

Research Article



Unpacking Barriers and Enablers to Quality Early Childhood Education and Care in Lebanon: A Multi-level Perspective

تحليل العوائق والعوامل المُمكنة لضمان تعليم ورعاية عالية الجودة في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة في لبنان: منظور متعدد المستويات

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Abstract

This article investigates the barriers and enablers to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Lebanon's complex and multilingual context. In this qualitative study, 56 stakeholders—ministry representatives, NGOs, educators, parents, and healthcare professionals—were interviewed. The study reveals a fragmented governance structure and inequitable funding that impact the quality and equitable access to ECEC provision. Despite the value placed on ECEC and OL, systemic weaknesses, including inadequate staff compensation and donor-driven priorities, constrain progress. Findings also highlight grassroots resilience, with committed educators and NGOs adapting to meet local needs. Using Kagan's system-level framework and Torii *et al.*'s (2017) quality domains as a multilevel systems lens, this study offers practical policy recommendations to support coordinated, equitable ECEC in Lebanon.

الملخص

يتناول هذا المقال العوائق والعوامل المُمكنة لضمان توفير تعليم ورعاية عالية الجودة في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة في لبنان، في ظل واقع متشابك ومتعدد اللغات. وتعتمد الدراسة على تصميم بحث نوعي، حيث أُجريت مقابلات مع ٥٦ من الجهات المعنية، من بينهم ممثلو الوزارات ومنظمات المجتمع المدني والمرتبون وأولياء الأمور والعاملون في القطاع الصحي. تُظهر النتائج أنساق نظام إدارة القطاع بالتجزؤ وتمويل غير متكافئ، مما ينعكس سلبًا على جودة خدمات تعليم ورعاية الطفولة المبكرة وعلى عدالة الوصول إليها. وعلى الرغم من التقدير الواسع لأهمية هذا القطاع والتعمّم المبكر، فإن هناك تحديات بنيوية، من بينها ضعف أجور العاملين وخضوع الأولويات لتوجهات الجهات المانحة، وهو ما يحدّ من إمكانيات التقدّم.

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كما تسلط الدراسة الضوء على مرونة المبادرات المحلية، حيث يسعى مرتبون ملتزمون ومنظمات مجتمع مدني إلى التكيف مع الاحتياجات المحلية والاستجابة لها. وبالاستناد إلى إطار كاغان على مستوى النظام، وإلى مجالات الجودة التي حددها توري وآخرون (٢٠١٧) بوصفها منظورًا تحليليًا متعدد المستويات، تقدم هذه الدراسة توصيات سياساتية عملية تهدف إلى دعم نظام أكثر تنسيقًا وعدالة في مجال تعليم ورعاية الطفولة المبكرة في لبنان.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education and Care, Lebanon education policy, System-level reform, Multilingual education, Oral language development*

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم ورعاية الطفولة المبكرة، سياسات التعليم في لبنان، الإصلاح على مستوى النظام، التعليم متعدد اللغات، تنمية اللغة الشفوية

1. Introduction

Education is a human right, and access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4; United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Internationally, governments have been investing in ECEC, recognizing the evidence linking ECEC to positive outcomes in academic achievement, behavior, and social-emotional development (Balladares & Kankaraš, 2020; Von Suchodoletz et al., 2023). Here, ECEC refers to out-of-home provision for 0–4-year-olds delivered by formal or informal settings. ECEC benefits all children, especially the vulnerable (Ereky-Stevens et al., 2022; OECD, 2012b). However, provision alone is not sufficient: ECEC quality matters (Anís & Chlela, 2022).

Eadie *et al.* (2022) identify interconnected domains which capture the characteristics of ECEC quality: system, structure, and process. This paper explores barriers and enablers to all elements of quality, particularly process quality, which describes the characteristics most proximal to the child, including practitioner–child interactions. In process quality, OL is one of the main factors. While most children develop language skills at the expected rate, a significant minority do not (McKean et al., 2017), and those living with the greatest social disadvantage are most likely to have poor language development (Law et al., 2017).

This research was conducted as part of the X study, a UK–MENA university collaboration which focused on understanding how effective support for early Oral Language (OL) development could be implemented in Lebanon. In this study, we define OL as the ability to use and understand words, sentences, and grammatical markers to communicate verbally. To explore OL, we first needed to understand what all aspects of high-quality ECEC provision look like, and this is the focus of this paper.

Recent policy and research emphasize the crucial importance of language-enriching interactions in the foundational early years (Republic of Lebanon et al., 2024). Robust early language development underpins literacy, cognitive development, emotional regulation, learning, and social relationships. As

such, language-enriching interactions in ECEC are an essential element of quality. Supporting OL in the foundational early years is essential, but the required knowledge, services, and policy are sometimes lacking (Khattab et al., 2023). The interviews we describe here gather information about the context in Lebanon.

This article examines the challenges of providing high-quality ECEC in Lebanon. Lebanon has one of the highest ECEC attendance rates in the Arab countries (UNICEF, 2023); however, the country's political, economic, and humanitarian crises have intensified challenges in delivering high-quality, equitable ECEC (Assy et al., 2023). ECEC in Lebanon lacks strategic focus, is often a low priority for governments and NGOs, and has seen declines in ECEC attendance and providers. In 2023, with 3.8 million people needing humanitarian assistance, families often prioritized basic survival over early education (Assy et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Models of ECEC quality

There is no universal definition of ECEC quality. To enable the examination of quality ECEC, we drew on two recognized complementary frameworks: Torii *et al.* (2017) and Kagan (2019). Torii *et al.* (2017) expand on Eadie *et al.*'s (2022) interconnected domains to specify the details of multiple components that contribute to ECEC quality (see Figure 1).

- System quality: Governance, institutions, structures, and dynamics that shape decision-making, role allocation, priority setting, policy implementation, and funding.
- Structural quality: Staff working conditions, the learning environment, educator qualifications, learning frameworks, and educator–child ratios.
- Process quality: Educators' and children's daily experiences in ECEC settings.

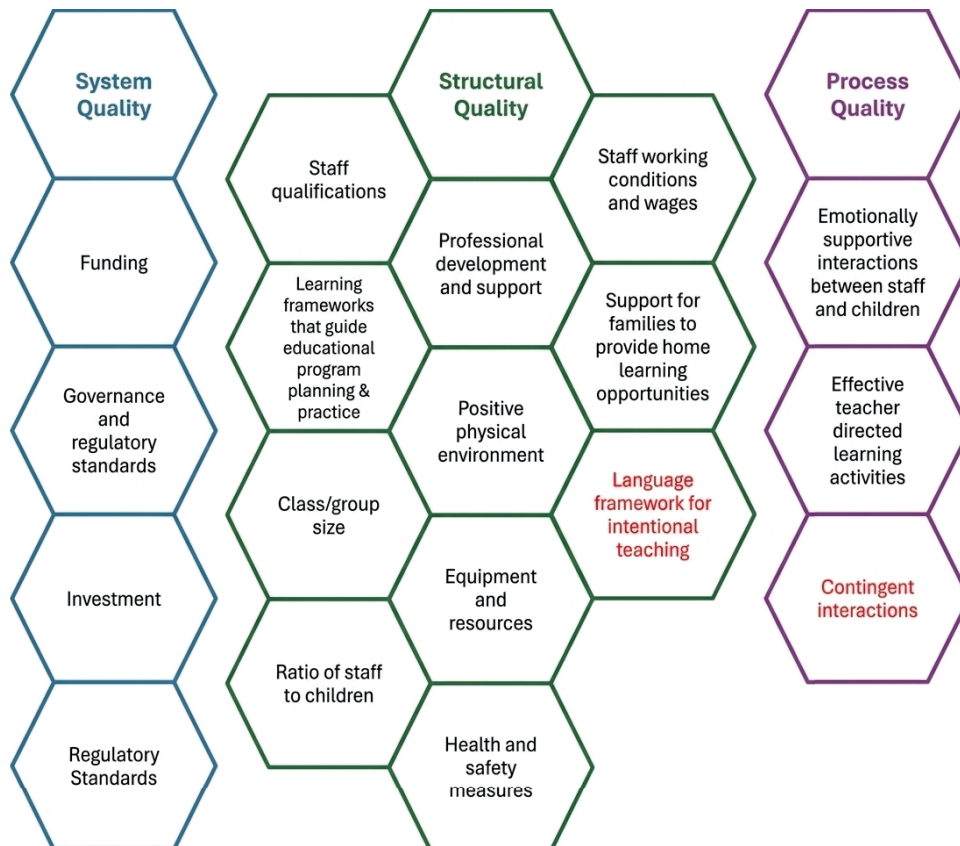
To evaluate OL provision in more detail, the team adapted the Torii framework by adding two new themes (shown in red on Figure 1):

- Language framework for intentional teaching: Strategies used for teaching OL.
- Contingent interactions: Educator–child interactions where educators' responses are directly influenced by the child's behavior.

Quality definitions depend on stakeholders' assumptions and context (Von Suchodoletz et al., 2023) and often reflect a Western, Anglo-American perspective (Dahlberg et al., 2013). Effective ECEC policy

Figure 1

Domains of quality adapted from Torii et al. (2017). Note. This figure is reproduced with permission from the Mitchell Institute, Victoria University. The figure has been minimally adapted through the addition of two hexagons indicating the focal areas of the current research; these additions are shown in red text, and all other elements remain as originally published.



must consider country-specific factors, including the political, financial, and technical feasibility of implementing quality (OECD, 2012a). In a series of groundbreaking international case studies of Early Years systems, Kagan suggests that capturing ECEC complexity requires a systems approach and engagement with all stakeholders (Kagan, 2018; Kagan & Roth, 2017). Kagan's (2019) reviews identify characteristics at multiple levels that enable a successful and effective ECEC system.

Kagan identifies the need for clearly delineated infrastructure and boundary-spanning mechanisms where shared values and goals link services across different ministries and sectors.

Elements of Torii *et al.*'s (2017) framework: System quality (governance, funding, and collaboration) and structural quality (staff working conditions, staff qualifications, professional development) can be seen as part of Kagan's infrastructure. These inputs can yield an effective ECEC system with high-quality, equitably distributed, and sustainable services, leading to responsive and appropriate mechanisms to support families and children. ECEC reviews must account for context, including two overarching contextual

domains. The Econo-political context, which focuses on how the system is governed and resourced, and the Sociocultural context, which focuses on the values and beliefs that shape a society.

Kagan's framework is useful for exploring who the key actors are in the complex Lebanese ECEC system, which includes two important sociocultural factors: multilingualism and the values and attitudes of key actors regarding the importance of ECEC and OL. It also helps to consider the temporal context, examining how our participants consider the crises that have affected Lebanon.

By incorporating Kagan's systems approach, we can examine how the different elements of Torii *et al.*'s (2017) entire model interact, allowing us to make recommendations for how quality can be improved.

2.2. ECEC in Lebanon

Lebanon's ECEC system has evolved within a complex historical and sociopolitical landscape shaped by waves of colonization, migration, and conflict, producing a uniquely multilingual society, where Arabic, French, and English coexist in the educational system alongside minority languages such as Armenian. Since independence in 1943, Lebanon's education system has emphasized bilingual and trilingual models (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999).

ECEC plays a key role in developing children's personal, cognitive, physical, emotional, and social abilities (Mehana, 2018). However, the ongoing crises severely impacted Lebanon's ECEC sector. The economic collapse beginning in 2019 reduced household income and public investment in social services. COVID-19 further disrupted education, forcing school and nursery closures, triggering an unequal shift to remote learning. Concurrently, the 2020 Beirut Port explosion caused infrastructural damage and psychological trauma. Lebanon also hosts one of the highest numbers of refugees per capita globally (European Commission, 2025), placing further pressure on an already stretched education system. As a result, Anís and Chlela (2022) report that 10% of the student population moved from the private to the public sector with the aim of reducing costs. The authors also suggest that ECEC receives less attention from government and school leaders than other stages of education and is considered only as part of the larger system.

At a system level, three ministries are responsible for ECEC governance:

- The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), which oversees public nurseries (2;06-4;11-year-olds): Nonprofit and free to families.
- The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), which oversees private nurseries (0-3-year-olds): Most require parental fees.

- The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), which oversees formal education, including kindergartens: KG1, KG2, and KG3 (3-5.11-year-olds), and nonformal education (NFE), in collaboration with INGOs (e.g., UNICEF). MEHE also develops standards, curriculum, teacher training, and policies with its affiliated Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD).

In response to national challenges, and to meet the needs of vulnerable children, stakeholders have implemented nonformal ECEC interventions. However, knowledge of who ECEC is serving is limited as the last national census was conducted in 1932, resulting in limited coordination among ministries, fragmented data governance, and challenges for long-term planning and inclusive policymaking.

At a structural level, there is a clear commitment to creating supportive learning frameworks and to universal bilingual education, as evidenced by CERD's development of a kindergarten curriculum in Arabic, French, and English (Mehana, 2018). However, in Anís and Chlela's (2022) review, they reported that 46% of preprimary public classroom environments were of inadequate quality before the crisis, describing ill-maintained classrooms, developmentally inappropriate learning environments, sparse professional development, and limited educator specialization.

At a process level, high-quality adult–child interactions are essential, particularly for fostering language development (Sabol et al., 2013); this is especially critical in Lebanon with vulnerable populations and multilingual dynamics. Lebanese is mainly used for children's everyday communication, while in preschool, they study at least one foreign language (English or French) and Modern Standard Arabic. This linguistic richness is an asset for many, but brings challenges to supporting children from differing language backgrounds (Hreich et al., 2020, 2022).

2.3. Equity

Equitable access to education was considered at all stages of the research. The number of refugees in Lebanon and the numerous crises the country has faced in recent years have put pressure on the education system at all levels. Investment in ECEC is one way to address the resulting inequalities (Republic of Lebanon, Ministry of Public Health & UNICEF, 2024). Efforts were made to ensure participants represented those providing services to vulnerable communities and reflected diversity across the whole of Lebanon.

2.4. Barriers and enablers to high-quality ECEC in Lebanon

High-quality ECEC can improve children's outcomes (academic, social-emotional, etc.) and narrow the gap between disadvantaged and more advantaged peers, particularly where OL is prioritized (Shonkoff

& Phillips, 2000). Many stakeholders in Lebanon aim to provide quality ECEC, but the complex historical and geopolitical context makes it challenging. We aimed to identify the key barriers and enablers for high-quality, OL-promoting ECEC in Lebanon to inform developments at system, structural, and process levels.

3. Methodology

We conducted a qualitative case study on ECEC in Lebanon with equity and multilingualism as central themes. Stakeholders were interviewed between December 2022 and June 2023.

3.1. Participants

Participants were involved in ECEC governance and provision at all levels of policy, provision, and practice. They included educators, healthcare professionals (Speech and Language Therapists [SLTs] and pediatricians), and parents in Lebanon. Using purposive and snowball sampling, we recruited a diverse group across public and private sectors, geographical regions, and institutional types. The 33 interviews/focus groups included 56 participants from 28 organizations (Table 1).

3.2. Ethical approach

Ethical approval was obtained from Newcastle university. Informed consent was given after participants reviewed information sheets and had their questions addressed. Interviews were securely recorded, transcribed, and then deleted, with no personal identifiers retained.

3.3. Researchers and epistemic stance

The team included four Lebanon-based researchers with backgrounds in Education and SLT (RB, NH, CM, EK), fluent in Arabic, French, and English; and UK-based researchers with expertise in education (CJ), SLT (CMk), Linguistics (GK, who has a Lebanese heritage and is fluent in Arabic, French, and English), and developmental psychology (CF, AT). Weekly meetings supported reflexivity throughout the study.

We adopted a combined constructivist–pragmatic epistemology (McKean & Reilly, 2023). From the constructivist view, we recognize that participants construct knowledge through personal experiences, culture, and social interactions. From the pragmatic perspective, we focused on generating practical, real-world solutions to improve outcomes for children. Combining these approaches enabled us to explore the

Table 1*Participating stakeholders.*

	Participants	Interviews	Regions
Ministries	8 (senior leaders M1, M2, M3, M7; civil servants, M4, M5, M6)*	6 interviews & 1 focus group	Beirut
Higher education institutions	6 (senior leaders H1, H2, H3; focus group: H4 including teachers, management, and a senior leader)	3 interviews & 1 focus group	Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Keserwan
Policy center	1 (researcher PC1)	1 interview	Beirut
Nongovernmental organizations	8 (senior leaders and program managers NGO1, NGO2, NGO3, NGO4, NGO5, NGO6)	4 interviews & 2 focus groups	Beirut, Bekaa
Schools	19 (focus groups including teachers, ECEC leaders, and management S1, S2, S3, S4; ECEC leader S5)	1 interview & 4 focus groups	Beirut, South, North, Bekaa
Nurseries	7 (focus groups including teachers, senior leaders, and management N1, N2; ECEC leader N3, N4)	2 interviews & 2 focus groups	South, Beirut
Healthcare professional	5 (speech and language therapists SLT1, SLT2, and pediatricians PE1, PE2)	3 interviews & 1 focus group	Beirut, Mount Lebanon
Parents	2 parents PR1, PR2	2 interviews	Beirut
Total	56 participants	22 interviews & 11 focus groups	

*One of the ministry officials (M1) preferred not to be recorded, but gave consent for the interviewers to take notes.

experiences of Lebanese ECEC stakeholders and develop evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

3.4. Data collection

We conducted 22 semi-structured interviews and 11 focus groups (~60 minutes each) in person and via Zoom. The topic guide explored governance, service delivery, OL development and use in ECEC, equity, and multilingualism. Semi-structured interviews allowed questions to be tailored to participants' roles and promoted consistency and conversational flexibility across interviews (Kumar, 2011).

Interview schedules were developed by the research team and refined iteratively through piloting and revision. Consistent with a qualitative, semi-structured approach, the schedules functioned as topic guides rather than fixed instruments, and prompts were adapted across stakeholder groups and interview contexts. While all interviews shared core domains, the wording and emphasis of questions varied according to participants' institutional positioning and responsibilities. Two examples, the school interview schedule and the ministries interview schedule, can be found in Appendix A.

3.5. Data analysis

Interviews were conducted in Lebanese Arabic dialect, English, or French according to participant preference. Interviews were professionally transcribed and translated into English, then reviewed (NH and RB), ensuring nuance and technical accuracy. English and Arabic transcripts were viewed side by side to enable cross-checking. Ambiguities were discussed and resolved.

Deductive and inductive thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided first deductively by Torii *et al.*'s (2017) quality framework. The analysis was further informed by Kagan's (2019) systems framework, which was used to support the organization and interpretation of themes across all levels of the ECEC system. This integrative approach enabled the analysis to move beyond discrete thematic descriptions toward an understanding of how barriers and enablers of OL development were interconnected across levels of the system.

Two transcripts were coded collaboratively in NVIVO before NH and RB continued coding independently using a refined codebook. Data were exported to Excel, categorized, and consolidated into broader themes. Visual maps supported theme development, which were reviewed and revised iteratively by the wider team. Translated verbatim quotes were used for analysis, except for participant M1, where notes were made by the interviewer.

3.6. Ensuring trustworthiness

We ensured trustworthiness of the research using Guba and Lincoln's (1994) four criteria:

- **Dependability:** Collaborative analysis, clear documentation, standardized protocols, and NVIVO-assisted coding.
- **Credibility:** Triangulation and detailed descriptions.
- **Confirmability:** Multiple data sources and diverse participants.
- **Transferability:** Purposive sampling and reporting rich contextual detail.

4. Results

Findings identify barriers and enablers to delivering language-promoting, high-quality ECEC, organized by Torii *et al.*'s (2017) System, Structure, and Process Quality framework.

4.1. System quality: Governance

Interviewees described Lebanon's ECEC governance as fragmented and complex, with three ministries, MEHE, MOSA, and MoPH, holding overlapping responsibilities. The absence of a unified coordination body and the powerful presence of the private sector lead to gaps in access, planning, and quality: "We don't have one coordination body that talks about early childhood education" (PC1).

[The] current ECEC structure does not make sense, suggesting that two ministries regulating 0–3-year ECEC is inappropriate and there is no continuity in governance between 0–3 and starting pre-school. They described the provision as scattered between the 3 ministries stating that there is no real coordination. (M1)

Although boundary-spanning mechanisms like the High Council of Childhood aim to centralize work between key stakeholders and governing bodies, participants questioned its effectiveness, noting that: "it targets different ministries to tackle everything related to children...but certainly, it's not working functionally." (PC1).

The fragmentation is further complicated by the public and private provision and geographic disparities, creating inequalities in access. While most nurseries are private and urban-based, families with young children (0–3) in rural areas rely on under-resourced public or semiprivate settings: "Between private and public nurseries, there's a big gap in the type of services, delivery, the financial means available." (PC1).

Ministry leaders mentioned that overall public investment remains insufficient to meet demand equitably: "In Lebanon, the private is better than the public, and this is the policy adopted by the state... the private sector at the expense of the public sector." (M6). The public sector seems to be particularly sensitive to national crises, such as COVID-19 and ongoing strikes: "During COVID, the [enrolment in public schools] decreased to 43%." (M4).

4.1.1. Uneven expansion and access

Public nurseries, managed by MOSA, are limited in number and geographic coverage. Decisions regarding their expansion are centrally planned, whereas private KGs and nurseries expand based on market demand and are mostly urban-based. This geographical inequity forces families in outlying areas to travel long distances to access essential support, amplifying existing disparities: "Nurseries are very important and necessary, but what's the problem? Where are the nurseries located? In cities." (M5).

In contrast, public kindergarten classes under MEHE are more evenly distributed across Lebanon: "We have around 870–875 schools that have a kindergarten." (M4).

Nonformal KG services, largely provided by NGOs in coordination with MEHE, aim to support the most vulnerable. Since the Syrian crisis, NFE programs mainly served refugees; now they are more inclusive, targeting vulnerability rather than nationality:

We are telling our partners now when you implement your program in education you go for vulnerability you don't go for nationality, so you go to an area, you assess all the children who are in the ECEC age of 5 regardless of their nationality, and that is a completely new approach and it will be the first time ever to implement in Lebanon. (NGO5)

4.1.2. Fragmented data systems and monitoring

Data governance in Lebanon's ECEC sector suffers from fragmentation, limited coordination among ministries and stakeholders, limited sharing, and dissemination. There is no unified early years population census: "Unfortunately, there isn't one [census] right now. UNICEF gives you more of an approximation..." (PC1). Data on nursery enrolment and student learning outcomes are outdated or missing: "We don't have an accurate number [of children enrolled in private nurseries] ... the last inspection was more than two years ago." (M3).

Despite these gaps, NGOs and ministries collaborate on external evaluations and data-sharing for KG and beyond:

We [did] an external evaluation for the face-to-face implementation and the distance learning implementation ... We don't want to create a parallel system, all generated data, the information that we gather, we automatically share it with MEHE. Whether they are recommendations or data or resource. (NGO2)

Monitoring and evaluation of ECEC in Lebanon is progressing through national efforts such as the development of nursery standards by MoPH and MOSA (developed in 2022, published in 2025), and the public kindergarten evaluation under MEHE's Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) initiative (2017–2021). These initiatives mark a shift toward structured quality assurance: "We set the required standards and divided them into levels. Now, we're [assessing] nurseries [all over] Lebanon... to come up with data and see at which level the nursery stands." (NGO1).

Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven due to fragmented governance, limited institutional capacity, and reliance on external evaluators, especially within MoPH and NGOs:

With MoPH... what we did is that we recruited assessors and we trained them as IRC (International Rescue Committee), and they are providing this service to the MoPH. With MOSA,

it's going to be their social workers at the Ministry, so, we're going to train the social workers. Because at the MoPH they don't have anyone to support, so we had to train assessors. (NGO1)

While MEHE and MOSA utilize internal monitoring teams, challenges persist in consistency, supervision, and data use. Interviewees call for clearer evaluation frameworks, better resourcing, and sustained professional development:

Half of the team has retired and there is no one else, there is no replacement... one visit is not enough for the schools, it is not enough for us to go during the year, barely following up on the situation... we are really trying, we are really fighting not to stop. (M5)

4.1.3. Community-based enablers

Despite systemic gaps, local organizations have built strong trust-based relationships with families, especially in rural areas, enhancing outreach and participation: “the mother doesn't come alone, she comes with her sister, her mother-in-law, her neighbor... We know the families of all the children who are enrolled ... we reach many parents.” (NGO3).

The widespread presence of public schools in nearly every village and a national curriculum also supports access, though implementation varies by school capacity, resources, and leadership commitment.

4.2. System quality: Funding

Sustainable and equitable funding is foundational to delivering quality ECEC, yet Lebanon's current financial landscape highlights persistent systemic barriers. Lebanon's education sector depends on overseas funding. For example, the education of Palestinian refugees is entirely funded by UNRWA, broader education systems are funded by UNICEF, IRC, and World Bank, and informal ECEC in refugee and more disadvantaged communities are funded and provided by international (e.g., UNICEF), national, and local NGOs.

4.2.1. A declining and unpredictable funding supply

In the context of early education in Lebanon, the funding landscape involves various stakeholders, such as the government and external donors, who are playing pivotal roles. Thus, it is worth highlighting that the government is not the main budget allocator for educational projects; rather, ministries receive

funding from several, mainly international, donors such as the World Bank and UNICEF, as highlighted by participants.

Most of the funds in MEHE are from [the] World Bank and UNICEF. (M1)

One of the most pressing challenges is the steady decline in funding, as the country receives decreasing attention from global donors amidst crises like COVID-19, the war, and natural disasters: “Lebanon is not a priority anymore, you have a lot of crises.” (NGO4). This decline in prioritization has contributed to budget shortfalls that affect government support for public nurseries, professional development, and core services. Many ECEC initiatives, including core services, are consequently increasingly dependent on external funding.

A second significant barrier lies in donor-defined priorities and limitations. While donor funding has kept many services afloat, it is often tied to rigid agendas or short-term goals which, according to stakeholders, may not always align with Lebanon’s long-term education sector needs. Projects may be reduced in scope or discontinued entirely due to shifting donor priorities, underscoring the unsustainability of relying solely on external resources: “When the project ends, the funding stops, and everything else stops as well.” (M6).

Furthermore, donor portfolios sometimes overlook the specific contextual needs of Lebanese communities, resulting in fragmented programming and missed opportunities for meaningful impact: “We still depend on external donors to come and invest in projects and programs. The challenge is also on donors’ levels that usually have their own portfolio that is a bit far from the need of the Lebanese context.” (NGO2). These funding dynamics can create tensions between donor expectations and community needs.

From one of the main donors’ perspectives, they give priority funding to the schooling mandated by the government, and in the case of Lebanon, mandatory education starts at grade 1. The challenges this donor mentions are mainly related to transparency and data dissemination from government parties that impact the tracking process. Hence, they mentioned the development of systems to facilitate transparency and information accessibility for donors.

4.2.2. Public and private sectors

Another major barrier lies in the quality and financial disparities between public and private ECEC services. Private institutions are often perceived as high-quality but are expensive for many families, while public services, though more accessible, are viewed as substandard: “Some [parents] can’t afford to enroll their children. Services have a price.” (M3).

This divide can reinforce socioeconomic inequalities, with wealthier families securing better opportunities, while economically disadvantaged families struggle to access even basic early education: “Why is it that if I go to the private sector, I am provided with a luxurious and expensive service, and if I go to the public sector, I am provided with a somewhat below-average service?” (M6). The situation is further overburdened by the sector’s dependence on external donors and the state’s limited financial and human resources, challenges that became more acute during Lebanon’s ongoing crises.

Yet even in this constrained environment, some enablers reflect the sector’s resilience and adaptability. Educators and NGOs employ cost-saving strategies, such as reusable materials and low-cost innovations, to stretch limited resources while preserving learning quality, reflecting their commitment to easing families’ financial burdens: “We laminate books, they use markers, so we can easily erase everything... to avoid costly color printing and papers.” (NGO6). Such resourcefulness reflects the dedication of those working in the field, who continue to navigate complex funding realities while centering the needs of children and families.

4.3. Structural quality: Staff working conditions

A discussion of staff wages and working conditions highlighted the profound challenges faced by educators in Lebanon, exacerbated by the financial crisis and inflation. Inadequate compensation and payment delays have led to declining morale, recruitment, and retention challenges. Educators, especially in the public sector, report being unable to cover basic costs, including transportation to work. One public nursery teacher noted: “We are not getting our salaries, and we are still paid on the 1500 LBP/\$ rate, how can we come every day?” (N1).

This financial strain directly significantly affects educators’ mental health and contributes to a strong sense of professional undervaluation and hence impact their professional performance: “Teaching is no longer a credible job.” (H1); “The employee cannot give his best when he comes to work depressed, and when I borrow money to come, how can I hold a class with a low morale?” (N1).

Fresh graduates are increasingly discouraged from entering the profession due to the gap between educational investment and compensation, which contributes to an aging workforce: “I’m studying for three or four years, I’m not going to accept such salary, my college tuition would’ve cost me 10 times more.” (H4).

Inequities within the sector are stark. Nursery and contractual teachers are particularly underpaid: “The nursery teacher has a very important role, but she is the least remunerated. She is given the minimum wage.” (H2). Public university teachers who teach students also face delayed and inconsistent payments: “I worked in 2012 and I kept asking myself, when will I get paid? 4 years later...” (H2).

These systemic issues also impede professional development, with training participation affected by financial and logistical constraints: “But we can no longer bring the team to Beirut from Hermel, the Beqaa, and the North [for training]... their salary has become so meagre.” (M5). Even remote modalities are challenging due to digital access gaps: “In Akkar, the South or the Bekaa, there are teachers who did not even have a WhatsApp account, how would they have an e-mail account to work when there is no internet?” (M5).

Low pay, inadequate compensation, and payment delays have led to declining morale, recruitment struggles, and retention challenges. Hence, the compounded issues undermine the teaching profession’s value, negatively impact the quality of education, and hinder the ability to attract and train qualified staff, threatening the sector’s sustainability and alignment with evolving educational needs.

Despite these hardships, many staff continue their work with remarkable commitment to children’s learning and well-being: “Teaching requires a conscience...You can’t work for what you’re getting paid. No way.” (S1). This motivation and resilience among educators form an important foundation for recovery and reform.

4.4. Structural quality: Value of ECEC and OL

One of the most significant barriers facing ECEC is its limited visibility in education policies and donor agendas. Major donors often focus on children aged six and above, leaving the 0–5 age group overlooked, despite being foundational: “They’re all working, the programs start from the age of 6... [0–5] group is marginalized, and it’s the essential one, it’s the base.” (M4). Even when donor programs target younger children (0–2 years), support is framed through health and nutrition rather than child development, limiting efforts to promote holistic early learning: “There are programs for children 0–2 providing supplementary food, ... and vaccinations.” (NGO4).

4.4.1. Cultural and structural de-prioritization

This limited focus extends to parental priorities and school structures. In rural areas, financial constraints or cultural norms lead families to rely on grandparental care instead of nurseries: “In the villages, the child is sent to the grandparents, the nursery is not very active...” (N1). In schools serving multiple age groups, kindergarten is often deprioritized in favor of elementary grades and standardized tests: “[Principal] gave little importance to kindergarten and focused more on the elementary sections.... However, when the school is specifically a kindergarten school... any principal would care about it.” (S1).

Even when ECEC is offered, some principals hold narrow views on pedagogy, equating success with early writing rather than play-based learning or OL development. Higher education professionals critique this “schoolification” trend: “There are many schools in Lebanon that compete in writing skills in kindergarten, but logically, kindergarten is... where children’s oral skills are developed.” (H4).

4.4.2. Gaps in policy and parental awareness

At the policy level, OL is not explicitly promoted in national early childhood frameworks: “As for the policy and curriculum, we don’t promote oral language directly.” (M3). Gaps in parental understanding further limit OL development, with some parents unaware of their role in fostering language-rich interactions: “[Parents] don’t place importance on education or oral communication, they don’t play their role correctly because they don’t know what their role is.” (NGO3).

4.4.3. Recognition of OL as foundational

Despite these barriers, there was a broad agreement among our participants that OL are critical for children’s holistic development, supporting social-emotional growth, cognitive and motor skills, and school readiness. This belief in early learning’s significance is reflected in some institutional discourse: “The slogan of our school is ‘early childhood is fundamental.’” (S1).

Participants also highlight OL as more than a developmental milestone; it is a vital human need for communication, learning, and social belonging in Lebanon’s multilingual society. “[OL] is my first milestone... I start asking about it in my clinic from 3 months... For me, language is about communication and the child’s relationship with their environment... We need to address it early.” (PE2). However, the level of awareness varied from deep understanding to limited clarity on how to effectively foster OL in practice (as explored in the following sections).

4.5. Structural quality: Learning framework

4.5.1. Thematic and teacher-directed approaches

Across both public and private nurseries in Lebanon, thematic learning is a dominant practice, structured around topics (e.g., seasons, nutrition, vehicles). While potentially effective, there were very few mentions of the child-centered pedagogies that would be required to yield benefits for OL. Furthermore, interventions for promoting OL were not described. A teacher-directed approach to planning was reported

as highly prevalent, limiting child agency and discovery-based learning. In private nurseries, leaders often control the curriculum and daily routines, leaving little room for teacher autonomy: “I define precise objectives... every single detail is on the sheet.” (N4). This top–down model may reflect limited trust in teacher preparation and a preference for efficiency over responsiveness to children’s interests.

4.5.2. Public–private inequities

Pedagogical concerns are further compounded by inequities in access and quality between public and private nurseries. Public nurseries, governed by MOSA, suffer from resource scarcity, lack of standard curriculum, and inconsistent planning: “They don’t have a curriculum in public nurseries.” (PC1). Educators often rely on personal initiative or adapt content from unsuitable sources, such as KG curricula: “Yes, it’s the CERD KG curriculum, it’s not suitable for 2-year-olds... MOSA should have something of their own.” (M4).

In contrast, private nurseries adapt models like Montessori or Reggio Emilia to their context, enabled by their greater autonomy, flexibility, and resources, though the approaches are not always applied consistently: “[Private nurseries] that are well-resourced, are traveling to learn about the Reggio Emilia approach, and they’re trying to make their own programs.” (M3). However, access to comprehensive, culturally adapted curricula remains limited across both sectors: “Even if you’re a private nursery, you’re not spoiled for choice. You must look for a needle in a haystack, to finally find that those [programs] that are up to the level and nurseries are trying to make their own programs.” (M3).

To address these gaps, new initiatives funded by IRC, in collaboration with MoPH and MOSA, have introduced nursery standards that apply across both sectors.

4.5.3. Kindergarten curriculum gaps

In kindergarten, the preschool curriculum was last updated in 2002 and it is built around projects that many teachers still find it difficult to implement due to unclear guidance and limited resources: “When they changed the projects, it was very hard for us... for KG1 and KG2... they needed the help of supervisors.” (S1). The preschool landscape uses a mix of curricula: public schools follow a project-based model, private schools adopt unit-based or book-guided programs, and NFE centers apply skill-based content. For example, a private school mentioned that: “We used to only depend on the international standards, but it turned out that we have students who sit for [official exams]...So, we established committees and we did the mapping.” (S3).

4.5.4. Workforce specialization

A cross-cutting challenge is the low specialization of the ECEC workforce, with many teachers lacking ECEC teaching qualifications, affecting instructional quality: "...not all teachers have the required specialty." (S1).

4.6. Process quality: Oral language (OL) awareness vs practice

As described in the *Value of ECEC and OL* section, interviewees acknowledged the central role of OL in ECEC. Some described OL as embedded in routines: "A child needs to express themselves, to play, to have fun, way before they learn how to write." (H1). "Language is incorporated in every activity, in everything." (M4). "OL has become a daily habit. We talk about the environment, about the seasons, the months." (S1).

Despite this awareness, several respondents noted a lack of intentional, structured focus on OL, especially for ages 0–3. Practices were often informal and lacked a strategic framework: "Regarding OL, we discovered, on the field, that we have a lot of problems in the 0–3 curriculum." (M3). As discussed in the *Learning Framework* section, the dominance of teacher-led approaches also constrains opportunities for spontaneous language use and communication.

This reflects a broader tension: while most stakeholders value OL and holistic development in principle, current structures and practices appear to fall short of these goals.

4.6.1. Promising initiatives

New efforts are underway to bridge these gaps. MoPH, in collaboration with IRC, is developing a play-based early education program tailored to the local context. It emphasizes OL development through interactive learning: "We are focusing on oral language... the approach is more play-based." (M2).

4.6.2. Multilingualism: Asset and challenge

Lebanon's multilingualism was viewed by many as a rich cultural asset. However, interviewees highlighted the challenge of delivering multilingual education in a manner that supports children from diverse backgrounds. Many prefer children to have a strong foundation in Arabic before learning other languages, but this is not always reflected in parental practice or in how children are taught. "We're begging them [parents] to speak Arabic to the children at least until they're three years old... But they speak mostly French, English and God knows what." (M3).

Others critique rigid classroom language policies that prohibit the use of Lebanese Arabic, even in Arabic or English instruction: “It’s not allowed to use the Lebanese home language in Arabic and English language classes... But honestly... we’d rather it’s done another way.” (S2).

Furthermore, language lessons often prioritize vocabulary memorization, reading, and writing, starting as early as KG1, at the expense of foundational communication skills. The result is a schoolified, literacy-heavy model misaligned with best practices for OL development.

We have detailed in the *Results* section strengths and weaknesses, and barriers and enablers to quality ECEC systems. Table 2 summarizes the views of the stakeholders on those barriers and enablers at the time of data collection. Salient cross-cutting enablers across the systems are the determination, commitment, deep knowledge, and resilience of the individuals working in the ECEC systems in Lebanon, at all levels.

5. Discussion

This study explored the barriers and enablers to ECEC in Lebanon, focusing on policy, service delivery, and the intentionality of OL support. Findings reveal system and structural challenges alongside promising developments and sources of resilience. This discussion draws on existing literature and Kagan’s framework to situate the Lebanese case within broader conversations on best practice in ECEC systems. The consideration of Kagan’s framework offered a vision for transforming Lebanon’s fragmented ECEC system into a cohesive, resilient, and equitable system. While signs of alignment with international best practice (functional consolidation, curricular reforms, local adaptations [Kagan, 2018]) are emerging, gaps remain across funding, governance, data, and workforce support. Lebanon’s multilingual and crisis-affected context offers a unique contribution to international discourse highlighting the constraints of econo-political instability, such as the financial crisis, donor dependency, and weak national investment in ECEC.

5.1. Influence on an econo-political level

Political leadership in high-performing ECEC systems recognize ECEC as a critical investment and align efforts with global goals (SDGs). They demonstrate durable commitment and coherent national vision (Kagan, 2019). Despite Lebanese stakeholders recognizing the role of ECEC in developing children’s personal, cognitive, physical, emotional, and social abilities, Lebanon’s leadership has not prioritized ECEC at a policy and funding level. Despite some international agencies placing ECEC on their agendas, domestic political will remains low. This denotes a major “knowing doing” gap, that is expressed by the

Table 2

Summary of stakeholders' views about barriers and enablers.

Dimension	Barriers	Enablers
System quality (governance, funding, access, data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented governance across multiple ministries. • There is no currently unified coordination body. • Mandates sometimes overlap with weak boundary-spanning mechanisms. • Public–private divide and geographic inequities. • Significant reliance on donors; declining and unpredictable funding. • No unified early-years census; enrolment and learning data require updating. • Monitoring capacity is still developing with reliance on external evaluators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing boundary-spanning mechanisms (though limited effectiveness). • Public kindergartens are more evenly distributed across regions. • NGO partnerships and community-based enablers for vulnerable children. • Development of nursery standards and education development plans (RACE) • External collaboration for evaluation data dissemination • Adaptability and resilience of staff in creating low-cost resources.
Structural quality (workforce, curriculum, value of ECEC & OL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low/modest wages and delayed payments affecting morale and retention. • Early career graduates may feel discouraged; the workforce is progressively aging. • Limited professional development and digital access gaps. • Teacher-directed approaches remain common; child-centered pedagogy is not yet widespread. • Public nurseries operate without a standardized curriculum; the KG curriculum requires updating. • ECEC is not a priority in funding-policies and parental beliefs. • OL not promoted in policy; parents unaware of role. • Workforce has limited access to ECEC specialization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong educator commitment despite hardships. • Private nurseries adopt innovative approaches (inconsistently). • New nursery standards introduced. • Broad recognition of ECEC and OL as foundational.
Process quality (pedagogy & OL practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OL valued but not systematically integrated. • Informal practices dominate, especially for 0–3. • Teacher-led routines limit spontaneous language. • Lack of strategic framework for OL. • Multilingualism challenges and rigid language policies. • Strong emphasis on literacy readiness may not always align with best practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging play-based OL programs. • Recognition of multilingualism as cultural asset. • Efforts to promote foundational language before others.

presence of a core tension between the acknowledgement of the importance of ECEC and the promotion of robust OL practices that sharply contrasts with a translation of this awareness into deliberate practice.

5.2. Infrastructural gaps: Coordination

Kagan distinguished between structural consolidation, where services are unified under one ministry or agency, and functional consolidation, which involves aligning policies and services across existing sectors. The governance of ECEC in Lebanon is characterized by fragmentation and limited coordination across MOSA, MEHE, and MoPH leading to discontinuities in provision across age groups (0–3 and 3–5), geographic disparities, and a lack of shared data systems. These issues mirror global concerns about fragmented governance and its impact on quality and equity in ECEC systems (Kagan, 2019; OECD, 2012a). Emerging efforts toward functional alignment, for example, KG curriculum reform and the development of national nursery standards, suggest emerging momentum toward unified standards and more coherent governance. However, bodies like the Higher Council for Childhood lack enforcement capacity, reflecting the need for more durable structural solutions.

5.3. Workforce conditions: Commitment and capacity

Effective ECEC systems require well-compensated, well-trained, and professionally recognized ECEC staff (Eadie et al., 2022; Kagan, 2019; Torii et al., 2017). Lebanon's ECEC workforce faces low pay, limited training opportunities, and a lack of career progression. Despite these barriers, educators showed strong commitment and intrinsic motivation. Participants expressed strong affective bonds with their work and a desire to improve children's outcomes. This mismatch between professionals' beliefs and systemic barriers highlighted a necessary reform. Lebanon's success will depend not just on systems and policies, but on the professionals who enact them.

5.4. Funding and sustainability

Kagan observed that successful systems relied primarily on government-funded, supply-side financing that supports providers directly. In Lebanon, public funding is minimal, especially for children under three, and is limited for older preschoolers, leaving services reliant on private and donor support, vulnerable to external changes and trapped in a cycle of underfunding and donor dependence. As studies argue, without long-term, government-led funding, quality and equity may remain elusive (Khattab et al., 2023). Donor investments have driven some innovation, but stakeholders highlight misalignment with local

needs, and the absence of national financing and strategy undermines sustainability. Practitioners and NGOs employ low-cost solutions to maintain quality, reflecting resilience, yet lasting improvement requires a national investment framework that prioritizes ECEC supported by strategic donor collaboration.

5.5. Structural disparities and local resilience

Disparities in access to ECEC service persist, particularly between urban and rural areas and across socioeconomic groups. As equity literature in ECEC underscores (Ereky-Stevens et al., 2022; Von Suchodoletz et al., 2023), access must be paired with quality and inclusion. In Lebanon, private institutions dominate the ECEC landscape, leaving public services under-resourced, but NGOs and public schools in remote areas sustain access, build family trust, and adapt services to local needs. These enablers reflect global calls for culturally and geographically responsive delivery (Kagan & Roth, 2017) and help counter systemic inequities, though they face limited support and sustainability challenges.

5.6. Oral language (OL): Recognized priority with low intentionality

While participants recognized OL as foundational to children's development, this recognition is rarely translated into structured support. There was limited intentionality on OL in curricula and classroom practice. This is concerning considering evidence emphasizing the centrality of process quality, particularly teacher–child interactions, in fostering language and cognitive development (Hunkin & Grieshaber, 2024; OECD, 2018; Pianta et al., 2016). Lebanon's multilingual environment adds complexity while language support remains informal, fragmented, and often shaped by parental expectations.

5.7. Limitations

Our study faced several limitations, primarily its timing, which occurred after the COVID-19 pandemic and during Lebanon's political and economic collapse. External challenges such as strikes and logistical issues caused delays in data collection, particularly in public institutions. Access to key institutions like ministries was restricted, limiting data breadth in certain areas. Some stakeholder groups had low participation, affecting the diversity of perspectives. While some of the participants did represent donors, donors were not targeted in the sampling framework. Although cross-linguistic limitations may have existed, the team took significant care to ensure process integrity throughout.

5.8. Implications and recommendations

A core tension emerged from our findings: while the ECEC workforce values OL development highly, practice remains constrained by donor-driven, project-based initiatives, resulting in fragmentation and short-termism. This gap between ambition and reality is common in global ECEC reform (Kagan, 2018) and is especially acute in crisis-affected contexts. Nevertheless, Lebanon's context is evolving, and there is a growing awareness, new policy initiatives, and grassroots innovations that are promising. Ministries, NGOs, and educators are beginning to align around ECEC's importance and form new partnerships. This transition offers an opportunity to shift from reactive projects to a coordinated national strategy for sustainable, system-level reform.

To strengthen Lebanon's ECEC sector and infrastructure, and to promote robust OL development, it is essential to bridge the "knowing-doing" gap discussed earlier through the implementation of several interlinked policy and practice reforms. These include establishing a central coordinating body that unifies ministry responsibilities and creates a coherent national early years policy; adopting a sustainable public investment strategy complemented, but not replaced, by contextually appropriate donor partnerships; and explicitly embedding OL development within curricula, national frameworks, and teacher training, with emphasis on developmentally appropriate practices and multilingual pedagogy. Addressing workforce challenges through improving salaries, professional recognition, and clear specialization pathways is critical for attracting and retaining qualified educators. Lastly, developing an integrated data infrastructure to improve monitoring, update population-level data, and guide equitable, evidence-based planning is vital. Given ongoing crises, implementing these reforms will require co-constructed policies involving ministries, NGOs, and other key actors. A co-design, knowledge exchange, and policy roundtable event is planned to share our findings with the main stakeholders and our participants, and to co-construct relevant recommendations and identify next steps.

This study offers a rare, in-depth analysis of ECEC in Lebanon and contributes to global debates. In multilingual, crisis-affected contexts like Lebanon, the interplay of governance, language, and equity presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Lebanon's experience highlights the need for contextualized, inclusive, and coordinated strategies— lessons relevant to global early childhood policy debates.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix A

Sample Interview Schedules

Interviews and focus groups were guided by a set of core thematic domains developed by the research team. These domains functioned as flexible guides rather than fixed instruments. The prompts were adapted across stakeholder groups to reflect participants' roles, institutional positioning, and areas of expertise. We provide a sample for school and nursery stakeholders, and the ministries.

School and Nursery Stakeholder Interview Schedule:

About you and this setting

Can you tell me a little bit about what motivated you to take part in this research?
What interested you about it?

Can I also ask a little bit about your role and experience as an educator?
- How long have you been working as an educator?
- What inspired/motivated you to become an educator?
- What is the name of your job/position in the nursery/school you work in now?

Can I ask a little bit more about this setting?
- Approximately how many children are there in the EY program?
- What is their distribution across KG1, KG2, KG3?
- What is the student/teacher ratio in each of these sections?
- What is the language of instruction? What other languages are taught? What is the ratio of each?
- How many staff are there and what is the skill mix of the staff here? Does everyone have a bachelor's degree or is there a mix?

About the place of oral language in the curriculum and teaching content in your setting

People have different ways of thinking about what a curriculum is. How would you describe what a curriculum is? What should it contain in your view?

Interviewee may talk about:

outcomes the child should achieve
standards of school environment
- content of teaching
- standards of staffing
- staff training
- parent partnership/involvement

To what degree is the early years curriculum standardized and/or documented?
- Where does this curriculum come from (locally developed? MEHE?)
- What is the system or process for checking the delivery of the standards/content etc.
- Where is this information available? Online? Individual schools? Somewhere else?

To what degree is the promotion of oral language present in the curriculum?

- Are there standards children should achieve?
- Do specific topics/activities/subjects explicitly try to develop children's vocabulary? Can you give some examples? [if they struggle say: think of your last day in school think through the activities of the day – did any of those aim to develop the children's vocabulary?]
- Do specific topics/activities/subjects explicitly try to develop children's use of sentences? Can you give some examples? [if they struggle say: think of your last day in school think through the activities of the day – did any of those aim to develop the children's vocabulary?]
- Do specific topics/activities/subjects explicitly try to develop children's use of sentences or stories? Can you give some examples?
- Do specific topics/activities/subjects explicitly try to develop children's understanding? Can you give some examples?
- Are these language goals documented anywhere? In curricula or planning?
- Please note that these documents are solely used for the purpose of research. As researchers, our purpose is to see what the status of the oral language in EY curriculums is. The school's name is not mentioned anywhere.

How does the language content in your curriculum take account of the multilingual Lebanese context?

- How does the language of instruction relate to the languages of the homes of your pupils?
- Is Lebanese/home languages allowed during foreign language/MSA instruction?
- Is Lebanese/home languages used in making meaning of instruction?

About teaching practices and how they promote oral language development

As you know children's learning is very much influenced by how the adults in their environment interact with them during learning. Here we might start off with imagining a scenario or directly saying the prompts.

What are the values and beliefs which you and your educator colleagues have which help them to support?

What are the behaviors the early educators do during a learning activity which help?

What are the skills and knowledge you and your colleagues bring which help them to support children's language development? Is this knowledge interdisciplinary? (e.g., Do you have SLTs on the team?)

Would this knowledge impact the curriculum you follow? Did you perform any reforms on the curriculum because of this interdisciplinarity?

How well do you feel educators are trained to support children's language development - before they start work? After they start work through CPD? Do you provide staff training?

About how you think early education and care might be further improved to support children's oral language development

What do you believe are the key strengths of current provision in supporting children's language development? Can you give an example of a successful innovation you have tried?

What are the key challenges to being able to support children's language development in your setting? What would you like to develop?

What is the improvement you would like to see? What support do you feel you need to make the improvements?

Ministries Interview Schedule

About the ministries' role in ECEC provision and policy

We know MEHE/MOSA/MOPH is responsible for x, y, and z; would you like to add anything else about the role of the ministry in the oversight and provision of ECE in Lebanon?

- Funding – of institutions, staff training, staff CPD, research...
- Training of ECEs
- Standards – teacher qualifications, ratio, admission requirements
- Curricula in ECE settings
- Monitoring of standards and implementation

Where are the policies and regulations held and how are they disseminated across services?

About the promotion of oral language development in the early years

How do MEHE/MOSA/MOPH view the importance of oral language development in early years?

Make sure there is a shared understanding of what oral language means

- Priorities: Is oral language a priority? Or other things are seen as more urgent?
- Several initiatives are taking place can you tell us more about it.
- Funding
- Training of ECEs
- Standards
- Curricula in ECE settings
- How do you assess the implementation of new and existing programs?

What is the current situation in terms of the spread of available resources across Lebanon to do this work?

- What are the challenges in making sure all children across Lebanon are equally well served in terms of their access to support for their language development?
- What are the strengths in available services and support systems and what are the gaps? – this question if asked here, will be removed from section 4
- What research/policy materials exist to help with the promotion of oral language development

How does early years policy and **provision** to promote children's oral language skills take account of the multilingual Lebanese context? – this can be asked before question 4

- We are aware that some children's experience of ECE may differ depending on their home language, in what way do ECE settings take account of different home languages? – focus on settings
- In what way does the ECE provision across Lebanon take account of different home languages? – focus on national picture
- Do you think it is harder for some children to access the benefits of the ECE context because of their language background?
- What do you **believe** is the best approach for children who come to ECE Settings with little or no knowledge of the language of instruction?

About collaboration with others to support language development in the early years

What do educational, health and social services, and NGOs do to support the development of children's oral language development in the early years?

Is oral language a priority? Or are other things seen as more urgent?

Do some agencies have more of a role than others? Who?

How explicit is the provision of support for oral language development in the policy of health educational and social services?

In what ways do educational, health and social services, and NGOs collaborate to support the development of children's oral language development?

What are the barriers and facilitators to working collaboratively to support children's language development in the early years?

If you wanted to develop an early intervention which could be delivered to every child in Lebanon to promote children's language development, what are the pathways to deliver intervention? (Service delivery platform or workforce would be able to reach all children and families?)

- If there is a universal contact – who/when/why and what skills do they have?
- If not – is there perhaps a patchwork of different services that could be used to reach everyone?
- Is there a service that reaches most children and families?
- Where do most families seek help and advice about their child? Does this differ with respect to geography? SES? Language background?

About how you think early education and care and related services might be further improved to support children's oral language development

What are the strengths in available services and support systems for the promotion of children's language development?

- Can you give an example of a successful recent innovation in this space?

There are clearly strengths in the provision and energy placed in to continuous improvement, what would you like to see in the future?

- What would your priorities be?
- What would you like to develop?
- What is the improvement you would like to see?
- What support do you feel you need to make the improvements?

If you had 3 wishes for developing services, systems, and processes to support children's language development in your country what would they be? – could be combined with question number 10

- From your "wishes" are there any which could happen with minimal additional resources?
- If you had to prioritize one of your wishes which would it be and why?
- At what level of children's services would action need to occur for these wishes to be realized?

We would like to have the opportunity to examine curriculum and training program documentation to consider how oral language development is represented in these documents. How would we go about accessing those documents? Could you help us?

MENTION THE SOLE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH, CONFIDENTIALITY, EVIDENCE WOULD BE DESTROYED