

Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 35

Hui Li
Eunhye Park
Jennifer J. Chen *Editors*

Early Childhood Education Policies in Asia Pacific

Advances in Theory and Practice



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Early Childhood Education Policies in Asia Pacific

Advances in Theory and Practice

 Springer

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Series Editors' Introduction

This important book by Hui Li, Eunhye Park and Jennifer Chan, on *Early Childhood Education Policies in Asia Pacific*, is the latest volume to be published in the long-standing Springer Book Series 'Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects'.

The first book in this Springer series was published in 2002, with this volume by Hui Li et al. being the 35th volume published to date. The subject of this book is a very important one because early childhood education (ECE) is widely accepted as being the foundation upon which all aspects of formal schooling and education is built, with the quality and effectiveness of primary, secondary and post-secondary education all very much depending on the strength and relevance of this key foundation. As the authors of this volume clearly demonstrate, the vital importance of ECE is keenly understood by governments in the Asia Pacific, with funding allocations and policy initiatives reflecting this importance in countries.

The various topics included in this Springer Book Series are wide ranging and varied in coverage, with an emphasis on cutting-edge developments, best practices and education innovations for development. Topics examined include environmental education and education for sustainable development; the reform of primary, secondary and teacher education; innovative approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and highly relevant education for all; active ageing through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross-country and cross-cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. For full details about books published to date in this series, examine the Springer website <http://www.springer.com/series/5888>.

All volumes in this book series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policymakers and practitioners, tertiary students, teachers at all levels within education systems and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting-edge developments in education and schooling in the Asia Pacific.

The reason why this book series has been devoted exclusively to examining various aspects of education and schooling in the Asia-Pacific region is that this is a challenging region which is renowned for its size, diversity and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labour force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation and attitudes and values. Asia and the Pacific is home to some 63 % of the world's population of 7 billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 billion; India, 1.3 billion) and the most rapidly growing megacities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the island of Niue, 1600).

Levels of economic and socio-political development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40 % in some countries in Asia. At the same time, many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalisation and technological innovation, is leading to long-term changes in trade, business and labour markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centred on Asia and the Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be 'the Century of Asia Pacific'.

We believe that this book series makes a useful contribution to knowledge sharing about education and schooling in the Asia Pacific. Any readers of this or other volumes in the series who have an idea for writing their own book (or editing a book) on any aspect of education and/or schooling, which is relevant to the region, are enthusiastically encouraged to approach the series editors either direct or through Springer to publish their own volume in the series, since we are always willing to assist prospective authors shape their manuscripts in ways that make them suitable for publication in this series.

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March 2016

Lorraine Pe Symaco

Preface: From ‘Sound Bites’ to Sound Solutions: Advancing the Policies for Better Early Childhood Education in Asia Pacific

Abstract This book comprises 12 interesting case studies on early childhood education (ECE) policies in the Asia Pacific. The selected works individually analyse the target education policies in a specific country or region, based on the theoretical framework of ‘3A2S’ – affordability, accessibility, accountability, sustainability and social justice. Collectively, they provide a multifaceted account of the merits and limitations of the ECE policies implemented or proposed in 12 countries/regions. In an effort to provide a greater understanding of the current policy trends, all the contributors analyse the education policies in their respective socio-economic and political contexts and suggest new research agenda for early childhood education in this rapidly developing region. This introduction chapter presents the ‘3A2S’ framework and briefly summarises the theoretical advances and practical improvements in ECE policies in the Asia Pacific.

Introduction

At the turn of a new millennium, early childhood education (ECE) has increasingly become a prominent focus in education reforms all over the world. Many nations have tried to reform ECE system to better prepare their young children for the local fitness and global competitiveness of manpower resources (Li et al. 2014). The Asia Pacific, with the most rapidly developing economies in the world, has particularly witnessed noticeable changes and remarkable advances in ECE policies and practices. In Greater China, for instance, free ECE has become the ‘sound bite’ in national debates. Macau and some provinces in Mainland China have already made ECE free to young children in addition to the 12-year free education. Other Chinese societies, however, are still debating about and struggling with why and how to implement a 3-year free ECE (Lau et al. 2014; Li and Fong 2014; Li and Wang 2014; Li et al. 2014). And similar debates and dilemmas are also observed in other Asian countries, such as Korea and Singapore. All the debates should be carefully addressed and supported by empirical evidence from systematic studies and with

reference to other countries' experiences and lessons so that we can achieve a greater understanding of ECE policies in many parts of the world. This book is devoted to analysing ECE policies in the Asia Pacific.

The Asia-Pacific region, in this book, refers to a group of nations in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australasia and the Pacific Islands in the ocean itself (Oceania). East Asia, for example, is the eastern part of the Asian continent and includes the Greater China (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), Japan, Korea, Mongolia, etc. Southeast Asia, conventionally, includes Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and so on. In this book, the Pacific Islands countries/areas include Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Australasia comprises [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#) and Papua [New Guinea](#).

It seems that this region is really diversified and complicated in terms of economic and social developments, ranging from the most developed countries (such as Japan) to the least ones (i.e. Nepal). But it occupies a far more important place today than it did only a decade ago, as the consequence of shifting the centre of gravity of global economy to the Asia Pacific from Europe and America. It is home to about half of the world's population. Just China and India alone, the two population giants, have a combined population of 2.4 billion. And 9 of the 20 largest metropolitan areas in the world are located in the region, i.e. Tokyo, Jakarta, Seoul, Delhi, Shanghai and Manila, growing considerably in size as a result of their profound economic developments and massive migrations from rural areas. About one third of the Group of Twenty (G20) is Asia-Pacific countries, indicating that this region is gaining prominence in many aspects. Their diverse education systems and changing ECE policies, however, have not been systematically studied and analysed. European countries can share their information on ECE through the European Commission Network and OECD, whereas most of Asia-Pacific countries (except Japan, Korea, New Zealand and Australia) don't have such international platform to share their data. As discussed earlier, there are more reasons to not neglect this region, which is the home to almost half of the young children in the world.

Therefore, for the first time, this book endeavours to address the literature gap by systematically studying and analysing the ECE policies in the region. The current edition has successfully collected critical analyses of ECE policies in 12 countries/regions contributed by renowned researchers, young scholars, policymakers and the experts from international NGOs. Although unique to their specific contexts, all the chapters share the common theme of evaluating new ECE policies in the Asia Pacific with the '3A2S' framework, which refers to accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice. This framework provides a reliable, comparable, appropriate and consistent measure to assess the advances of ECE policies in Asia-Pacific countries. The following section will delineate this framework in detail.

The ‘3A2S’ Framework

We understand that there is a variety of theoretical frameworks that could provide meaningful perspectives and approaches to developing our knowledge of ECE policies, such as postmodernism, socialism and even Marxism. In this book, however, we just limit our analyses and discussions to a new theoretical framework that has just been employed in our recent empirical studies in Asian contexts – the ‘3A2S’ framework.

This ‘3A2S’ theoretical framework is applied to the analyses of all ECE policies reviewed in this book. Originally, Li et al. (2010) proposed the ‘3As’ theoretical framework to evaluate ECE policies: accessibility, affordability and accountability. They defined ‘accessibility’ as that every preschool-age child could easily attend the nearby early childhood settings. ‘Affordability’ was defined as that every family could easily afford the fees of their chosen ones, and some exemptions/subsidies could be offered to needy families. ‘Accountability’ denotes that the extra fiscal input provided by the policy should be accountable to the government for improving education quality. Li et al. (2010) used this ‘3As’ framework to analyse the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) launched in Hong Kong in 2007. They surveyed 380 kindergarten teachers and principals and found that the majority of the respondents perceived positive impacts of PEVS on the 3As of ECE.

Later on, Li and Wang (2014) proposed the ‘3A1S’ theoretical framework to evaluate the free ECE policies in China: accessibility, affordability, accountability and sustainability. They believe that a truly scientific and appropriate free ECE policy should also be ‘sustainable’. This criterion is critical because implementing a 3-year free ECE policy in China requires strong financial support, which should be well calculated and sustainable. Otherwise, the fiscal deficit will make the policy impossible to sustain. In Western China, for instance, many counties have launched 3-year ‘free’ ECE policies since 2010. Li and Wang (2014) sampled four counties from Shanxi and Shaanxi province and found that: (1) the ‘free’ education policies are neither ‘all kids free’ nor ‘all fees free’, thus could only partially solve the problem of affordability; (2) the policies did not solve the problems related to school place allocation, which in turn tended to exacerbate the issue of accessibility and inequality in educational opportunities; (3) no monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms were launched to improve the accountability of kindergartens; and (4) the policies are unlikely to be sustainable as the ECE budget entirely relies on the fiscal investment at the county level. In addition, they also found that so-called ‘free’ ECE policies in China were neither fair nor upholding social justice. Poor families had to send their children to low-quality private kindergartens, whereas wealthy or powerful families could enrol their children in high-quality public kindergartens for free. This finding implies that social justice should be considered a very important dimension for ECE policy evaluation.

Accordingly, believing that a truly scientific and appropriate free ECE policy should also be sustainable and should uphold social justice, Li et al. (2014) further developed the 3A1S into the 3A2S framework, adding the last dimension (social

justice) into the equation. Social justice refers to the idea that all young children should have equal access to and fair treatment of ECE, without any discrimination against their gender, race, religion, age, belief, disability, geographical location, social class and socio-economic circumstances. The ECE policies should advocate the notion of fairness and equality in both procedures and outcomes. The 12 chapters in this book have jointly demonstrated that this 3A2S framework is a potent and powerful theoretical tool to use for analysing education policies.

About This Book

Following this introduction chapter are the 12 chapters reviewing the ECE policies and developments in the Asia Pacific, with each chapter devoting to one country/area using the ‘3A2S’ framework. They are arranged alphabetically, starting with Australia. Since the turn of a new millennium, Australia has been reforming and changing its ECE system and policies, and an ambitious reform agenda is still in process. In this chapter, Raban and Kilderry introduce, explore and analyse these developments, systematically and historically. They found that the major change of early childhood setting was departing from a sanctuary for children’s health and safety to a setting advocating for young children’s educational development. This shift shows that ECE is no longer viewed as a ‘cost’ to government and families; instead, it is regarded as an ‘investment’ for the future of the social and economic growth of the country. Last, they also share their concerns about the future development of ECE policies and practices in the country.

In Chap. 2, the developments of ECE policies in Mainland China were thoroughly analysed by Hong and Chen. They first reviewed the four-decade history of ECE development, with a particular examination of phase I (2011–2013) and phase II (2014–2016) of the ‘Three-Year Action Plan’. Their analyses of national data from statistical reports and educational agencies indicate that although many achievements have been made, China is still wrestling with different aspects of ‘3A2S’ problems in ECE. Thus, more work is needed to develop a more appropriate and stronger ECE system in China.

Chapter 3 is a case study on the Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China – Hong Kong – by Yang, Wang and Li. They used the ‘3A2S’ framework to analyse all the ECE policies that have been implemented (or proposed) over the span of nearly two decades from 1997 to 2015. They found that the totally privatised ECE market was well regulated by the supply and demand mechanism, and the subsidy measures were promoting children’s equal access to affordable ECE. In addition, the educational authorities have successfully established a self-evaluation and school improvement mechanism to promote the accountability of ECE. Currently, Hong Kong is developing the ‘free ECE’ policies, a process in which sustainability and social justice of ECE are highly valued. They conclude that Hong Kong has achieved a balance in 3A2S of ECE. Accordingly, Hong Kong might provide a model or at least a good case of study for policymakers in other countries.

In Chap. 5, Park and her colleagues introduce the two different systems of early childhood education in Korea and the recent developments. First, they presented a brief introduction of the history and context of ECE in Korea. Second, they analysed the trends, policies and issues of accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice. Their analyses on the recent 10 years data indicated that the educational authorities have improved a lot in the accessibility, affordability, accountability and sustainability. And they have also begun to address the social justice issues in 2012 by starting to integrate the early child care and education sectors.

Chapter 6 presents a case study on the second Special Administrative Region of China – Macau – by Lau. Macau is the first region in Greater China to provide 15 years of free education to its residents. Its free education policy has successfully and strategically solved the problems with 3A2S. However, Macau is facing some challenges with the sustainability and social justice, as discussed in the chapter. In particular, its solely depending on gambling economy has cast doubt on the sustainability of the 15-year free education policy.

In Chap. 7, Khanal, Paudyal and Dangal have systematically and historically reviewed the developments of ECE policies in Nepal. In recent years, the government of Nepal has recognised ECE as an important catalyst for early childhood development and thus has introduced many ECE programmes. In this chapter, the review of these policies with the ‘3A2S’ framework revealed mixed results. The accessibility to ECE has been improved, but some structural and methodological challenges are still observed. Furthermore, the problems in affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice also need to be solved with important innovations. This case study on Nepal, however, may provide some useful lessons about how to develop national-level policy and strategic plans for establishing an effective ECE system in developing countries.

Chapter 8 is about the development of early childhood care and education (ECCE) system in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is contributed by Everiss, Hill and Meade. They reviewed the major developments of ECCE in the country and evaluated the market-driven policy approaches employed by the government. Their analyses indicated that there were steady growth and improvements in the accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice in ECCE. For more details about New Zealand, please see Chap. 8.

Chapter 9, for the first time, collects and reviews the ECE policies in the Pacific Islands, a neglected area in the literature. In this chapter, Rich-Orloff and Camaitoga systematically review ECE policies and practices in Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. In these countries/areas, ECE was regarded as a community-based, privately run initiative with very little governmental involvement. In 2010, the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Care and Education (PRC4ECCE) was established. Subsequently, some guidelines and frameworks were issued by PRC4ECCE in 2013. This chapter provides a summary across individual specific island countries/regions and some

insight on how the process of working regionally on the *Pacific Guidelines* may have impacted individual countries.

Chapter 10 is a chapter on the examination and evaluation of ECE policies in Singapore, by Jing. Since 2012, the country has placed unprecedented emphasis on the development of ECE in order to raise its status in a world ECE ranking system. To promote quality ECE, the educational authorities have moved from the local traditions of efficiency and standardised-oriented ECE to a cosmopolitan outlook for the future. However, this shift and the accompanying educational reforms may have generated tensions among participants in this particular socio-cultural milieu. In this chapter, Jing reviews all the ECE policies that have been proposed and implemented since 2000. While the existing issues and the current trends are analysed, the author raises questions for further research.

Taiwan, the last member of the Greater China family, is reviewed in Chap. 11, by Leung and Chen. In this chapter, they report the ECE policies that have been proposed and implemented in Taiwan from the years 2000 to 2014. Their review indicates that the postmillennial governmental policies in Taiwan have vastly improved early childhood education for its future generations. The trends of policy changes, current problems and future research questions are also discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 12 is a report on the history and evaluation of early childhood education policies in Vietnam, contributed by Boyd and Thao. First, they reviewed the historical developments of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Vietnam. Second, they evaluated the policies, laws and documentation on ECCE through the 3A2S framework. They concluded that Vietnam had made significant progress in meeting accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability and social justice goals in ECCE. Some problems and concerns regarding the accessibility and accountability are also discussed.

Chapter 13 presents a summary of this book. The different problems encountered by the 12 countries/areas were thoroughly analysed, and the common themes were discussed. Last but not least, the most important country in the Region, Japan, was reported in Chap. 4. We are very grateful to the authors, Satomi Izumi-Taylor and Yoko Ito, for having successfully managed to submit the chapter on such short notice. They reviewed the governmental documents and ECE policies and analysed how the four abilities (accessibility, affordability, accountability, and sustainability) had resulted in social justice in Japan. This is exactly one of the foci of this edited book.

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Chapter 1

Early Childhood Education Policies in Australia

Bridie Raban and Anna Kilderry

Abstract This chapter introduces, explores, and analyzes Australian policies with respect to early childhood education (ECE). It does this by using the 3A2S framework: accessibility, affordability, accountability, sustainability, and social justice. The last decade has seen large-scale and significant changes to the Australian early childhood sector, an ambitious reform agenda that is still in process. The major features of these changes have seen early childhood education move from a sanctuary for children’s health and safety while their parents worked to settings advocating for young children’s educational development. Discourse has shifted from ECE viewed as a “cost” to government and families to an “investment” for the future of the social and economic growth of the country, leading to a more highly educated workforce.

However, as governments change and political persuasions alter, the movement between these positions varies across time and impacts the rate and direction of change within the ECE sector.

Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACECQA | Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority |
| ACER | Australian Council for Educational Research |
| ACT | Australian Capital Territory |

The original version of this chapter was revised. An erratum to this chapter can be found at http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1528-1_14

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| | |
|---------|---|
| AEDI | Australian Early Development Index |
| CCB | Child Care Benefit |
| CCR | Child Care Rebate |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| COAG | Commonwealth of Australian Governments |
| DEEWR | Department of Education Employment and Work Relations |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| ECA | Early Childhood Australia |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| LDC | Long Day Care |
| MCEETYA | Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training & Youth Affairs |
| NCAC | National Childcare and Accreditation Council |
| NESB | Non-English Speaking Background |
| NQF | National Quality Framework |
| NQS | National Quality Standard |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PC | Productivity Commission |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| PPP | Purchasing Power Parity |
| QA | Quality Area |
| QIAS | Quality Improvement and Accreditation System |
| QIP | Quality Improvement Plan |
| QKFS | Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme |
| SCRGSP | Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |

Overall Context

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world and comprises an area of some 8.5 million square kilometers. It covers a distance of 3700 km north to south and 4000 km east to west. Within these boundaries, there is an extraordinary range of extremes. Australia's landscape ranges from vast deserts in central Australia (deserts comprise 20% of the country) to that of snowfields, with temperatures varying from an average of 30° centigrade in the midsummer of the central deserts to an average of minus 6° centigrade in the highlands during the winter.

Technically, the country is the Commonwealth of Australia, with the Commonwealth being a Federation of six states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia) and two territories (Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory). Each state and territory has a major city where the majority (89%) of the population lives. Australia's population has tripled since the end of World War II, standing currently at 23.8 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2015). However, the population density is 2.8 inhabitants per square kilometer, because of the vastness of the landmass. The

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) population, from the 2011 census, number 548,370 (ABS 2011b).

Most immigrants arrived from the UK and Ireland, but more recently, the 2011 census identified immigration from New Zealand, Italy, Germany, China, India, Greece, and Holland, as well as Vietnam and the Philippines, and, in addition, more recently there has been immigration from African nations and Afghanistan (ABS 2011b). However, in common with other developed nations, Australia is experiencing a demographic shift toward an older population.

Between 30 June 1993 and 30 June 2013, the proportion of Australia's population aged 15–64 years has remained stable, increasing from 66.6% to 66.7% of the total population; however, the proportion of people aged 65 years and over has increased from 11.6% to 14.4% (Productivity Commission 2013).

Australia is referred to as a developed-world country and one of the wealthiest in the world, having the 12th largest economy. It is a market economy, having the fifth highest GDP per capita (US\$67,468 – 2013), and a relatively low poverty rate, although the nation's poverty rate increased from 10.2% to 11.8% from 2000/2001 to 2013. In 2013, Australia ranked second in the world after Switzerland with respect to adult average wealth (US\$402,600) (Credit Suisse 2013). However, this ranged from US\$1,007,165 to US\$130,272, thus identifying a widening gap between the wealthiest people and those with fewest resources (Gini coefficient, 1982, 0.27; 2012, 0.34) (Greenville et al. 2013).

Government in Australia is conducted both at national level and at the level of states and territories. It uses a parliamentary system of government, and all Australian citizens are required to vote by law. Queen Elizabeth II (residing in the UK) is at the top of the governing pyramid and is represented in Australia by the governor-general, and each state has their own governor, with an administrator in the Northern Territory. The national parliament is based in Canberra (Australian Capital Territory), and each state (sovereign entities) and territory also has their own parliamentary systems. State parliaments retain legislative powers over schools, state police, the state judiciary, roads, public transport, and local government, including early childhood education (ECE).

Early Childhood Education

Government involvement in ECE, both at the national and state and territory levels took place formally as a result of the *Child Care Act* (Commonwealth of Australia 1972). The primary purpose of this new legislation was to provide a basis for funding the establishment and operation of childcare centers for working families, given the increased participation of women in the paid workforce (Brennan 2007; Cox 2007). During the 1990s, the provision of accessible, affordable, quality childcare and preschool (preschool in this chapter denotes the year before formal schooling) provision emerged as a policy priority with a clear focus on growing the national economy, using a market model to drive the expansion of services (Elliott 2006). However, Brennan (2013, p. 38) has shown that the market model of this period served parents poorly. Instead of greater diversity, lower costs, and higher quality

Table 1.1 Percentage of children attending ECE (full and part time)

| Year | 2005 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|
| 3 years olds | 17 % | 10 % | 13 % | 18 % |
| 4 years olds | 53 % | 52 % | 67 % | 76 % |

Source: OECD (2012, 2013 & 2014)

Table 1.2 Annual expenditure per ECE student

| Year | Equivalent USD using PPPs (*) for GDP |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| 2010 | 8493 |
| 2011 | 8899 |
| 2013 | 10,734 |

Source: OECD (2012, 2013, 2014)

*Purchasing power parity

promised by governments, families faced escalating fees, greater uniformity, lower quality, and less choice. Nevertheless, 1996 marked a clear shift in government discourse (Irvine and Farrell 2013; Logan et al. 2013). Two documents published in that year reflect this move from “care” to “education”:

- Economic Planning Advisory Commission (1996) Final Report – *Future Childcare Provision in Australia – Recommendations for Systemic Reform*
- Senate Employment, Education and Training Reference Committee – *Childhood Matters: The Report on the Inquiry into Early Childhood Education (1996)*

This decade was a period of intense government policy initiatives within the field of ECE, and there was a dramatic increase in funding and the provision and uptake of places (Tables 1.1 and 1.2).

National Partnership Agreement

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the peak government forum for Australian governments across the country, chaired by the Prime Minister and made up of premiers and representatives of all states and territories, continued to initiate changes and developments, leading to the *National Partnership Agreement on ECE* (COAG 2008). This agreement was reached to ensure that all children would have access to a quality early childhood education program in the year before starting school, requiring each early childhood education preschool program be delivered by a 4-year university-trained early childhood teacher, for 15 h a week, 40 weeks a year, to be implemented over a period of time (2009–2013).

To implement this program, the Commonwealth Government committed US\$790 million to states and territories over 5 years from 2008. State governments also agreed to the objective that all children will be enrolled in an early childhood education program (in the year before school) by 2013. The *National Partnership* also included a specific commitment that by 2013, every Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander 4-year-old child in a remote community would have access to a quality early childhood education program. In addition, in July 2009, COAG agreed to a National Early Childhood Development Strategy, *Investing in the Early Years* (COAG 2009) that guided investment in future reforms to support around two million children and their families.

However, despite what looks to be an increasingly healthy investment in ECE, the Australian national government expenditure on pre-primary school education is significantly less than other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) comparable countries (OECD 2012, p. 264). Consistent with neoliberal motivations, current government expenditure is not all about providing an endless revenue stream for the education of children before formal schooling. Instead, part of the motivation for the Productivity Commission's inquiries (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) 2013, 2014, 2015) into ECE was to find economic efficiencies and reduce government expenditure. Nonetheless, it is evident that since the 2009 COAG initiatives, a more cohesive, inclusive, and ambitious national policy reform agenda has transpired; consequently, successive governments have inherited a more robust and accountable system, compared to previous years.

Government expenditure currently on education and training, including preschool education, schools, universities, and TAFE (Technical and Further Education) institutes in 2012–2013, was US\$62.5 billion, equivalent to 5.2% of GDP in that year (SCRGSP, 2015, p. B.11). In the same years, 2012–2013, the expenditure for childcare (separate funding source from preschool education) was US\$4.3 billion.

This was equivalent to 0.4% of GDP in that year and up to 0.1% from the previous year, 2011–2012 (SCRGSP 2014, 2015, p. B.11). The US\$61.6 billion government expenditure consisted the following:

- Schools (51.1%)
- Universities (28%)
- TAFE institutes (8.5%)
- Preschool services (5.6%) (SCRGSP 2015, p. B.12)

By the end of 2009, the national government had published a landmark framework document, a first for Australian ECE, entitled *Belonging, Being & Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009) replacing a number of state curriculum frameworks (Fenech et al. 2008; Kilderry 2014). It is a framework of principles and practice with which teachers can build their practice leading to five specified Learning Outcomes for all Australian children before starting school (discussed elsewhere (Margetts and Raban 2011; Raban and Margetts 2012)).

The *National Partnership Agreement* was reviewed (Woolcott 2014) in order to assess the extent to which the objectives and outcomes of the *National Partnership* had been achieved. This review reported that the sector was still undergoing transition, and therefore further amendments should not be made until it had been fully implemented and all services had been through the assessment and rating process (see later in this chapter).

National Quality Framework (NQF)

A new *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (NQF) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) 2013a) commenced on 1 January 2012. This new policy initiative aims to deliver better quality services and promote positive educational and developmental outcomes for all Australian children attending long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, and preschool programs. It focuses on:

- Better qualified staff and improved staff-to-child ratios that allow for more quality time to focus on individual children's needs
- Providing national uniform standards in education, health and safety, physical environment, and staffing
- Introducing a new transparent rating system that enables parents to compare services easily and make informed choices about which service best meets their child's needs

This new national approach, the NQF, replaced various licensing and accreditation processes previously undertaken by states and territories. Under the NQF, individual services only account to one organization for quality assessment, reducing the regulatory burden and enabling them to focus more on the children's education and care (ABS 2014).

The *National Quality Standard* (NQS) (ACECQA 2013b) is a key aspect of the NQF and sets a national benchmark for early childhood education services in Australia. As the NQF progresses, every early childhood service in the country is now assessed to make sure it meets the new quality standard. To ensure children enjoy the best possible conditions in their early educational and developmental years, the NQS promotes continuous improvement in quality.

However, there remains a great deal of variation in the way in which ECE is provided in Australia that is largely based on historical, political, and legislative environments. Indeed, the Productivity Commission's (PC) recent report (2014c) states:

The current system for delivering preschool is complex – services are delivered in a variety of settings by a range of providers and each state and territory has a different service delivery profile. (p.490)

This complexity becomes clear when the diversity of provision is identified. Early childhood education is provided through kindergartens, stand-alone preschools, long day care (LDC) settings, and early learning centers, as well as preschool programs within the independent school sector. Early childhood education programs in Australia tend to be delivered along two broad models – one a predominantly government model and the other predominantly a nongovernment model:

Of the more than 8600 preschools in Australia, half are dedicated preschools provided by governments or nongovernment groups, and half are long day care centres with preschool programs. (PC 2014c, p.480)

Preschools (called kindergartens in Victoria and called pre-primary programs in Queensland and Western Australia) deliver a structured educational program to children for a prescribed number of hours per week, in the year or 2 before they start formal primary school. The program is planned and delivered by a university graduate ECE teacher. Preschools can be stand alone, incorporated into LDC settings, or be part of or colocated with a school. Government preschools include those managed by state local governments or by state and territory government schools. Nongovernment preschools include those operated by private for-profit organizations, private not-for-profit organizations (community-managed and other organizations), independent schools, and Catholic schools (ABS 2014).

Long day care (LDC) is a center-based form of childcare providing all-day or part-time care for children from 6 weeks of age to 5 years. Traditionally, LDC was predominantly a service for the care of children, whereas, since the introduction of the NQF and for some time before, education is also viewed as important (DEEWR 2009). A preschool program may be included in this service and attracts preschool funding, varying from state to state. Long day care services are primarily operated by for-profit or not-for-profit organizations, local councils, and community organizations. They have been staffed by both qualified and unqualified staff, with requirements now in place to see all staff with post-secondary school qualifications, with the preschool teacher 4-year university educated.

It should be noted here that the school system in Australia comprises government schools, nongovernment or independent schools, and a separate Catholic school system. Each of these three systems is funded differently at levels of national, state, and territory governments; they have different school term dates, and in addition, each state and territory will have different ages for starting school (Table 1.3).

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)

In view of the variety and diversity within the ECE sector, a national body has been set up to move this new agenda forward. The *Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority* (ACECQA) guides the implementation of the *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (ACECQA 2013a) nationally and is charged with ensuring consistency in delivery, as well as ratifying university programs that educate ECE teachers.

ACECQA is an independent national authority, and it reports to the national government. It is led by a CEO and guided by a 12 member governing board whose members are nominated by each state and territory and national governments. One of ACECQA's many roles is to:

educate and inform the wider community about the importance of improving outcomes in children's education and care... (and to also) provide governments, the sector and families with access to the most current research to ensure NQF policy and service delivery is in line with best practice across the country. (ACECQA 2015)

Table 1.3 Preschool year and first year of formal schooling and age of commencement by state and territory^a

| State/territory | Preschool year and age in year of commencement | First year of formal schooling and age of commencement |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| New South Wales | Preschool (age 4 by July 31) | Kindergarten (age 5 by 31 July) |
| Victoria | Kindergarten (age 4 by 30 April) | Preparatory (age 5 by 30 April) |
| Queensland | Kindergarten (age 4 by 30 June) | Preparatory (age 5 by 30 June) |
| South Australia | Kindergarten (age 4 by 1 May) | Reception (age 5 by 1 May) |
| Western Australia | Kindergarten (age 4 by 30 June) | Pre-primary (age 5 by 30 June) |
| Tasmania | Kindergarten (age 4 by 1 January) | Preparatory (age 5 by 1 January) |
| Northern Territory | Preschool (entry after 4th birthday) | Transition (age 5 by 30 June) |
| Australia Capital Territory | Preschool (age 4 by 30 April) | Kindergarten (age 5 by 30 April) |

Source: With kind permission from the Australian Government Productivity Commission: Report to Government Services Vol 1 2013, ECEC 3.3 Table 3.1

^aMost state and territory governments provide for early entry to preschool, usually at age 3, for Indigenous children and children considered to be at risk or developmentally vulnerable

During this later period (from 2009 onwards), there has been an increasing focus on moving toward the *Universal Access* agreement. The development of a national commitment to universal access to ECE for children in the year before full-time schooling began in 2006 when the Council of Australian Governments (COAG 2006) committed to improving early childhood development outcomes. Early childhood education programs that fall within the scope of this universal access commitment are defined as:

A program delivered in the year before full-time schooling in a diversity of settings, including long day care centre-based services, stand-alone preschools and preschools that are part of schools. The program is to provide structured, play-based early childhood education delivered in accordance with the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the *National Quality Standard* and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher. However, a key feature of ECE programs is that participation is not compulsory. (COAG 2006)

Accessibility

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2009a) reports data showing that at the time of the *National Partnership Agreement on ECE* (COAG 2008), which committed national and state and territory governments to ensuring that all young children have access to a quality ECE program by 2013 (15 h per week for 40 weeks per year), approximately 50% of children aged 3–5 years attended a preschool

Table 1.4 Hours per week for preschool programs

| Length of time per week | State or territory |
|-------------------------|--|
| 12 h 30 mins | New South Wales, Queensland |
| 12 h | Northern Territory |
| 11 h | Western Australia |
| 10 h 30 mins | South Australia, Australian National Territory |
| 10 h | Victoria, Tasmania |

Press and Hayes (2000), p. 76

program. These programs were provided by separate preschools or preschool programs within long day care programs. A further 30 % attended school depending on school-starting ages, while 20 % of children did not attend preschool at all. At this time, there were over three quarters of a million children in Australia, with around 395,000 attending 3-year- and 4-year-old preschool or preschool programs. These preschool programs, wherever they were accessed, prior to these reforms, were for a number of hours each week, which varied between states and territories (see Table 1.4).

The first national survey to measure attendance at preschool programs in both preschools and long day care settings was published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2009(a). Additional data (ABS 2009b) states that in June 2008, in children aged 3–6 years who did not attend school (552,000), 395,000 (72 %) “usually” attended a preschool or a preschool program in a long day care setting. This data collection also reported that 82 % of school children aged 4–8 years had attended a preschool program in the year before commencing school. In a further report (ABS 2011a), in children aged 4–5 years, who did not attend school (321,000), 85 % “usually” attended a preschool or a preschool program.

Current ABS data (2014) is limited to young children aged 4–5 years of age in the year before formal schooling begins (which varies in different states and territories – see Table 1.3). However, the Productivity Commission Issues Paper (Productivity Commission 2013, p.10) identified 41 % of 3–5-year-old children to be in some form of approved care. This Issues Paper notes that in 2012, 1.3 million children attended at least one childcare service or preschool program (comprising around 15,100 approved childcare services which may include preschool programs and 4300 separate preschools). However, preschool enrolments have increased in every state and territory in recent years. Nevertheless, it is still the case that not all children have access to a preschool program in the year prior to entering school:

New South Wales (59 %) has, by far amongst states and territories, the lowest proportion of preschool age children enrolled in a 15 hour per week preschool program with a qualified teacher. (Productivity Commission 2014c, p. 493)

This report continues, pointing out that Western Australia and Tasmania (the two states with preschools most integrated into schools) have the highest percentage (97 %) of preschool-age children enrolled in a 15 h per week preschool program with a qualified teacher.

In order for ECE services to be considered accessible, appropriate vacancies in ECE services should be available within a reasonable distance of the homes or workplaces of families, and the care and education should be at times that is needed.

However, many submissions made to the Productivity Commission's call for responses to their inquiry (see Productivity Commission 2014a) showed that around 35% (or nearly 250) of the personal comments that the Commission received highlighted problems with accessing ECE services. Problems reported by participants to the inquiry included:

- Long wait times to get ECE places
- Compromises being made in convenience or the type of preschool in order to have a place in any type at all
- Taking up/retaining a place simply because it is available, in order to have the flexibility to work as required in the future
- Altering work arrangements to fit in around what is available

The number of Australian families accessing preschool services for their children is large, and the enrollment rate in preschool programs is high – in 2013, over 90% of children of preschool age attended a preschool program in their year before formal school. This high attendance rate is underpinned by *Universal Access* to preschool delivered under the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education* (COAG 2006).

The Productivity Commission draft report (2014a) considers the access benefits of the *National Partnership* are greatest when preschool programs are supported regardless of their setting. For many families, a preschool program delivered by a LDC service represents the most suitable environment for children to undertake ECE. This might be when, for example, care is required outside of preschool hours or when siblings who are not yet of preschool age are being cared for in the same setting. Preschool hours, which are often sessional on a part-day basis for a few days a week, do not facilitate the workforce participation of families and problems accessing suitable care before and after preschool exacerbate this problem. In 2013, of the 8654 preschools in Australia, state and territory governments accounted for just over 21%, the nongovernment sector around 28%, and LDC settings with preschool programs for just over half (51%). However, Warren and Haisken-DeNew (2013, pp. 17–18) quoted by the Productivity Commission report (2014c, p. 506) found that:

children who did not attend any type of preschool program more commonly lived in low income and lone parent households, and children whose parents did not complete high school were less likely to attend preschool.

Indigenous children are also less likely to attend preschool programs. In the year before school in 2013 (SCRGSP 2015, p. 3.38), 66.7% attended in major cities, 73% in regional areas, and 85% in remote areas of the country, increasing by 10% from the previous year (SCRGSP 2014).

A comparison of the number of places in ECE services with usage reveals substantial variations in accessibility across different parts of Australia. When compared to the relevant population of children, not surprisingly, it is apparent that on a per child basis, fewer ECE services are available in rural, remote, and very remote

locations than urban centers. This has particular implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their children who typically do not do as well as other children when they enter formal schooling.

Affordability

The Productivity Commission report (2014c, p. 510) states that approximately 27 % of children who attend a preschool service (during 2013) paid no fees for the programs they attended, while 60 % paid a fee of less than US\$3 an hour, while others paid a small fixed amount voluntary parental contribution. However, given the complex mix of national and state and territory government involvement in early childhood education, levels of expenditure between and within different levels of government are difficult to report in any straightforward manner. Different preschool programs across the states and territories charge different fees and families that are invited to contact each setting directly for this information.

For nongovernment preschool programs, the national government's main financial input to early childhood services at this time is toward the costs through the *Child Care Benefit* (CCB) and the *Child Care Rebate* (CCR) schemes.

The Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate can be claimed by families to support their child's attendance at preschool, while some states and territories additionally contribute to preschool fees in a variety of ways.

Child Care Benefit (CCB)

For families to be eligible for the CCB, they need to meet an income test, use an approved or registered service, and satisfy work, study, or training requirements. The payment is paid either to the service or to the family and adjusted each year in line with the consumer price index. Families also need to meet requirements for immunization and residency. The current approved care rate is US\$3.33 per hour or US\$166.50 per week up to a maximum of 50 h per week (US\$832.50); this is the maximum rate payable (2013–2014) for families with income under US\$34,904 (information current as of January 2015) (Table 1.5).

Table 1.5 Income limits for CCB payments

| No. of children | Income limits before CCB reduces to US\$0 |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 | US\$121,500 |
| 2 | US\$125,860 |
| 3 or more | US\$142,122 plus US\$26,879 for each additional child |

Source: Department of Human Services (2015)

Child Care Rebate (CCR)

The CCR is not means tested and is currently based on 50% of a family's out-of-pocket expenses, up to a maximum of US\$6100 per year. This scheme commenced in the tax year 2005–2006 when 30% of out-of-pocket expenses could be claimed.

Additional Payments

Some states (e.g., Victoria and Queensland) make additional payments to families or waive preschool fees altogether. For instance, in Victoria, the *kindergarten fee subsidy* is available to families who qualify because of ill health, asylum-seeker status, or have multiple children in the same program. If a family qualifies for any of the specified reasons, they can attend preschool free for 10 h and 45 min each week. There is a further initiative in Victoria – *Early Start Kindergarten* – to support 3-year-olds to attend preschool free if they are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families or if the family has had contact with child protection services. Children who have accessed an *Early Start Kindergarten* 3-year-old program are also eligible for a free or low-cost 4-year-old preschool place in addition.

In Queensland, the *QKFS “Kindy” Support* program is also available for eligible families. The subsidy is provided directly to the approved program provider for families who have listed health conditions, are a foster family, are identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or have three or more children of the same age enrolled in the same year.

Phillips (2014) reports on the affordability of childcare in Australia, with many long day care settings including preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-old children. These settings can cost up to US\$138 a day (most expensive), and the average cost has increased by 150% in the last decade, jumping from US\$24.50 a day per child to US\$57.

Preschool Funding and Delivery Models

Model 1 Government Model According to Urbis (2010), the “Government Model” includes Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory. This is where the state government owns, funds, and delivers the majority of preschool services. Preschools are treated in much the same way as primary and secondary schools.

Model 2 Nongovernment Model The “Nongovernment Model” includes New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland and is where the state governments subsidize preschool programs that are provided by nongovernment organizations.