Project Officer in Iraq, "*The project has made commendable efforts to extend its coverage to encompass a broad spectrum of targeted areas.*" However, the same informant also highlighted the challenges of limited resources: "*Among these challenges is the sheer magnitude of children requiring assistance, surpassing the organization's capacity to cater to their needs.*"

In Jordan, the project seems to have had more success in reaching its target groups. Key Informant, female teacher stated :

"*No one was left out of the program, and the use of our social media page to make announcements helped us reach all segments of society.*"

Regarding Appropriateness of Target Groups, the project appears to have been effective in identifying and reaching vulnerable groups. Key Informant 1 from Jordan identified orphans and the poor as the most vulnerable.Despite the project's successes, there are notable gaps in coverage and inclusion, identified through the FGDs and KIIs. The participants further provided suggestion for improvement of coverage in future programmes. The insights were analysed and presented in the Table 11 below.

Table 11: Gaps and recommendations for Improved Coverage Country

Gaps in coverage and inclusion	Recommendations for Improved Coverage
Geographical Limitations: In Iraq, the project's reach has been constrained by resource limitations, particularly affecting children in remote areas. A Key Informant emphasized : *"This is especially crucial for children residing in remote areas, where financial constraints hinder providing transportation for their access to the organization's center."*	**Resource Augmentation and geographical expansion**: Increasing staff and financial resources could help extend the project's reach, particularly in Iraq. A project staff Key Informant, suggested: *"To address these pressing needs, an augmentation in staff, funding, and financial assistance is imperative."* Additionally, a project staff Key Informant from Jordan recommended: *"It is possible that if a second site is opened for the war child in the middle of the camp, it can attract all the camp residents."* **Transition to Community-Based Models**: To overcome the challenges associated with transporting children from remote areas to centralized facilities, there is a need to adopt community-based models. This will allow the project to offer services closer to home for these marginalized communities. **Partnerships with Educational Institutions**: Collaborating with schools and kindergartens could be an effective way to broaden the project's outreach. As stated by a project staff Key Informant in Iraq: *"Expanding our reach to include more schools and kindergartens is contingent on securing adequate financial backing. This expansion holds the promise of offering a greater number of children the opportunity to engage in these impactful programs."*
Gender and Cultural Barriers: In Mansheyat Bani Hasan, some women were not allowed by their husbands to participate in programs other than those offered by War Child. An FGD participant mentioned, *"There are husbands who do not allow their wives to enter any organization except War Child."*	**Community Engagement and Sensitization:** Utilizing platforms like social media and direct community outreach can help the project resonate with vulnerable groups that are otherwise restricted due to cultural or familial barriers. This has been a notably successful approach for War Child, enabling wives to participate in the ECD project. **Strategic Collaborations:** Additional recommendations from project staff include forging alliances with other organizations, prioritizing those that are community-based or local, to synergize with War Child's mission and extend its reach.

4.2.3. Operational Bottlenecks and Challenges

This section synthesizes the operational challenges and bottlenecks that impacted the project implementation in Iraq and Jordan. These insights are drawn from Focus the FGDs with caregivers and facilitators, KIIs, and a review of relevant project documents. The challenges range from logistical issues to stakeholder engagement and financial constraints. Despite these challenges, innovative solutions have been implemented to ensure the project's success. The insights from the FGDs and the KIIs presented the following common challenges:

- *Logistical Challenges and Accessibility:* Geographical distance and transportation costs were significant barriers to children's consistent participation in the program. This was particularly evident in Iraq, where the expansion of the program to include children from more remote areas led to a decrease in attendance.
- *Climate Conditions:* Extreme weather conditions, such as high temperatures, adversely affected children's attendance, especially for outdoor activities.
- *Financial Constraints:* Limited funding restricted the project's reach, particularly in remote and financially constrained regions. This was a common issue in both Iraq and Jordan, affecting transportation provisions for children.
- *Engagement with Stakeholders*: Complex legal procedures and stakeholder engagement, particularly with the Ministry of Education, led to delays in approvals and implementation.
- *Limited Project Duration***:** The relatively short timeframe of the project was a limitation, particularly for educational programs that require a longer duration for a more lasting impact.

Further, the review of the project documents highlighted the country specific challenges and the innovative solutions implemented.

Table 12: Country-Specific Challenges and Solutions

	Challenges	Solutions
Iraq	**Distance to the Center** Decrease in participation numbers due to geographical distance and transportation costs.	Collaboration with the Department of Education to implement the program in schools and kindergartens, thereby ensuring sustainability and broader reach. Additionally, adoption of community based ECD models to sidestep logistical issues related to transportation in remote locations, the integration of community-based delivery systems is recommended.
	Attendance and Commitments Low attendance among parents due to busy schedules and the lengthy nature of the cycles.	Exploring more private sector partnerships to reach more parents/caregivers especially men. Specifically for this project, the implementation team targeted parents at their workplaces, such as sewing factories, leading to increased attendance and commitment.
Jordan	**Duration and Content** The brief cycle duration limited the educational content that could be imparted to children.	Additional funding allowed for an increase in the number of face-to-face sessions, enhancing the quality of the program.
	Male Engagement in CSI Program Low male engagement due to work commitments and cultural factors.	Flexible class times, hiring male facilitators, and transportation allowances are being implemented to encourage male participation[6]

While the project has achieved significant milestones, operational bottlenecks such as logistical issues, climate conditions, financial constraints, stakeholder engagement, and limited project duration have impacted its full potential. Country-specific challenges have been met with innovative solutions, but these challenges underscore the need for adaptive program management and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure the project's effectiveness and sustainability.

4.2.4. Adaptive Learning to Improve Program Effectiveness

Adaptive learning is a critical component for the effectiveness and sustainability of any program/project. It involves the ability to adjust strategies and activities based on ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and feedback.

This narrative aims to discuss how well the ECD Project has utilized adaptive learning to improve its effectiveness, drawing from the review of relevant project documents, FGDs, KIIs and discussions with the key project staff. The information is synthesised and presented as follows:

Flexibility and Partnerships

a) Targeting Parents in Alternative Places: The program demonstrated adaptive learning by recognizing the need to meet parents where they are, both literally and figuratively. By choosing venues that are convenient and do not disrupt parents' daily routines, the program increased participation and engagement. This flexibility in approach shows a commitment to understanding and meeting the needs of the community it serves.

b) Business and private sector engagement: Exploring opportunities to implement the program in business or private company settings is another example of adaptive learning. By identifying organizations that align with the program's goals, the program not only finds a venue but also potential long-term partners that can add value to its sustainability.

Collaboration with NGOs and Government

a) NGO Partnerships: The program actively sought partnerships with other NGOs with similar objectives. This collaborative approach allowed for resource pooling, knowledge sharing, and network leveraging, thereby strengthening the program's impact and sustainability.

b) Localized Delivery with Government Support: Engaging with government entities provided additional layers of support and resources, aligning the program with broader policy objectives and opening doors for additional funding and institutional backing. This not only improved the program's effectiveness but also its potential for long-term stability and scalability. In a significant strategic adaptation, the project partnered with the Ministries of Education in Iraq and Jordan to train government teachers for implementing the ECD program in public kindergartens. This move not only brought the services closer to the families but also fortified the program's long-term sustainability through capacity building. In Iraq, for instance, the comprehensive training engaged 22 staff members across four kindergartens, setting the stage for the program's wider roll-out.

c) Innovative Partnership with the Ministry of Social Development: In Jordan, the project formed a unique collaboration with the MoSD, securing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This partnership allowed War Child to integrate community-based organization (CBO) staff already funded by the MoSD into the project. This not only enhanced community engagement but also resulted in cost savings, which were redirected to benefit the children.

Tailored Educational Interventions for Children

a) Importance of In-Person Sessions: The program recognized the limitations of e-learning for early childhood development and increased the number of face-to-face sessions. This adaptation was crucial for the children's educational development and made the program more effective in achieving its objectives.

b) Activity Specialization: The program also adapted its activities to be more specialized and tailored to individual children's needs, covering various domains like cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development. This tailored approach made the learning experience more engaging and effective for the children.
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c) Curriculum Adaptation for Holistic Development: Following a comprehensive curriculum review with the War Child Technical team, it was evident that while the curriculum had a strong focus on emergent literacy and numeracy, there were gaps in addressing young children's social and emotional learning needs. Consequently, an additional lesson was designed by the technical team to cover basic feelings and emotional identification, with follow-up activities integrated into future lessons. This adaptation, implemented in cycle 2 of the Iraq programming, resulted in noticeable improvements in children's comfort levels with expressing basic emotions, showcasing emergent techniques for emotional expression.

Internal Communication and Feedback Loops

a) Staff Meetings and Field Visits: In Jordan, end-of-cycle meetings with field staff and regular field visits by project staff and managers serve as feedback mechanisms. These practices ensure that challenges and recommendations are discussed, contributing to continuous improvement.

b) Learning Platforms and Tailored Meetings: The program leverages global learning platforms like the "Lunch and Learn" sessions and organizes tailored meetings targeting specific organizational roles. These platforms serve as internal mechanisms for disseminating learnings, thereby fostering an organizational culture that values adaptive learning.

c) Dissemination of Learnings: Reports and significant learnings are actively shared throughout the organization, attracting interest from other departments like advocacy and corporate funding. This cross-departmental interest amplifies the program's reach and potential impact.

d) Adaptive learning to improve effectiveness: Through flexibility in program delivery, strategic partnerships, tailored educational approaches, and robust internal communication and feedback loops, the program has shown a strong commitment to learning and adapting for better outcomes. These adaptive strategies not only enhance the program's current effectiveness but also contribute to its long-term sustainability and scalability.

4.2.4 Face to face (f2f) vs online sessions .

The qualitative data gathered from FGDs with caregivers and facilitators in Iraq and Jordan offer an elaborate understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of face-to-face (f2f) and online educational modalities within the ECD project.

Comparative Merits and Limitations

a) Face-to-Face Interactions: The data reveals a pronounced preference for face-to-face interactions,

which are lauded for their contributions to children's holistic development, emotional well-being, and social skills. One caregiver from Iraq, Mosul, stated that:

"The notion of imparting education to children through direct interaction holds a distinct advantage over online learning. Engaging in in-person sessions, collaborating with peers, sharing viewpoints, partaking in group activities, and active learning collectively foster a positive influence on children."

b) Online Methods: While online methods were not as universally endorsed, they were acknowledged for their role in sustaining learning and reinforcement. A key informant from Jordan noted, *"In-person sessions allowed for a more hands-on approach, but the online resources were great for reinforcing what was learned."*

Transition to Face-to-Face Sessions and its impact

In Jordan, the project initially adopted a hybrid model blending face-to-face and online methods. However, it transitioned to fully face-to-face sessions, accompanied by an increase in session frequency to three days a week. The shift to more frequent face-to-face sessions yielded several positive outcomes:

a) Strengthened Relationships: Facilitators reported forming stronger bonds with the children, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience.

b) Caregiver Satisfaction: Caregivers expressed appreciation for the increased frequency, noting their children's heightened enthusiasm for attending sessions.

c) Reduced Facility Pressure: The shift alleviated logistical pressures on educational facilities, further elevating the learning experience for all stakeholders.

> **"The face-to-face sessions allowed us to connect better with the facilitators, and we could see immediate improvements in our children."**
> A participant in the Caregiver FGD from Mansheya Bani Hasan, Jordan

Addressing the Needs of the Children

The transition to face-to-face sessions appears to have been particularly beneficial for the children involved. The increased frequency of sessions and the direct interaction with facilitators and peers have contributed to a more rounded development, both emotionally and socially.

> **"Face-to-face learning is better because when a child interacts with his teacher and classmates, his personality becomes better and stronger."**
> **A caregiver from Jordan**

The evaluation suggests that the transition to more frequent face-to-face sessions has been particularly beneficial in enhancing the quality of the ECD project. This change has led to improved relationships between facilitators and children, increased caregiver satisfaction, and more effective use of educational facilities. Based on the data and the feedback from caregivers and facilitators, the outcome suggests that

ECD programs should primarily be conducted face-to-face to maximize holistic development, emotional well-being, and social skills. However, online resources can serve as valuable supplements for reinforcement and continuous learning. Overall, the project has demonstrated the potential of employing a multi-modal approach to deliver a comprehensive and impactful early childhood development initiative.

4.3. EFFICIENCY

The program's efficiency is evaluated herein through multiple dimensions: the adherence to the planned timeline, management effectiveness, and the impact of managerial changes. This section synthesizes insights from facilitator feedback at the project's end and internal team reflections.

4.3.1. Implementation and Management

The program displayed a commendable level of efficiency in both its implementation and management, aligning closely with the proposal's stipulations. Facilitator feedback from Jordan emphasized the program's "transparency and clarity in its objectives and implementation," thereby underscoring the effective translation of the proposal into actionable steps. Moreover, the program received positive feedback from the community, and the camp where it was implemented gained a favourable reputation, indicating a high level of social acceptance and trust, which are often proxies for effective management.

However, it is crucial to address certain challenges identified in the internal team reflection meeting. The team cited "high beneficiary targets compared to team capacity" as a significant obstacle. While ambitious goals are laudable, they must be realistically achievable within the available resource envelope to ensure the program's efficiency. This challenge might suggest the need for a review of the human and material resources allocated for implementation.

4.3.2. Adaptive Management and Quality Enhancement

The impact of managerial transitions within the program was multifaceted, creating initial hurdles but eventually culminating in improved outcomes. As the internal team reflection pointed out, one of the challenges during this period was staff turnover, affecting not just headquarters but also country and field offices.

According or the project team reflection, the new management not only brought fresh perspectives but also introduced more streamlined decision-making processes that empowered field teams, thereby speeding up the pace of adaptations to meet beneficiary needs. The transition also had an impact on donor relations. A more stable team ensured a clearer communication with the donor, particularly around challenges, adaptations to the project design, and impact of changes. This, in turn, created a positive and fruitful donor-grantee relationship that supported the project's success.

4.3.3. Decision-making, and relationship building

The management's role in decision-making processes has been pivotal, and the internal team reflection identified this as a strength. Decisions were often made collaboratively, with field teams actively participating in consultations. This decentralized approach fostered a sense of empowerment and ownership among team members. Furthermore, War Child's ability to respond flexibly to challenges and "think outside the box to find solutions" is a testament to the program's adaptability.

One notable achievement highlighted in War Child's reflection was the program's strong relationship with local authorities and the Ministry of Education. This facilitated smoother cooperation and streamlined certain administrative processes, ultimately contributing to program efficiency.

The program's commitment to transparency and clarity has engendered community trust. As one of the facilitators noted, "*the camp has gained a good reputation."* This reputation is a testament to the program's dedication to open communication and its ability to align its objectives with community needs.

In summary, the program has been efficient but faced challenges that tested its adaptability and resilience. Changes in management were initially met with skepticism but eventually led to improved program outcomes. Effective decision-making and strong donor relations have been key drivers of the program's efficiency and overall success. Future programs may benefit from an initial phase focused on capacity assessment and stakeholder engagement to better align expectations and capabilities.

4.4. PROJECT IMPACT

4.4.1. Impact on Children Learning Outcomes

The evaluation of the project's impact on children's learning outcomes is a critical component for understanding its overall effectiveness. Utilizing the IDELA scores, this narrative discusses the impact of the intervention on various developmental domains, including Social Emotional Learning, Emergent Literacy, Emergent Numeracy, and Gross and Motor Development skills.

The comparison of IDELA scores between control and treatment groups in Iraq and Jordan underscores the positive impact of the intervention on various developmental domains. The treatment groups consistently outperformed the Control groups across all IDELA domains, demonstrating the effectiveness of the interventions in fostering children's Social Emotional Learning, Emergent Literacy, Emergent Numeracy, and Gross and Motor Development skills. These results highlight the success of the interventions in enhancing children's holistic development, further supporting the importance of targeted early childhood programs in these countries.

The Total IDELA Score provides a holistic view of children's overall development. In Iraq, the treatment group achieved a score of 64.9%, indicating substantial progress compared to the control group's score of 44.0%. In Jordan, the treatment group achieved a score of 71.1%, surpassing the control group's score of 31.9%. These results demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the intervention in promoting comprehensive child development.
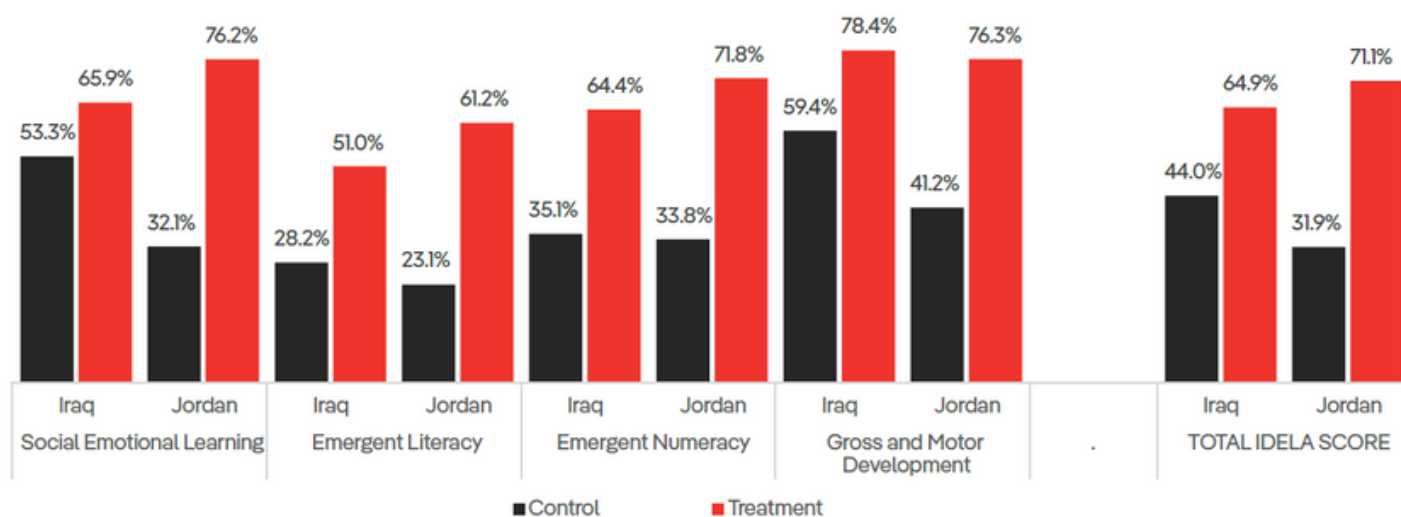
Figure 12: Total domain scores and Total IDELA score at endline, by Country

The analysis of IDELA scores across different domains and sub-domains provides compelling evidence of the intervention's efficacy in enhancing children's holistic development. The consistent pattern of higher scores in the treatment groups, as observed in both Iraq and Jordan, underscores the positive impact of these interventions. These findings not only validate the effectiveness of the targeted interventions but also emphasize the importance of such programs in fostering positive outcomes in children's educational and developmental journeys.

4.4.2. Impact on Child Wellbeing

The Little Fellows Program* has had a transformative impact on the wellbeing of conflict-affected children aged 6 to 9. Designed to enhance resilience, self-esteem, and positive coping mechanisms, the program has been successful in achieving its objectives. Qualitative data from the caregivers pointed out that participating children exhibited significant strides in multiple facets of emotional development, including but not limited to, empathy, emotional intelligence, and the ability to express feelings. Their social skills have been notably enhanced, as evidenced by more robust interpersonal interactions and effective communication with peers. A marked increase in self-confidence has also been a common thread among participants.

Caregivers and facilitators have provided qualitative feedback, highlighting transformative stories of children who were initially reticent or socially inhibited. For example, one child, who was previously reluctant to engage in social activities, evolved into an outgoing individual who not only participates in group discussions but also takes initiative in school activities. This anecdotal evidence serves as a powerful testament to the program's efficacy in fostering positive behavioural changes.

The program employs a well-structured pedagogical approach comprising 11 carefully curated sessions. These sessions feature an array of activities, from storytelling sessions that encourage emotional expression to group games that build teamwork and social skills. These multi-faceted activities have played a pivotal role in catalysing the aforementioned positive changes.

In summary, the Little Fellows Program has not only achieved but surpassed its initial goals, making a resounding impact on the emotional and social landscapes of conflict-affected children within the target age group. Its success serves as a blueprint for future interventions aimed at enhancing child wellbeing in challenging environments.

4.4.3 Engagement with caregivers

Caregiver Support in Jordan

The Caregiver Support Intervention (CSI) component of the ECD program has also yielded positive results. Caregivers who participated in the program reported significant improvements in their ability to interact with their children, spouses, and extended family members. They noted that they are now better equipped to handle everyday situations, experiencing less stress and anger than before. This not only enhances the wellbeing of caregivers but also has a ripple effect on the entire family, fostering healthier dynamics and more positive interactions.

Positive Parenting in Iraq

In Iraq, the Positive Parenting program has adopted innovative methods to engage caregivers, especially fathers. The program conducted sessions outside conventional education centers,, leveraging community spaces like local factories and stadiums to reach a broader audience. Remarkably, the initiative registered 470 males, all of whom successfully completed the program. This unique approach has proven effective in increasing male engagement in childcare responsibilities and fostering healthier family dynamics.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

The comprehensive approach to child development adopted by the ECD project had a transformative impact on caregivers and children, resulting in numerous lessons learned and best practices identified.

a) Holistic Child Development: The project's emphasis on holistic child development, encompassing social, emotional, and psychological well-being, led to positive changes in children's behavior and confidence. The transformative impact on previously shy or struggling children highlights the efficacy of strategies that enhance self-esteem and social skills.

b) Parental Education and Support: The project's focus on parental education and support equipped caregivers with valuable tools and knowledge to engage effectively with their children. This approach not only benefited children but also fostered healthier caregiver-child interactions and nurtured positive parenting practices.

c) In-Person Learning: Caregivers' preference for in-person learning over online education for young children underlines the importance of face-to-face interaction in early childhood education. The engaging and interactive nature of in-person sessions contributes to effective learning experiences.

d) Recommendations for Improvement: Caregivers' suggestions to extend program duration, and provide ongoing support underscore the importance of accessible and sustainable initiatives that continue to benefit children and caregivers over time.

e) Impact on Fathers: The project's impact extended beyond mothers to fathers, encouraging increased involvement in childcare and promoting positive parenting and healthier family dynamics. One of the standout achievements of the Positive Parenting program in Iraq has been its success in actively engaging fathers with three cycles in the sewing factories and one cycle in stadium. Historically, caregiving programs often reach mothers more effectively than fathers, but the Positive Parenting program took targeted steps to bridge this gap. By choosing unconventional venues like local stadiums and tying the program to community activities such as football matches, the project made strides in attracting male caregivers, leading to more equitable sharing of household and childcare tasks, enhanced emotional connectivity between fathers and children, improved child behavior through positive reinforcement, stronger co-parenting relationships, and a community-wide shift in challenging traditional gender roles in caregiving.

In summary, the engagement with caregivers through the ECD project highlighted the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to child development, the significance of parental education and support, the importance of in-person learning, and the potential to positively impact fathers' engagement. These lessons learned and best practices contribute to the enhancement of future ECD programs.

4.4.4. Impact of different parenting programmes on child development / well being

The evaluation of the impact of the different parenting programs on child development and well-being is a critical component of the War Child ECD project. This section synthesizes insights from KIIs, FGDs, and the relevant project notes to assess the effectiveness of the interventions in Iraq and Jordan. The impact is analyzed and discussed under the following thematic areas.

Parental Engagement and Child Development

In Iraq, the interventions have been successful in fostering a collaborative partnership between parents and educators. According to a teacher who served as a key informant, *"Evidently, the child's behaviour has undergone a positive transformation since joining the program, largely attributed to the active involvement of parents and their consistent interaction with their children."*
The Mukhtar, another key informant, highlighted a case where a parent who had involved their child in child labour was sensitized and encouraged to prioritize the child's education. This change was described as an example of *"the growing awareness within the community that education, learning, and academic attainment are pivotal for a promising future for their children."*
In Jordan, the interventions have been particularly impactful in addressing the mental health needs of caregivers, which is often overlooked. A representative from the Ministry of Education noted:
 "Services are always limited to children, and there is always little concern for the mental health of the caregiver. War child has met this need."

Behavioural Changes in Caregivers

*T*he project staff in Iraq noted that the project "*yielded considerable positive changes among the caregivers we targeted. Societal norms and long-held customs underwent transformations.*" For instance, a group of parents collectively decided to rent vehicles for transporting their daughters to school, despite financial challenges.
In Jordan, the program led to a change in parents' perspectives on their roles in child-rearing. As one participant noted: *"In the beginning, men would say that the mother was responsible for raising the children. After some time in the program, they were surprised that the father plays a major role in the child's educational attainment."*

Psychological Well-being and Stress Management

Both in Iraq and Jordan, the interventions have had a profound impact on the psychological well-being of caregivers, which in turn positively affects child development. As one caregiver in Iraq put it:
"Today, thanks to the awareness sessions, I've gained a repertoire of constructive ways. I've learned to interact with my child without resorting to violence and yelling."

Caregivers in both countries reported better emotional and psychological well-being, which had a positive impact on their children. A participant in Jordan mentioned: *"When my kids would ruin something in the house, I would get angry and hit them, but after the sessions, I'm more patient with them, and they also got a lot better."*

A representative from the Ministry of Education in Jordan emphasized the need for psychological support for caregivers, stating: *"In situations of disasters and wars, we find that mothers suffer from breakdowns and are unable to provide support for their children. War Child has met this need."*

The parenting programs under the ECD project have had a significant impact on child development and well-being in both Iraq and Jordan. They have successfully engaged caregivers, changed long-standing societal norms, and improved the psychological well-being of both caregivers and children. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in extending the duration and frequency of the programs to maximize their impact. By focusing on these areas, the ECD project can continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and their caregivers, thereby contributing to the broader goal of enhancing child development and well-being.

4.4.5. Engagement with private sector

The ECD project, spearheaded by War Child in Iraq, innovatively engaged the private sector, both directly and indirectly, through various approaches

Strategic Workplace Engagement

Recognizing the logistical challenges faced by working parents in attending the center, War Child proactively transitioned Home Learning Support and Positive Parenting Support activities to a local sewing factory. This move was initiated based on suggestions from parents who were factory employees. The War Child team successfully negotiated with factory management to allocate a dedicated space for program activities, without disrupting the factory's operations. The management not only welcomed the initiative but also ensured that parents could participate without any salary deductions. This exemplifies a win-win engagement strategy with the private sector that significantly extended the project's reach.

4.4.6. Engagement with community

The project has not only been instrumental in addressing the educational and psychosocial needs of learners and caregivers in post-conflict and pandemic scenarios but has also characterised a model of inclusive and sustainable community engagement. Below are the pivotal elements that have contributed to its success, with a focus on the details of community interaction in Iraq and partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Jordan.

Bridging Public and Private Sectors

In Iraq, the project leveraged its partnership with War Child as a facilitating agent to actively involve community members in Child Protection Committees (CPC). The engagement from the community through the Child Protection Committees and parents attending activities resulted in helpful feedback and suggestions which have enabled War Child to respond to the community's needs. Throughout the project period, the team maintained regular meetings with the CPC groups to identify the challenges, problems, and difficulties they were facing. To address these issues, the team collaborated with other partners (NGOs), the DOE, schools, stakeholders, and put forth suggestions to solve some of these problems.

These committees played an invaluable role in awareness-raising campaigns, particularly those focused on sensitive issues like substance abuse. In serving as an intermediary, War Child has effectively demonstrated how private sector involvement can be channeled in socially responsible ways, thus unlocking alternative avenues for resource mobilization and support.

Empowering Caregivers: Beyond Parental Education

The project's comprehensive caregiver support programs have not only imparted essential skills and knowledge but also catalysed healthier interactions between caregivers and children. This dual focus has been instrumental in fostering an environment of constructive and positive parenting, benefitting not just the immediate family but the community at large.

Adaptive Design: Tailored to Community Needs

The project's unique adaptive programming strategies have been especially noteworthy in their flexibility. Participant feedback emphasized that the inclusion of local languages and community-specific challenges made the interventions more resonant and impactful.

Partnership with Community-Based Organizations

In Jordan, the project went beyond conventional engagement strategies by collaborating closely with local Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). This initiative enhanced the project's legitimacy and acceptance within the community. CBOs provided invaluable on-the-ground insights and contributed to the participatory design and implementation of activities, thereby amplifying the project's reach and efficacy. The lessons gleaned from community engagement and collaborations in both Iraq and Jordan

underscore the critical importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, caregiver empowerment, adaptive programming, and local organizational involvement. These factors are not merely additive but synergistic, contributing to a more holistic and sustainable impact, thereby setting a high standard for future Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives.

4.5. SUSTAINABILITY AND CONNECTEDNESS

In evaluating the extent to which the plans and strategies for sustaining program results have been effective, realistic, implementable, and capable of leading to longer-term sustainability, it is evident that the program has demonstrated a strong commitment to these objectives. The evaluation examines the program's sustainability efforts in various dimensions:

4.5.1. Caregiver Engagement and Support

The program has successfully extended its positive impact to caregivers, fostering improved relationships with their children, and promoting positive parenting techniques. The provision of awareness sessions has guided parents toward behaviour changes, including the cessation of violent practices and the adoption of nurturing approaches. The peer-to-peer engagement among the caregivers was highlighted by the caregivers as a contributing factor to long term impact of the project, specifically the CSI. One participant from the Male FGD, in West Mosul/Nineveh noted that *"The continuous engagement and updates provided through conversation groups on "WhatsApp" allow us to be an active part of our children's journey in these programs."* This demonstrates that the program's strategies for caregiver engagement and support are both effective and implementable.

4.5.2. Collaboration and Advocacy

While the engagement of key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, schools, and communities has shown variability, the program has recognized the importance of stronger collaboration and partnerships. Recommendations have emerged in this regard, emphasizing the significance of early childhood education within the broader education system. The involvement of War Child and other organizations in advocating for children's safety further demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive child development. These efforts reflect a realistic and implementable approach to fostering sustainable collaboration and advocacy. The program's engagement in global advocacy efforts is noteworthy. Active participation in ECD-focused platforms and networks such as the Moving Mind Alliance (MMA) signifies a commitment to long-term impact. The planned activities, such as sharing key findings and policy briefs, attending international meetings, and engaging with stakeholders, demonstrate a proactive approach to sustaining advocacy efforts. These strategies align with the goal of promoting ECD and informed decision-making, showcasing the program's effectiveness in connecting with global networks for long-term sustainability.

Institutional Engagement and Policy Influence in Jordan

War Child's coordination frameworks in Jordan exemplify an unwavering dedication to fostering an ecosystem of collaborative intelligence within the humanitarian landscape. Engaging in pivotal working groups such as the Child Protection Sector Working Group, Education Working Group, and the Jordan Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Working Group, War Child deploys its technical expertise to actively shape policies and refine best practices. This level of involvement goes beyond mere membership; it enhances War Child's networking reach and cements its role as a trusted collaborator in multi-organizational endeavours. Such a holistic approach elevates the efficacy and reach of War Child's initiatives, ensuring they seamlessly complement existing services without overlapping efforts.

Moreover, War Child's proactive participation in the National Early ECD forum, spearheaded by the National Council of Family Affairs, positions it as an influencer in shaping the evolving narrative and strategic direction of the ECD sector in Jordan. This strategic alignment with other specialized institutions ensures a unified and synergistic approach to enhancing child well-being and development, making War Child's interventions an integral part of a broader, more comprehensive strategy.

Iraq Advocacy and Sustainability

The program's advocacy efforts within the Directorate of Education (DoE) have not only provided valuable knowledge but have also fostered a shift in teachers' attitudes toward program methodologies and curriculum development. This represents an effective strategy for advocating change within the educational system, which can contribute to long-term sustainability.

The emphasis on sustainability is evident through regular meetings with Child Protection Committees and collaboration with the Department of Education (DoE). Equipping local teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for program continuation is a practical approach to ensuring that the program's impact endures beyond the organization's involvement. Additionally, expanding program reach to alternative venues like a sewing factory demonstrates an understanding of the need to diversify partnerships and engage the community effectively for long-term viability.

Jordan Advocacy and Sustainability

The program distinguishes itself through a multi-tiered strategy aimed at fostering long-term sustainability and scalability. This is vividly demonstrated through its commitment to capacity building and knowledge transfer. Active and sustained engagement in national ECD working groups, symposiums, and conferences serves as a platform for collaborative dialogue and the exchange of best practices. The program's initiative to organize a dedicated workshop for disseminating research findings and actionable recommendations exemplifies a robust advocacy strategy aimed at influencing policy and practice.

Strategic Partnership with the Ministry of Social Development

A pivotal element of the program's sustainability framework is its strategic alliance with the MoSD. The evaluation has revealed that targeted efforts were made to cultivate relationships with specialized personnel within MoSD, who have subsequently emerged as key advocates for the ECD program. This alignment with MoSD has led to the formalization of communication channels for ongoing technical assistance and support.

Notably, MoSD has undertaken direct implementation roles, thereby contributing to the program's sustainability. Their active involvement manifests in various forms, including the provision of specialized training sessions on self-care for facilitators. This symbiotic relationship serves the dual purpose of augmenting the program's reach while enhancing the professional well-being of MoSD and War Child facilitators alike.

Implications for Sustainability

The cooperative model with MoSD offers an integrated approach to sustainability. By leveraging MoSD's existing infrastructure and personnel, the program gains cost-efficiencies and local credibility. This collaboration also enables the allocation of saved resources towards enhancing program elements like child transportation and refreshments, further contributing to the holistic well-being of the beneficiaries.Moreover, the program's relationship with MoSD is poised to attract additional funding opportunities. The successful demonstration of this collaborative model has already caught the attention of potential donors, thereby ensuring the longevity and scalability of the program.

4.5.3. Caregivers and Facilitators perspective on sustainability and long-term impact

The ECD project by War Child in Iraq and Jordan demonstrates a sustainable and multi-faceted impact by incorporating both psychological support and educational enrichment. This dual-pronged strategy not only fosters holistic individual development but also lays the foundation for enduring societal change. Caregivers involved in the program emphasized the significance of this comprehensive approach. As one caregiver from West Mosul noted:

> **"At first, we believed the program was exclusively educational. But as we saw transformations in our children's behaviour and emotional health, the program's wider objectives became clear."**

This observation underscores the program's effectiveness in making psychological well-being a key element of its long-term impact.

Facilitators also contributed their perspectives on the program's sustainability. A facilitator from the Emirati Jordanian Camp articulated:

> **" The program extends beyond the individual child to encompass the entire family, generating a ripple effect that holds the promise of sustained change. "**

This statement highlights the program's innovative methodology, which includes caregivers in the intervention process, thereby acknowledging the family as the fundamental social unit shaping a child's growth.

In summary, the project employs a comprehensive intervention model substantiated by robust qualitative data. It adeptly navigates the intricate relationship between educational and psychosocial factors, engaging not only the young learners but also their caregivers and broader communities. The insights derived from these qualitative evaluations offer invaluable direction for future ECD initiatives aimed at achieving transformative and lasting impact.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive overview of children's development skills in Jordan and Iraq, encompassing various provinces within Jordan. ECD has been examined in terms of physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development from conception to the age of six years. The primary goal of this report is to assess the project's impact and advocate for the importance of ECD programs, promoting data-driven decision-making at local and global levels.

Research underscores the significant influence of a child's environment on brain development and intelligence [7]. Early childhood settings, including the home and school, play pivotal roles in shaping a child's future. This study has addressed communities in Iraq and Jordan, aiming to uncover disparities in early childhood development based on gender, age, and geographical location. The tool developed for this purpose addresses the need for valid, rigorous, and user-friendly methods to assess ECD in low-income countries.

Quality guidance, care, love, and protection profoundly impact a child's future choices, attainment, well-being, happiness, and resilience. Insufficient access to ECD services disproportionately affects vulnerable children worldwide, hindering their physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Investment in the early years is crucial, as mental abilities form during this period. Furthermore, strong foundations of physical wellness, emotional security, and social competence are established during these critical years. Children who participate in quality ECD programs are generally better prepared for primary school, perform better at school, and are less likely to repeat grades or drop-out of school, all reducing the costs of the education system [8]. Therefore, it is crucial to focus investment on children in their early years thus ECD is significant since mental ability is formed in the early years of childhood.

Based on the findings and key lessons learnt, this Impact Evaluation suggests the following recommendations, categorized in line the Key Evaluation Criteria:

7. Deray, Ian J (2000). Looking Down on Human Intelligence: from Psychometrics to the Human brain. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. Heckman, J.J. (2008). Schools, Skills and Synapses. IZA Discussion Paper No. 3515

Relevance and Appropriateness

Finding #1

Overall, stakeholders perceived the ECD programme as **highly relevant**, addressing immediate needs of children particularly those affected by conflict and post-war challenges. The programme addressed needs like **education, psychological support, safety, and well-being,** evidenced by initiatives such as the distribution of medical earphones, glasses, safety advocacy, awareness poster distribution, and educational activities.

Recommendation(s)

Lengthen the Programme Duration

For future programmes, ensure a longer duration, both regarding enrollment of children in early learning programmes as well as longer overall programme duration, especially in contexts of prolonged crises such as conflict and pandemics, to maximize benefits

Finding #2

The **integrated approach** of **caregiver support** with **psychosocial interventions** led to multifaceted improvements in the well-being and development of both children and their families. The programme has been effective in enhancing children's **social skills, behavioral development,** and **academic preparedness.** Innovative teaching methodologies were highly commended by caregivers and were effective in preparing children for formal education.

Recommendation(s)

Advance Holistic Family Well-Being Through Integrated interventions

Continue and expand the integrated approach that combines caregiver support with psychosocial interventions. The emphasis should be on a **Caregiver Support Intervention** model that **prioritises caregiver mental health**, supplemented by **Home Learning Support**, to achieve a holistic and enduring impact on family well-being and child development.

Expand Effective Pedagogy

Scale the innovative pedagogy focused on **play-based learning**, **child-center learning,** and incorporate a focus on **psychosocial well-being** into academic learning. Scale these methodologies into nearby government facilities.

Finding #3

The programme was effective in extending beyond mothers to fathers, encouraging **increased involvement in childcare** and promoting **positive parenting** and **healthier family dynamics**.

By choosing **unconventional venues** like local stadiums and tying the program to community activities such as football matches, the programme made strides in **attracting male caregivers,** leading to **more equitable** sharing of household and childcare tasks, enhanced **emotional connectivity** between fathers and children, **improved child behavior** through positive reinforcement, **stronger co-parenting relationships.**

Recommendation(s)

Leverage Community Spaces for Gender-Transformative ECD Programmes

Considering the programme's effectiveness in engaging both mothers and fathers through community-centric approaches, design and implement an ECD model that is **gender-transformative** from the outset.
This should include targeted outreach at locations where male caregivers are naturally congregated, such as workplaces, mosques, or sporting events, as proven effective in the initial phases of the programme.
In addition to **localized strategies**, capitalize on **globally recognized best practices** to specifically engage first-time fathers in positive parenting roles. This **holistic approach** ensures not only equitable involvement of both male and female caregivers in child-rearing tasks but also cultivates stronger co-parenting relationships, emotional bonds between fathers and children, and community-wide shifts in caregiving gender roles. This model will fortify the overarching aim of enhancing equal positive parenting opportunities for all caregivers.

Effectiveness/Coverage

Finding #4

The programme has shown a strong commitment **to adaptive learning**, which has contributed to its **effectiveness** and **sustainability.** This includes **flexibility** in programme delivery, strategic partnerships, and robust internal communication and feedback loops. Through adaptive learning, the transition from a hybrid model to more frequent face-to-face sessions has led to improved relationships between facilitators and children, increased caregiver satisfaction, and more effective use of educational facilities.

Recommendation(s)

Enhance Adaptive Learning Mechanisms
Continue to invest in adaptive learning strategies, integrating them into organizational process and approaches including more robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, to ensure the program's long-term effectiveness and sustainability

Prioritise Face-to-Face Interactions
Given the positive impact of face-to-face sessions, prioritize these over online methods while still utilizing online resources only in response to government mandates or only for reinforcement of in person learning.

Finding #5

War Child has been effective in providing comprehensive ECD interventions. The programme has been **successful in preparing children for primary education** and has been well-received by key stakeholders. Further, the programme leveraged its partnership with War Child as a facilitating agent to actively **involve community members** through Child Protection Committees (CPC). The engagement from the community and parents attending activities resulted in helpful feedback and suggestions which have enabled War Child to **respond to the community's needs.**

Recommendation(s)

Sustain and Scale Comprehensive ECD Programme
To overcome financial constraints and extend the programe duration, seek additional funding from existing and new donor organizations. Further, investments in capacity building for ECD service providers are essential. This includes comprehensive training and resource allocation to equip professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge to support children's development effectively.

Integrate Community-Driven Innovations into a Holistic ECD Model
Community engagement yields invaluable feedback and actionable insights. Formulate a comprehensive ECD model that encompasses **multi-layered interventions** involving children, parents, extended families, and the wider community. In particular, the **community-led innovations** and **feedback loops** established through the CPC should be integrated as a core component of this model. This will ensure that the community's needs and inputs are continuously incorporated, thereby creating a more responsive and effective ECD programme that enjoys ongoing community investment and trust.

Finding #6

The Little Fellows Programme has had a **transformative impact on the wellbeing** of conflict-affected children aged 6 to 9 years. The programme has not only achieved but surpassed its initial goals, making a resounding impact on the emotional and social landscapes of conflict-affected children within the target age group. Its success serves as a blueprint for future interventions aimed at enhancing child wellbeing in challenging environments.

Recommendation(s)

Expand the Continuum of Care
Develop a core War Child model that follows children through the ages, so that when they graduate from a War Child early learning center and go into Little Fellows programme and continue their learning. This will be particularly important when children graduate from a **play-based**, **child centered** model and then enter a primary school focused on rote learning and academics. Follow-on participation in Little Fellows will allow them to continue their learning and growth, particularly in the socio-emotional area.

Efficiency

Finding #7

The programme experienced a remarkable turnaround, transitioning **from** significant **ineffectiveness** in its inaugural year to **exemplary performance** in the second year. This transformation was notably influenced by improvements in staff quality, **adaptive learning**, and enhanced **inter-organizational collaboration,** particularly between War Child Holland and War Child UK.

Recommendation(s)

Optimize Programme Efficacy through Staff Quality, Adaptive Learning, and Inter-Organizational Collaboration
Prioritise the recruitment of **high-quality staff** from the inception of the programme to lay the groundwork for exceptional performance. Implement a system of **adaptive learning** from the start, ensuring a **robust framework** for continuous improvement and responsiveness to evolving needs. Establish **streamlined policies and procedures** for efficient and effective hiring processes. Mitigate internal organizational bottlenecks and politics that could hinder programme execution. Lastly, underscore the critical importance of seamless **information sharing, constructive partnership, and a culture of learning** in any impending organizational mergers or collaborations.

Sustainability and Connectedness

Finding #8

The programme effectively engaged caregivers, **promoting positive parenting techniques,** and fostering improved relationships with their children. The **Peer-to-peer engagement** among caregivers contributes to the **long-term impact** of the programme. Within the programmem there was a strong **commitment to building partnerships** with key stakeholders like the Ministry of Education and other organizations. It has also engaged in **global advocacy** efforts**,** aligning with its long-term sustainability goals. Additionally, the **local Advocacy** efforts within the Directorate of Education have led to a shift in teachers' attitudes, contributing to long-term sustainability. Regular meetings with Child Protection Committees and the Department of Education further emphasize the focus on sustainability.

Recommendation(s)

Strengthen Peer-to-Peer Networks
Consider formalizing peer-to-peer networks among caregivers to ensure the sustainability of behavioral changes and positive parenting techniques. In future, consider linking **caregiver support engagement** to **gender programming** with focus on access to childcare, women's economic empowerment, vocational preparation, and women's access to labor market participation. Additionally, consider **partnerships with local organizations** to enhance c**ommunity-based approaches** to ECD and caregiver engagement. Finally, leverage public-private partnerships for expansive and sustainable engagement of male caregivers, Consider empowering caregivers to facilitate and provide leadership in their communities.

Institutionalize Stakeholder Collaboration and Advocacy for Long-term Programme Sustainability
Work on standardizing the engagement process with key stakeholders like the Ministry of Education to ensure consistent and effective collaboration. To expand advocacy efforts, engage in both local and global advocacy efforts. Consider developing a structured advocacy strategy that aligns with the programme's long-term objectives. In Jordan, continue to strengthen the established communication channel with the MoSD for ongoing technical support

Impact

Finding #9

The **treatment groups** in both Iraq and Jordan significantly **outperformed the Control groups** across all IDELA domains, including Social Emotional Learning, Emergent Literacy, Emergent Numeracy, and Gross and Motor Development skills. In **Iraq**, the treatment group achieved a Total IDELA **score of 64.9%** compared to the control group's 44.0%. In **Jordan**, the treatment group **scored 71.1%**, surpassing the control group's 31.9%. Further, the caregivers who participated in the Caregiver Support Intervention (CSI) reported significant improvements in their ability to interact with their children and handle everyday situations, resulting in **healthier family dynamics.** The programme's comprehensive approach led to **positive changes** in **children's behavior** and caregivers' attitudes, strengthening family dynamics and contributing to community progress. **Collaboration** with stakeholders like the **Ministry** of Education and Ministry of Social Development was instrumental.

Recommendation(s)

Continue and Expand of ECD Interventions

Target populations with the lowest access to early childhood services and highest levels of childhood adversity. Conduct further research to identify the specific elements of the intervention that are most effective in improving IDELA scores.

Expand tailored Caregiver Support Intervention

Improve on the global model of the Caregiver Support Intervention by using it as a base and then weaving into the model additional support to scaffold parent support of early learning. Expand the intervention to include more diverse family structures, including inclusion of grandparents and other nontraditional caregivers. Develop a model of the programme for not-yet-parents particular in locations of high youth and presence of adolescent programming.

Sustain Impact Through Multisectoral Collaboration and Continuous Learning in Future Initiatives

Maintain a comprehensive approach in future programmes, ensuring collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. Engage diverse ministries. Seek private sector engagement form the outstart of programming.Consider engagement of faith actors. Consider consistent follow-up after core training for effective learning and implementation.

Finding #10

The programme has adequately implemented **adaptive learning** strategies, enhancing its ability to **adjust to crisis situations**. This adaptability manifests in various forms: **flexibility** in program execution, **strategic alliances,** customized educational frameworks, and effective internal communication channels. Not only do these measures augment the programme's immediate effectiveness, but they also contribute significantly to its long-term sustainability and scalability.

Recommendation(s)

Focus on ECD Programme for Climate Resilience and Adaptability

In light of the programme's demonstrated adaptability to crises and its effectiveness in various domains, it's imperative to proactively prepare for emerging climate challenges, which are increasingly a focus for development donors. To do so, develop a **climate resilient ECD model** that integrates innovative features such as school gardens, vertical gardens in recycled rubber tires, and climate education modules. These features not only serve immediate educational and nutritional needs but also align the programme with future funding opportunities focused on climate resilience. The model should also include plans for extreme weather contingencies and involve both children and caregivers in community-led environmental initiatives. By adopting these strategies, the program can ensure its long-term sustainability and scalability while meeting the immediate and future needs of the communities it serves.

In conclusion, the findings of this study emphasize the critical role that Early Childhood Development plays in ensuring the holistic development of children. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute significantly to improving the quality and effectiveness of ECD programs in Jordan and Iraq, fostering a brighter and more equitable future for children in these regions. These efforts not only benefit individual children but also have far-reaching positive effects on society and the economy as a whole.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Indicator Table

Appendix II: Sample Size Calculation

Appendix III: Sources of Information

Appendix IV: Evaluation Statement of Work, Terms of Reference, and/or Study Protocol

Appendix V: Data Collection Instruments

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN IRAQ AND JORDAN

Impact Evaluation Report