

RGC Reference HKU 37000217

**The Research Grants Council of Hong Kong
Prestigious Fellowship Scheme under the Humanities and Social Sciences Panel
Completion Report**

Part A: Project and Award Holder

1. Project Title

Assessing Early Childhood Development and Learning:
The First Step to Building Human Capital in One Belt One Road Countries

2. Award Holder and Academic Department/Unit Involved

Name/Post	Unit/Department/Institution	Contact Information
Nirmala Rao Professor	Faculty of Education	nrao@hku.hk

Part B: The Report

5. Workplan

5.1 Workplan as per original application

1. Review existing direct assessment and adult report tools to assess the development of children aged 3 to 5 years
2. Develop an Early Childhood Development Scale and a Parent Survey of Early Childhood Development.
3. Conduct pilot studies in the four countries, interview policy makers and ECE researchers and collect materials for the country case studies.
4. Prepare four country case studies and one integrated summary of results.
5. Organise workshop with consultants from the four countries to review findings.
6. Focus on dissemination through policy briefs, webinars and journal articles.

5.2 Revised workplan

N.A.

5.3 Realisation of the workplan

(maximum 2 pages; please state how and to what extent the work as stated in the workplan has been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

1. *Review existing direct assessment and adult report tools to assess the development of children aged 3 to 5 years*

Fully achieved

2. *Develop an Early Childhood Development Scale and a Parent Survey of Early Childhood Development.*

Exceeded objectives. An iPad Version of the Early Childhood Development Assessment Scale was developed

Photo of iPad Version



3. *Conduct pilot studies in the four countries*

Exceeded objectives

I had planned to assess 20, 3- to 5-year-olds in each country to develop a tool. However, the panel of RGC reviewers thought the sample size was too small to test out the scales. Hence, the pilot became a large study with 240 children in each country and I was able to validate the tool.

Interview policy makers and ECE researchers and collect materials for the country case studies

Policy makers and ECE researchers in all four countries were interviewed in each country.

4. *Prepare four country case studies and one integrated summary of results*

Fully achieved

5. *Organise workshop with consultants from the four countries to review findings*

Exceeded objectives

The workshop had 24 international participants and 14 local participants. In addition to county consultants (Capital Normal University, Yangon University of Education, University of Delhi, Institute of Child and Human Development), the following attended:

- Professors from East China Normal University, McGill University, Aga Khan University, University of Sheffield, and University of Dodoma
- The global head of Early Childhood Development for UNICEF (New York) and the Chief of the Section for Inclusive and Quality Education, UNESCO Regional Office, Bangkok
- Senior representatives WHO, World Bank, and OECD (on –line)
- Senior representatives from the Asia Pacific Regional for Early Childhood (ARNEC), Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association (PECERA) International, World Organisation of Early Childhood Education (OMEP – Hong Kong), and the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education attended the workshop.



Dissemination Workshop
Assessing Early Childhood Development and Learning (SDG Target 4.2)
 4 – 5 March 2019
 Meng Wah Complex Room 550
 Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

Agenda

Workshop Objectives

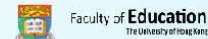
1. To review and discuss the results of the SDG 4.2.1 tool pilot administration and case studies.
2. To learn about priorities and future directions of leading organisations and academics in relation to SDG 4.2.1.
3. To develop a plan for next steps in terms of the further piloting, validation and finalisation of the SDG 4.2.1 tool as well as the dissemination of the research outputs.
4. To explore opportunities for collaboration among The University of Hong Kong, development partners, academia and pilot countries.

Day 1: Monday 4 March 2019		
09:00 – 09:10	Welcome remarks by Prof. A. Lin Goodwin, Dean, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong	
09:10 – 09:40	Introduction • Brief introduction of the project • Overview of the workshop agenda • Introduction of participants	Chair: Prof. Nirmala Rao
09:40 – 10:30	Introduction to the global SDG monitoring • Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the global SDG 4 monitoring mechanism • Monitoring of SDG Target 4.2 and other ECD-related targets • Q & A	Presenters: Ms Maki Hayashikawa, UNESCO Dr Pia Britto, UNICEF Moderator: Dr Mami Umayahara
10:30 – 11:00	Group photo and Break	
11:00 – 12:00	SDG 4.2.1 tool – introduction and results of pilot administration • Presentation of the tool construction and pilot results	Prof. Nirmala Rao Dr. Stephanie Chan Dr. Ben Richards Dr. Shuqi Yang
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	
13:00 – 14:00	SDG 4.2.1 tool – introduction and results of pilot administration • Pilot SDG 4.2.1 study in Tanzania • Q&A and discussion	Moderator: Prof. Nirmala Rao Presenter: Dr. Laurent Ndiaye
14:00 – 15:00	Country case studies • Presentations (Bangladesh and China) • Q & A	Bangladesh: Ms Mahmuda Akhter China: Dr Xu Xiaohui Moderator: Prof. Nirmala Rao
15:00 – 15:30	Break	
15:30 – 16:30	Country case studies (cont'd)	India:

Session 4	• Presentation (India and Myanmar) • Q & A	Prof. Namita Ranganathan Myanmar: Dr Aye Aye Myint Moderator: Prof. Nirmala Rao
End of Day 1		
17:30 – 19:00	Public Lecture • Dr Pia Britto • Prof. Frances E. Aboud • Prof. Zhou Jing • Dr Mugyeong Moon • Prof. Nirmala Rao	Chair: Prof. A. Lin Goodwin, Dean, Faculty of Education (Venue: Rayson Huang Theatre)
19:00 – 20:30	Welcome dinner for overseas participants hosted by Dean of the HKU Faculty of Education (HKU Senior Common Room)	

Day 2: Tuesday 5 March 2019		
09:00 – 09:10	Recap of Day 1 and overview of Day 2	
09:10 – 09:40	Discussion Panel 1 on next steps: pilot countries • Bangladesh • China • India • Myanmar	Moderator: Prof. Nirmala Rao
09:40 – 10:20	Discussion Panel 2 on next steps: Academia and research institutes • Prof. Frances E. Aboud • Prof. Zhou Jing • Dr Mugyeong Moon • Dr Ghazala Rafique	Moderator: Prof. Nirmala Rao
10:20 – 10:50	Break	
10:50 – 11:30	Discussion Panel 3 on next steps: NGOs • OMEP • PECERA • ARNEC	Moderator: Dr Mami Umayahara
11:30 – 14:00	Networking lunch (outside the HKU campus) Discussion Panel 4 on next steps: international development agencies • UNICEF • UNESCO • WHO (remotely) • The World Bank (remotely) • OECD (remotely)	Moderator: Dr Caroline Arnold
14:00 – 15:00	Session 5	
15:00 – 15:30	Conclusions and next steps	Prof. Nirmala Rao
16:00 – 21:00	Social programme and dinner for overseas participants	

Public Lecture



Developmentally on Track: Supporting our Youngest Learners

March 4, 2019 (Monday) | 5:30pm-7:00pm | Rayson Huang Theatre | HKU
 Chair: Professor A. Lin Goodwin Dean, Faculty of Education, HKU

Diverse fields of research have established the critical importance of early childhood – the period from birth to eight years – for an individual's subsequent development, learning, health and other life outcomes. World leaders gathered at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that include a specific education-related target for early childhood: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (SDG Target 4.2). This public lecture brings together renowned researchers and advocates for holistic development and learning of our youngest citizens. Their research, conducted in different regions of the world, elucidates the factors that affect young learners' developmental outcomes, has implications for supporting optimal development and learning and sheds light on the research-policy-practice nexus.



Dr Pia Britto

Chief and Senior Advisor, Early Childhood Development, UNICEF Headquarters, USA

Dr Pia Britto joined UNICEF in 2014 as Chief of Early Childhood Development, bringing with her many years of expertise in early childhood policy and programmes. Prior to joining UNICEF, she was an Assistant Professor at Yale University and is internationally renowned for her work on developing, implementing and evaluating early childhood programmes and policies across the world. Her research provides evidence for the role of governance and financing in the delivery of systems in early childhood, developing models for quality early childhood services, promoting women's economic empowerment, and the role of parents and caregivers. Dr Britto has been the recipient of various awards and grants; has published articles, books and reports; and made numerous presentations at both academic and non-academic conferences and seminars. She obtained her doctoral degree in Developmental Psychology from Columbia University.



Professor Frances E. Aboud

Professor Emerita, Department of Psychology, York University, Canada

Professor Aboud has been a full professor in the Department of Psychology at York University, Canada since 1993. Over the years, she has lived in Ethiopia as a member of the McGill-Shopia Community Health team. She has worked at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Bangladesh where she conducted research and supervised young investigators to implement, test and evaluate preschool and parenting programmes aimed at improving the health, growth and development of young children. From 2000, she has also conducted research on parenting and preschool education in Indonesia, India, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Ghana.



Dr Mugyeong Moon

Director, International Research and Cooperation Office, Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, Republic of Korea

Mugyeong Moon is Director of Office of International Research, Korea Institute of Child Care and Education in the Republic of Korea (KICC). Before working at KICC, Dr Moon was Head of the Early Childhood Education Division, Graduate School of Education, Aichi University in Japan. Dr Moon is the Vice Chair and the National coordinator (2007-2012 & 2016-2020) for the OECD ECE Network and is a Council member of PECERA (Public Early Childhood Education Research Association). Dr Moon has led and participated in numerous committees and Task Force teams for the Korean government policy development, including the national team on ECD and revision of the Kun curriculum. She earned her Ph.D. (1988) in Early Childhood Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S. and a B.A. in Education from Seoul National University in Korea.



Professor Zhou Jing

Professor, Preschool Education, Faculty of Education, East China Normal University, China

Jing Zhou is Professor and Director of the International Research Center on Child Development and Education in East China Normal University, Shanghai, China. She is the Executive Chairperson of OMEP China, a member of the National Steering Committee of Early Childhood Education Experts of the Ministry of Education and the Deputy Director of the Academic Committee of the China National Society of Early Childhood Education. She is also a Council member for UNICEF. Professor Zhou is internationally renowned expert in child language development and education in China. Her research areas also involve early childhood education policy and practical quality. She has published widely and has been involved in collaborative research projects with researchers from across the world. She received her B.A. from Nanjing Normal University, her M.A. from Connecticut College and her Ph.D. from the University of Hong Kong.



Professor Nirmala Rao

Serena H.C. Yang Professor in Early Childhood Development and Education, The University of Hong Kong
 Nirmala Rao is Serena H.C. Yang Professor in Early Childhood Development and Education, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong. A Developmental and Clinical (Educational) Psychologist by training, she has been recognised internationally for her research on early childhood development in Asian cultural contexts. Professor Rao has published widely, has participated in international meetings as an expert/consultant, and/or taken consultancies for UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, DFID, OECD and the Ewing-Koo Institute. She has also had significant administrative leadership roles at the Faculty of Education and as the Graduate Council of The University of Hong Kong.

~ All are welcome ~

Online registration: <http://webapps.edu.hku.hk/event/reg20190304.php>



6. *Dissemination plan*

6.1 Dissemination plan as per original application

- 1.** Dissemination of the work will occur primarily at the end of each of the proposed work packages but the planned **visits to the four countries will also provide an opportunity to share the measures.**
- 2.** The academic work will be submitted to **academic conferences**
- 3.** Five **journal articles** will be submitted to a selection of the following high impact journals.
- 4.** A **monograph** with the four country case studies and the integrative summary will also be submitted for publication.
- 5.** **Policy and evidence briefs** will be written to disseminate the information to policy-makers.
- 6.** A **DVD** will be made to train users of the Early Childhood Development Scale and Parent Survey of Early Childhood Development which will be available to researchers/research units in the four countries.
- 7.** During the last month of the fellowship, a **workshop** will be held in Hong Kong with one senior researcher from each of the countries and international early education specialists in academic institutions. Invitations will also be extended to UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and policy makers in the four countries. **Invitees will be key conduits of dissemination of findings.** The workshop will highlight the implications of the outputs from the Fellowship for researchers, policy-makers, and specialists in international development agencies and set the next stage for this ongoing programme of research.
- 8.** A **website** that contains the findings will be developed and linked to the websites of the Early Childhood Development and Education Research Team

6.2 Revised dissemination plan

N.A.

6.3 Realisation of the dissemination plan

(maximum 2 pages; please state how and to what extent the output as stated in the dissemination plan has been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

1. *The planned visits to the four countries will also provide an opportunity to share the measures.*

Exceeded objectives

Talks were given in each country at the end of the study. In addition, I was invited to give prestigious talks in Bangladesh, China and India because of the study and presented the fellowship work at a keynote address in Hong Kong.

- 1) **Rao, N.** (2019, November). *Promoting holistic early childhood development across sectors in diverse Asian countries: The critical role of research*. Presented at the National ECD Conference 2019 on Lending momentum to holistic early childhood development across sectors, November 6-7, 2019. Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- 2) **Rao, N.** (2019, March). *The quality of early learning environments and early child development: Observations from diverse Asian contexts*. Keynote address at the Conference on Home and School Influences on Early Learning: Cross Cultural Perspectives. March 28-29, 2019, University of Chicago Hong Kong Campus.
- 3) **Rao, N.** (2019, January). *Early Childhood Education and the way forward: South and South East Asia*. Keynote address at the International Conference on Human Development in a Globalizing World: Perspectives from South and South-East Asia, January 31–February 2, 2019, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara.
- 4) **Rao, N.** (2018, December). *Policy and quality: Observations from diverse Chinese contexts*. Keynote address at the International Conference on Preschool Education Quality (ICPEQ) 2018, December 13-14, 2018, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China.

2. *The academic work will be submitted to academic conferences*

Fully achieved

- 1) Chan, S.W.Y., Richards, B., & **Rao, N.** (2020, June). Unique contributions of executive function measures on early oral language and literacy development in Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar. Paper accepted for presentation at the 26th Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD), Rhodes, Greece. Conference postponed because of COVID-19.
- 2) **Rao, N.**, Yang, S., Richards, B., & Chan, S. (2019, August). *Are young children developmentally on-track in Learning, Psychosocial well-being and Health? Observations from China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and India*. Paper presented at the 4th Lancaster Conference on Infant and Early Child Development, Lancaster University, UK.
- 3) **Rao, N.**, Xu, X., & Richards, B. (2019). *Assessing whether young children are on-track in the areas of learning, health and psycho-social well-being*. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development Conference, Baltimore, USA.

- 4) Wang, R.K.Y., Su, X., Richards, B., & **Rao, N.** (2019). *Executive function development in urban and rural areas in China*. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development Conference, Baltimore, USA.

3. *Five journal articles will be submitted to high impact journals*

Objectives partially attained

Reason for underachievement is that UNICEF only finalised its cut-off scores for on-track development in March 2020 and we had to wait for them to submit the articles based on the tool. However, because the work led to some interesting findings I wrote a paper on challenges in Measurement of early childhood development.

- 1) **Rao, N.**, Mirpuri, S., Sincovich, A., & Brinkman, S.A. (2020). Overcoming challenges in measuring early childhood development across cultures. *The Lancet: Child and Adolescent Health*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30026-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30026-2)
- 2) **Rao, N.**, Chan, S., Richards, B., Su, Y., Cappa, C., De Castro, E., & Petrowski, N. (in review). Measuring being 'developmentally on track' in Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar: Supporting the monitoring of Early Childhood Development. *AERA Open*.
- 3) **Rao, N.**, Ranganathan, N., Kaur, R., & Mukhopadhyay, R. (in review). Fostering Inclusion and Quality in Preschool Education in India: Challenges and Opportunities. *International Journal of Child Care and Educational Policy*.
- 4) **Rao, N.**, Umayahara, M., Yang, Y., & Ranganathan, N. (completed). Ensuring Access, Equity and Quality in Early Childhood Education in Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar: Challenges for nations in a populous Economic Corridor. *International Journal of Educational Development*.
- 5) **Rao, N.**, & Su, Y. (in preparation). Urban-rural disparities in Early Childhood Development in China. *Early Education and Development*.

4. *A monograph with the four country case studies and the integrative summary will also be submitted for publication.*

Objectives partially attained

This has not been done but article 4 above contains an integrative summary of the case study results.

5. *Policy and evidence briefs will be written to disseminate the information to policy-makers.*

Objectives attained

The summary results have been given to all the country consultants who have disseminated them to in-country policy makers. Countries are very concerned about reporting progress on SDG Target 4.2 and there has been interest in the findings.

Workshop attendees were key conduits of dissemination of findings

6. *A DVD will be made to train users of the Early Childhood Development Scale and Parent Survey of Early Childhood Development*

Objectives attained

7. *A workshop will be held in Hong Kong*

Objectives attained (see page 4)

8. *A website that contains the findings will be developed and linked to the websites of the Early Childhood Development and Education Research Team*

Objectives attained

We have a website. However, we have not gone live. Our Faculty has been restructured and we have applied to change the name of our research team. We will put the work up by July 2020. <https://hkece.edu.hku.hk/>

7. **Other impact** (e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, knowledge transfer, etc.)

- We achieved more than we had planned with our tool and even developed an iPad version
- We used the tool in a national study in Bhutan.

Rao, N., Cohrssen, C., Chan, S., & Richards, B. (2020). *An Evaluation of the Early Childhood Care and Development Programme in Bhutan*. UNICEF:

Bhutan. https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/Final_Report_Evaluation_of_Early_Childhood_Care_and_Development_Programme_Bhutan.pdf

- Work supported by this Fellowship contributed to the following Indicators of Esteem and Awards

Indicators of Esteem

2019	Visiting Research Fellow, Families, Effective Learning and Literacy Group Department of Education, University of Oxford (June 2019)
2017 onward	UNICEF: Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.2 Technical Advisor on the Early Childhood Development Index UNESCO: Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) Task Force 4.2 WHO: Project Advisory Group for Global Scale of Early Development (birth – 3 years) WORLD BANK: Quality Early Learning Project

Recent awards

2019	Nehru Visiting Chair Professor, UGC - Center of Advanced Study in Human Development, MS University, Baroda, India (January 2019)
2018	Sino-British Fellowship Trust Visitorship 2018-19

The work done in the Fellowship may have helped secure another grant

HK Research Grants Council (GRF)	Are young children developmentally on track? Comparison between adult ratings and direct assessment in China and India	Awarded Jun-19
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