

## Summary

### **Workshop | From Evidence to Action: Pedagogical Innovations and Cost-Effective Practices for Early Childhood Education KIX LAC | OECS | EEF**

Date: November 26, 2025

Via Zoom

Organizers: KIX LAC

Duration: 2 hrs and 30 min

Recording availability: Link <https://youtu.be/F5k-A-J268E>

The following are the workshop moments in the order they were presented:

1. Introduction and regional context : Pedro Garret, Project Coordinator and researcher – KIX LAC
2. Supporting the use of evidence in early childhood education: the Early Years Toolkit | Amy Faux, Senior International Manager and Sandra Creixell, Early Years and Stronger Practice Hubs Project Manager – Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)
  - a. The Early Years Toolkit
  - b. Communication and Language Approaches
  - c. Early Numeracy Approaches
  - d. Case Studies
3. Group practical activity: Guided discussion around challenges and/or priorities in the region related to the previously addressed cost-effective practices.
  - a. Facilitators English/French group: Raúl Chacón – KIX LAC, Veda George – Ministry of Education of Dominica, Amy Faux – EEF
  - b. Facilitators Spanish group 1: Rosa María Moncada – KIX LAC, Sandra Creixell – EEF
  - c. Facilitators Spanish group 2: Catalina Godoy – KIX LAC, Sandra Creixell – EEF

#### **1. Introduction and Regional Context | Pedro Garret (KIX LAC)**

The workshop sought to explore evidence-based tools, such as those developed by EEF, that guide the identification, assessment, adaptation and implementation of cost-effective pedagogical practices for early childhood education, especially those related to improving foundational learning.

Firstly, the event was contextualized as part of the closing of the Knowledge Mobilization Cycle 2025, focused on early childhood education. The journey undertaken from structural issues (such as inclusive financing, regulatory frameworks, inter-institutional coordination) to aspects closer to the classroom (quality standards and curriculum, teacher professional development, and effective and inclusive pedagogical practices) was highlighted.

On the one hand, it was emphasized that the use of evidence makes it possible to reduce equity gaps, guide effective interventions with scientific backing and build more inclusive education systems from the early years. There are key benefits at the systemic level, since education systems that integrate evidence in the design of policies have shown significant advances in foundational learning such as reading and basic mathematics; at the pedagogical core, since evidence strengthens the interaction between students, teachers and curriculum; and at the teacher level, because it allows the design of more effective strategies by identifying which teaching methods achieve more significant learning and how to adapt them to the particular needs of each student throughout their educational trajectory.

On the other hand, it was mentioned that the regional panorama still has persistent challenges such as heterogeneity in data systems, gaps between evidence and decision-making, weak research-policy-practice articulation, insufficient contextualized evidence and limited funding. Therefore, the recommendations aim to strengthen interoperable data systems, promote contextualized evidence that incorporates local knowledge, integrate evidence into the pedagogical core, promote effective multisectoral partnerships, strengthen teacher training, and ensure inclusive and sustainable financing.

For example, some of these challenges and recommendations, as well as more specific ones, can be found in the [Early Learning Research Synthesis](#) of applied research projects of the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) focused on improving early childhood education in low- and middle-income countries. This is a relevant document because it provides a rigorous assessment of good practices and lessons learned from projects focused on early childhood education.

After this brief contextualization, the EEF team gave a presentation on the Early Years Toolkit, the most relevant aspects of which are detailed below.

## 2. Supporting the use of evidence in early childhood education: the Early Years Toolkit | Amy Faux and Sandra Creixell (EEF)

The presentation focused on how to promote the use of evidence in early childhood education through the [Early Years Toolkit](#). This toolkit is defined as a high-level summary of all available evidence linked to specific research questions, functioning as a gateway to an evidence base that spans over 450 impact studies. The central purpose of this tool is to support practitioners and policymakers, especially those involved in early childhood education initiatives, by systematizing evidence that would otherwise be difficult to find, costly to review, or restricted in access. While the original version of the EEF is contextualized for England, there is a project to develop an adapted and customized version for Latin America and the Caribbean by SUMMA in partnership with the EEF.

Emphasis was placed on the rigorous methodology behind the tool: evidence is systematically searched and synthesized, defining inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies before starting the search. This ensures that "all available evidence" is summarized, avoiding the bias of including only preferred or known studies. It was further clarified that the Toolkit is not designed to replace professional experience, contextual expertise or local knowledge of systems. Rather, it is a starting point for professional conversations or policy initiatives, and is a historical account of what has worked.

The tool organizes the findings into ten strands or broad approaches, covering aspects of pedagogy and school organization. For each strand, the Toolkit presents key figures on three essential indicators: 1) the cost of implementation (on a five-level scale); 2) the strength of the evidence (based on methodological rigor, and the number and similarity of studies); and 3) the average impact on learning (measured in additional months of progress<sup>1</sup>).

Finally, it was cautioned that users should look at these three indicators together, and not just prioritize impact, as a high-impact approach may be weak in evidence or too costly. After this general introduction to the Toolkit, two of its strands were discussed in more depth: 1) Communication and Language, and 2) Early Numeracy.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, when the toolkit mentions that "Feedback" strategies have an impact of 6 additional months, it means that students who participated in programs where the quality of feedback was improved advanced, on average, 6 months more in their learning than those students with similar characteristics who did not receive these improvements. (Example extracted from the document ["TEACHING AND LEARNING / EARLY YEARS TOOLKIT GUIDE"](#)).

### a. Communication and Language Approaches

The [Communication and Language](#) strand stands out for its very high impact, with about seven additional months of progress for children at a very low cost, supported by a moderate evidence base from 66 studies in eight countries. This approach involves intentional actions by educators to strengthen language comprehension and use—including verbal, nonverbal, cognitive, and social elements—through strategies ranging from vocabulary modeling and explicit language instruction to interactive reading and collaborative dialogue, as well as practices that develop social communication skills. The findings show consistent improvements in spoken language, expressive vocabulary and early reading skills, with benefits for all children, although with slightly greater effects for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, evidencing their potential for closing equity gaps. Among the most effective practices are shared interactive reading—the strategy with the strongest evidence—and programs supported by teacher assistants. Successful implementation requires combining multiple approaches, adapting them to individual needs and ensuring specific staff training. Finally, the importance of linking oral language development with early literacy was emphasized, highlighting [the "reading house" model](#), which shows how the two components support each other in moving toward comprehensive reading comprehension.

### b. Early Numeracy Approaches

The [Early Numeracy](#) strand also shows a very high impact, with approximately seven additional months of progress and a very low implementation cost; however, its evidence base is more limited, due to the smaller number of studies and the fact that many have not been independently evaluated. These approaches seek to strengthen number sense and understanding of early math concepts through both structured and informal activities—including math games, direct teaching, and guided interaction—and have proven particularly useful for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to catch up with their peers at the start of formal schooling, helping to close disadvantage gaps. The findings underscore the importance of teaching the full breadth of the mathematics curriculum, as interventions that focus only on numerical operations or offer mathematics as a supplementary activity tend to have smaller effects. A recurring feature of the most effective interventions is the dedication of two to three hours per week to mathematics instruction in a balance of guided exploration, explicit instruction, and child-directed activities. Professional development is a critical factor: educators' knowledge of mathematics and children's mathematical development is critical to supporting early learning, as demonstrated by the ["Maths Champions"](#) program, which has significantly boosted teacher confidence in this area. Both digital and non-digital approaches show

positive results, and evidence indicates that the impact is sustained in different types of early education settings, provided that regular times are planned, the methodology is adapted to each context, and adequate staff training is ensured.

### c. Case studies

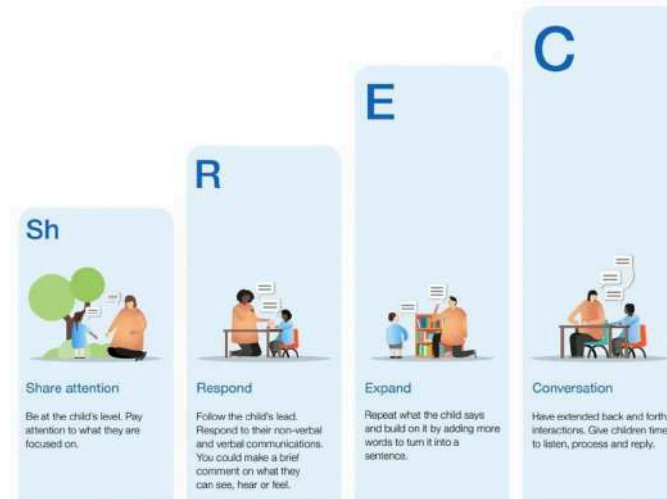
The presentation by the EEF experts culminated with a case study analysis illustrating how the evidence summarized in the Early Years Toolkit can be mobilized and translated into concrete actions, adapted to different contexts. Two main examples were highlighted: the [ShREC](#) model in England, which transforms evidence into simple pedagogical practice; and the [eBASE Africa](#) approach in Cameroon, which uses local culture for research dissemination. The case studies presented are summarized below:

#### ***The ShREC Approach (Share Attention, Respond, Expand, Conversation)***

The ShREC model was developed using EEF funds in collaboration between a group of researchers and teachers in England. The goal was to turn research evidence into practical professional development for early childhood educators.

- **Rationale:** The model is based on evidence from the Toolkit and more in-depth studies demonstrating that high-quality conversational interactions between adults and children can make a significant difference in early learning and language development.
- **Development and refinement:** Initially, the team created a menu of five strategies for high-quality interactions, but discovered through participatory implementation with educators that there were too many. Therefore, the approach was condensed and refined into a four-step method, demonstrating that effective professional development need not be complicated if it is research-based and contextually refined.
- **Components:**
  - **Share Attention:** The adult must get down to the child's level and pay attention to what the child is focused on.
  - **Respond:** Follow the child's lead and respond to the child's verbal and nonverbal communications (such as smiling or nodding).
  - **Expand:** Repeat what the child says and build on it by adding more words, including high-quality vocabulary.
  - **Conversation:** Extending back-and-forth interactions, giving the child time to listen, process, and respond.

- **Application:** The ShREC model has become a popular resource in the early education sector in England and is being used to train educators in over 100 centers, demonstrating its potential to be contextually relevant and scalable.



### ***eBASE Africa in Cameroon: "Evidence Tori Dey - Let's Tell Science Stories"***

This case illustrates how evidence mobilization can be adapted to systems very different from English, based on local cultural traditions.

- **Context:** The project was developed by eBASE Africa, a Cameroon-based EEF partner working in the Lake Chad Basin. The need arose due to local myths and limited or no access to the scientific evidence base in the communities.
- **Cultural approach:** eBASE Africa built on the strong storytelling culture in the region, using the pidgin English language for the name of their approach: "Evidence Tori Dey" (Science Stories).
- **Dissemination model:** They developed a constructive seven-step model involving eBASE researchers, professional storytelling artists, and local community members. Between them they create performances and narratives based on evidence from the Toolkit to share in communities.
- **Key lesson:** This approach underscores the importance of the arts in disseminating and mobilizing research. The key quote from this work is that "people forget the facts, but remember the stories." This method ensures that the Toolkit's knowledge is delivered in simple, compelling and culturally appropriate formats to generate change in practice.

Taken together, these cases demonstrate the variety of approaches EEF uses to influence the behavior of practitioners and school leaders, ranging from developing accessible

resources and actionable guides (such as ShREC) to collaborating with regional and international partners to engage communities (such as eBASE Africa).

### 3. Group practical activity

The participants were divided into three groups, according to language (two groups in Spanish, and one group in English–French) and strand (Communication and Language, and Early Numeracy) to share challenges specific to their countries and reflect on the following cross-cutting questions:

- Is there national or regional evidence that helps us better understand this issue in our contexts? If so, what does this evidence suggest?
- What additional support might key actors and institutions need to address this issue more efficiently and sustainably?
- How can we ensure that the proposed solutions prioritize closing gaps and benefit vulnerable groups (children in rural areas, from indigenous communities, with disabilities, migrants, living in poverty, etc.)?

Later, a plenary session was held in which each group shared what had been discussed and elaborated, highlighting both the particularities and points in common of the KIX LAC countries, reflecting on the interaction between the tools explored (such as the evidence included in the Early Years Toolkit) and the main challenges in early childhood education.

#### **Central American countries**

- **Group focused on Communication and Language:** The group focused their conversation on the challenges that exist regarding the articulation and governance of educational levels in the different countries. They highlighted that prior to the repository developed by the EEF there was no consolidated information from different projects, and that even today there is no evidence of the impact of small or large scale initiatives in the early years of education. Among the additional support needed, they identified the urgency of having teachers specifically prepared for the initial level, since, for example, in the case of Honduras, those who currently teach basic education are not necessarily specialized teachers for that stage. They also mentioned the need for curricular changes, the promotion of dialogic spaces that generate horizontality between teachers and children to develop communication, and the development of instruments to assess whether children are developing adequate language and skills. To ensure that solutions close gaps instead of widening them, the group emphasized the importance of adapting materials with a cross-cutting approach

to indigenous peoples and gender, redoubling efforts to make attendance at all three mandatory grades (currently in Honduras only one grade is mandatory), and being careful with strategies that may widen inequalities, such as the incorporation of technologies without considering that rural areas have less access to equipment and connectivity, which generates advantages for urban teachers and leaves rural ones behind.

- **Group focused on Early Numeracy:** The group identified as central priorities the need for effective methodologies for early childhood, strengthening collaborative work with families and reviewing educational materials to evaluate what is really working. Regarding the evidence situation, the case of Honduras was mentioned, where it is currently unknown what evidence is available, although this does not mean that it does not exist; while in El Salvador there is more work oriented to learning assessment, but there is a lack of specific evidence on what methodologies work best. A critical reflection that emerged was the concern about children as young as 4 or 5 years old who already express rejection of subjects such as mathematics, which led the group to conclude that "children are talking to us but we are not listening to them". To move forward, they identified the need for additional support to integrate an ecosystem of evidence that maps what the different actors are doing, establish lines of action that impact the most vulnerable populations, and focus especially on working with teachers in the classroom, who are the end users of this evidence.

### ***Caribbean countries***

- **Group focused on both strands:** The group agreed that the evidence is important and beneficial for the entire region. In the specific case of Haiti, they are currently working to regularize what is happening in the early childhood sector, but lack legislation, so they believe that this repository of evidence would be very useful to convince policy makers to take the necessary actions. They are also focused on reforming their curriculum, understanding that this is not only about what happens in the classroom, but also about ensuring that teachers are trained, so they see the repository as a tool that can assist them in training and professional development. A particularly interesting point was the reflection on the role of unions, highlighting that sometimes their contributions remain more at the discursive level than in concrete actions, so this repository could help them to concretize and substantiate with evidence what they are promoting, really assisting teachers in becoming professionals and supporting the early childhood sector as a whole. However, the group identified that one of the main challenges for the whole region is research,

recognizing the need to do more work to close the gap in terms of capturing their own evidence, as although some countries may have good practices, research remains a major concern. In relation to vulnerable groups, they noted that in some countries early childhood education is not compulsory, so parents do not always send their children to schools. They also identified an urgent need for professional development, and while some countries are partnering with the University of the West Indies (UWI), a significant gap remains to ensure that early childhood practitioners are properly trained. Finally, the group highlighted the need for additional programs for children after they leave school, questioning what happens to them when they return to their communities and proposing community-based programs to ensure continuity, recognizing that not all parents can support their children, so there is a need to use evidence to increase educational provision.

### **Final reflections of the EEF representatives**

On the one hand, the EEF team mentioned the complexities shared between England and the Latin American and Caribbean scenario shared by the participants. For example, the process of adapting language learning beyond words in rigid contexts towards differentiation of situations where children apply words according to their realities was highlighted. A special concern was expressed about not widening socioeconomic gaps by implementing interventions with parents or related to technological innovations, which could disproportionately benefit families or educational institutions with greater resources. In this sense, the EEF's mission was reiterated regarding the importance of providing relevant support to those who need it most without leaving them constantly unattended.

On the other hand, the question was left open to the audience about what they understand as a network of evidence, recalling that the evidence included in the Early Years Toolkit, more related to impact evaluations, is only one type of evidence among other rich forms of evidence: for example, evidence from qualitative research, school data, teachers' understanding of their students and communities, contextual knowledge, among others, that can be collected and interpreted at the school or community level to guide the design and implementation of initiatives. If schools can be supported to understand and use these different types of evidence, they can be empowered as agents of change in their own practice. In this way, EEF invites continuous reflection on how evidence is conceived and used in all its diversity and transformative potential.

## Closing remarks

Through this space, in which concrete examples were used and collaborative discussion was promoted, participants reflected on the applicability of the resources explored (such as the Early Years Toolkit) in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean; that is, how they could be adapted to the priorities, capacities and territorial needs of the region. In this sense, this workshop sought to close the year by sharing useful tools as an important input for thinking about more effective, sustainable and evidence-based educational policies.