Transforming Earliest Years Literacy Programs

A Guide for Evidence-Informed Strategies, Collaborative Partnerships, and Sustainable Impact

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBOs:	Community-Based Organizations - Local organizations focused on addressing community needs.
ECED:	Early Childhood Education and Development - A field focusing on the care, education, and development of children from birth to age eight.
EGRA:	Early Grade Reading Assessment - A standardized tool to measure foundational reading skills of children in early grades.
Iqrali:	Program name; Arabic for "Read to Me."
IRC:	International Rescue Committee - A global humanitarian aid, relief, and development organization.
KAP:	Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices - A research framework to assess what people know, believe, and do concerning a specific topic.
MENA:	MENA is an acronym for "Middle East and North Africa," referring to a region that includes countries in both the Middle East and North Africa, often grouped together due to shared cultural, historical, and geopolitical characteristics.
MSA:	Modern Standard Arabic - The standardized and literary variety of Arabic used in writing and formal speech across Arabic-speaking countries.
PESTLE:	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental analysis - A strategic analysis tool used to evaluate external macro-environmental factors.
PIRLS:	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study - An international assessment of reading comprehension for fourth-grade students.
PISA:	Program for International Student Assessment - A global study evaluating education systems by testing 15-year-olds' competencies in reading, mathematics, and science.
QRF:	Queen Rania Foundation - An organization focused on advancing education and development initiatives in Jordan.
R&D:	Research and Development - The systematic activity combining research and innovation to improve products or processes.
RHAS:	Royal Health Awareness Society - A Jordanian organization promoting health awareness and programs.
SBCC:	Social and Behavior Change Communication - A strategic approach to influencing behaviors through communication, often used in health and development program.
SEL:	Social-Emotional Learning - The process through which children and adults develop emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness.
SWOT:	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats - A strategic planning tool to identify internal and external factors.
ToC:	Theory of Change - A roadmap outlining how specific actions and interventions lead to desired outcomes.

GLOSSARY

Adaptive Management:	An iterative approach to program management that emphasizes flexibility, continuous learning, and adapting to new insights or changing circumstances.
Emergent Literacy:	The developmental stage during which children acquire foundational skills, such as listening, talking, and recognizing letters, that precede formal reading and writing.
Intention-Action Gap:	The disconnect between what people intend to do and what they actually do, often due to barriers or competing priorities.
Learning Poverty:	The percentage of 10-year- olds unable to read and comprehend a simple text, reflecting broader educational inequalities.
White Coat Effect:	The phenomenon where individuals are more likely to follow advice from trusted authorities, such as midwives, who are perceived as credible and authoritative.
Phased Approach:	A structured implementation strategy that tests and refines interventions incrementally before scaling them broadly.
Program:	"A group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually." (As defined by Project Management Institute - PMI)[1]
Project:	"A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result." (As defined by Project Management Institute - PMI)[2]
School Readiness:	A child's preparedness for school, encompassing skills like language, emotional regulation, and basic cognitive abilities.

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[1] Weaver, P. (2010). Understanding Programs and Projects—Oh, There's a Difference!

[2] Deguire, M. (2012). In the eyes of the beholder.

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS:
LESSONS FROM THE IQRALI PROGRAM

Early childhood literacy is a powerful tool for shaping brighter futures, yet it remains underexplored in Jordan's education landscape.

The Iqrali program meaning "Read to Me" in Arabic

marks a groundbreaking journey of persistence, innovation, and discovery.

Designed by the Queen Rania Foundation (QRF),

Iqrali moves beyond traditional approaches to address Jordan's literacy crisis through behavioral science and system-wide collaboration.

Drawing from Iqrali's challenges, decisions, and breakthroughs, this resource provides
evidence-backed insights for driving meaningful change. It highlights actionable strategies for:

practitioners

policymakers

organizations tackling complex social issues

More than a set of recommendations, these lessons:

- **Encourage :** fresh perspectives, adaptability.
- **Focus on :** sustainable, context-specific solutions.
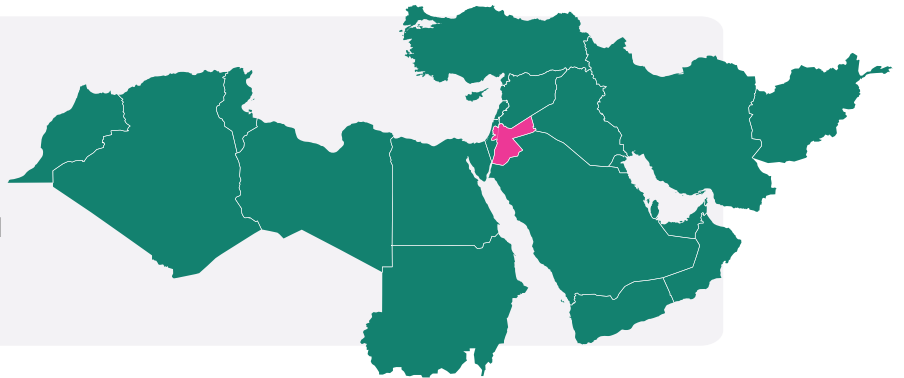
Designed for

NGOs, INGOs   Government Agencies   Education Practitioners

The content is especially relevant for those implementing evidence-based, culturally responsive strategies.

While rooted in

the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, its approaches can be adapted to similar contexts worldwide.

Whether it's through

- gifting books at vaccination centers,
- leveraging behavioral nudges
- conducting workshops in local communities

The Iqrali program exemplifies the power of

listening   learning   adapting
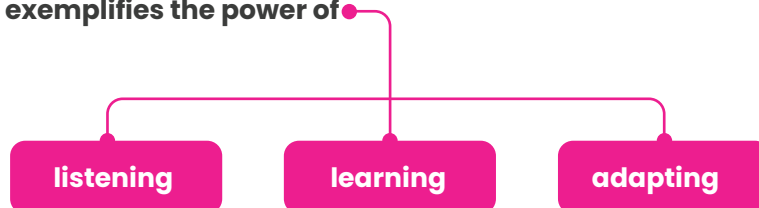
These experiences have shaped a set of core principles that can help others navigate similar challenges.

As you explore this guide, you'll gain

- evidence-backed insights
- practical tools
- real-world strategies

to create meaningful and lasting change. **Let's dive in.**

مؤسسة الملكة رانيــا
QUEEN RANIA FOUNDATION

Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah

established the Queen Rania Foundation for Education and Development in 2013 to improve educational outcomes in Jordan and the Arab world. Her Majesty believes that every child has the right to a quality education that enables them to succeed academically and professionally. The Foundation's vision is to ensure quality education for all children in Jordan and the Arab world.

Queen Rania Foundation

Aims for every child to be able to read and comprehend age-appropriate texts, equipping them with more complex cognitive, social, and emotional skills as they grow. As such, the Queen Rania Foundation's programs are designed to support children in developing fluent reading comprehension by the age of ten.

To improve educational outcomes in Jordan and the Arab world, the Foundation focuses on three pillars: engaging parents to develop young children's early literacy skills, supporting teachers with effective literacy instruction methods in schools, and working with policymakers to ensure that data and evidence drive classroom and educational decisions.

EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

Between 2016 and 2018, QRF identified children's literacy as a priority within Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED). Research clearly shows the importance of parental involvement for early literacy.[3]

At the same time, QRF's research[4] unearthed three key barriers limited parents' engagement:

1
Many parents underestimated the importance of reading to their children at an early age.

2
Families, especially in underserved areas, lacked access to age-appropriate books.

3
Parents struggled to find time for reading due to stress and competing responsibilities.

To address these challenges, Iqrali introduced behaviorally informed interventions:

Vaccination Appointments as Literacy Touchpoints
Midwives distributed books, modelled reading techniques, and reinforced engagement.

Community-Based Literacy Workshops
Trainers taught parents reading strategies, fostered peer learning, and provided book packages.

Mosque-Based Literacy Promotion
Religious leaders encouraged fathers to read with their children through sermons and interactive mosque sessions.

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[3] Evidence summary by Dr. Christina Clarke, Director of Research at the UK's National literacy Trust: Microsoft Word - Parental Involvement - a brief review.doc (ed.gov)

[4] Parental Behavior in the Early Years (2021). Parenting study. Retrieved from https://www.qrf.org/sites/default/files/07-2022/parenting_study.pdf

A PRINCIPLES-BASED APPROACH

Iqrali's development was guided by five key principles to ensure its impact was both effective and sustainable. These principles emerged from the program's experience, highlighting what is necessary to create long-term change. They address how to implement interventions in a way that is scalable, adaptable, and aligned with local needs.

These five guiding principles are:

1 **Define Your Unique Role in the Ecosystem**

2 **Continuously Adjust Your Approach as You Learn**

3 **Create Space to Do It Well: The Dichotomy of Quick Wins vs. Slow and Steady**

4 **Design Your Project for Scalability**

5 **Build Solutions That Are Suited to the Problem You Are Trying to Solve**

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide translates Iqrali's experience into a five-step checklist for mobilizing evidence, found in the annex. Organizations can use this framework to design, implement, and iterate on literacy programs, ensuring continuous learning and adaptation. Additional tools and frameworks are also included in the appendix.

By applying these lessons, organizations can develop effective, context-specific strategies that empower parents, strengthen literacy outcomes, and create lasting educational opportunities for children.

WHY CHANGE MATTERS: RETHINKING OUR APPROACH

As part of its strategic reflection process, QRF critically examined its approach to early childhood literacy, asking: Are our strategies addressing root causes or just symptoms? Are we identifying solutions that are both effective and contextually appropriate? Meaningful, observable behavior change requires more than raising awareness. Instead, solutions must resonate with everyday experiences and behaviors. This insight led to five key principles designed to tackle barriers via actionable strategies.

1 DEFINE YOUR UNIQUE ROLE
IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Identifying your unique impact potential and understanding your organization's role in the ecosystem allows you to maximize your impact.

WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

> *Over the years, we found our- selves pulled in many different directions and realized there was a risk of being spread too thin to make a meaningful impact. it became clear that we needed to rethink our strategy.*
>
> — Executive Director for Research and Program Development

Many organizations enter a sector with broad ambitions. However, without a well-defined role, they risk spreading resources too thin or duplicating existing efforts. The most effective organizations focus on where they can add the most value, aligning their efforts with their unique strengths and working collaboratively with other stakeholders. Clarifying your role is not always straightforward. Internal resistance or stakeholder skepticism can arise when narrowing focus. The process takes time, requires leadership alignment, and involves strategic decisions about where an organization can make the greatest impact.

HOW QRF DID IT

QRF undertook a structured approach to defining its role. It began with an analysis of national learning outcomes and team-led research into key focus areas. This process highlighted early childhood literacy as a critical gap where QRF could make a difference.

Internally, tools like PESTLE, SWOT, and the Business Model Canvas helped assess strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Externally, power-influence mapping identified key players—government agencies, NGOs, and community leaders—who could help champion literacy efforts. This process allowed QRF to position itself as a leader in parental engagement for early literacy.

> *We mapped out the vast, intricate ecosystem we were operating in and printed it on ten a3 pages. when we laid them out on the floor, the sheer scale was overwhelming.*
>
> — Research and Program Development Director

Defining a unique role also required trade-offs. A narrower focus on early childhood literacy meant forgoing broader education initiatives that might attract more funding. However, prioritizing impact over breadth strengthened the program's effectiveness. Another key decision was to empower parents rather than focus solely on the formal school system. With early childhood education already receiving institutional support, QRF chose to fill the gap by equipping parents with the tools to support literacy at home. By using data-driven advocacy, QRF secured buy-in from donors, political leaders, and the board.

✓ *HOW YOU CAN DO IT*

Defining an organization's role within the ecosystem requires dedicated time and effort, particularly from leadership. Without intentional focus, other priorities can easily take precedence, making it difficult to establish a clear strategic direction.

To navigate this:

- Assess your organization's strengths and expertise using tools like SWOT analysis and the business model canvas.

- Map key stakeholders, their roles, influence, and priorities, identify existing resources and partnerships, and explore opportunities for collaboration with other actors to maximize impact.

- Identify gaps and unmet needs in the ecosystem where your organization can create impact.

- Define how your organization can create the most value by aligning its mission with ecosystem needs.

- Engage teams and stakeholders in open discussions to foster alignment and build support for a shared vision.

- Analyze external factors (e.g., cultural, political, economic) that affect the issue using tools like PESTLE.

- Pinpoint power dynamics and barriers within the ecosystem that could influence your work.

2 *CONTINUOUSLY ADJUST YOUR* APPROACH AS YOU LEARN

Regularly gathering data from your audience and having the right team and systems in place helps you quickly validate assumptions and adapt your strategy effectively.

WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

> WE LET THE DATA TELL US WHERE TO GO.
> — Research and Program Development Director

Many strategies are built on assumptions—often shaped by past experiences, expert opinions, or common narratives. While these assumptions may seem logical, they can reinforce biases or lead to misplaced priorities if left untested. Continuously gathering data and validating assumptions ensures decisions are evidence-based rather than only intuition-driven. This approach requires patience, discipline, and a willingness to embrace uncertainty.

HOW QRF DID IT

> IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO QUESTION SOMETHING THAT HAD BEEN WIDELY ACCEPTED FOR SO LONG. WE STRUGGLED TO OPEN EVERYONE'S EYES TO THE TRUTH.
> — Executive Director for Research and Program Development

QRF initially assumed that raising awareness and providing books would be enough to improve literacy rates. To test this, the team conducted a nationally representative study examining three key hypotheses:

- Parents don't read to their children because they lack awareness of the benefits of reading.
- Parents value reading but don't engage due to time constraints.
- Social norms influence whether parents engage in reading activities.

> WE STARTED WITH DATA TO IDENTIFY GAPS AND END WITH DATA TO EVAULATE IMPACT AND FACILITATE LEARNING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.
> — Chief Executive Officer

The study found that while parents valued education, they didn't see reading, talking, or singing as essential for early literacy. Awareness alone wasn't enough—parents faced an intention-action gap. Time constraints were a factor, but a bigger barrier was parents' lack of confidence, especially among fathers, who saw literacy as a mother's role. Social norms reinforced this divide, with mothers prioritizing other caregiving tasks. These insights shifted QRF's focus from awareness to practical solutions and parental empowerment.

✔ *HOW YOU CAN DO IT*

A culture of curiosity and adaptability is key to designing effective interventions. To embed this mindset in your organization:

- Challenge assumptions by using data to uncover hidden issues and validate existing beliefs.

- Collect and analyze data continuously to identify gaps, refine hypotheses, and guide decisions based on evidence.

- Cultivate a growth mindset by fostering a culture of learning, collaboration, and resilience at all levels of the organization.

- Balance rigor with action by knowing when to transition from research to implementation, ensuring progress without sacrificing quality.

- Develop an adaptive management plan to systematically track progress, outcomes, and potential deviations from goals.

3

CREATE SPACE TO DO IT WELL:
THE DICHOTOMY OF QUICK WINS VS. SLOW AND STEADY

Achieving meaningful impact requires balancing immediate results with long-term, evidence-based solutions while ensuring transparency with stakeholders.

WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

An evidence-based approach is more than just collecting data—it requires time, space, and resources to design, test, and refine solutions effectively. Quick wins help generate momentum, but lasting change depends on careful research, thoughtful implementation, and long-term commitment. Clear communication with stakeholders is essential to manage expectations around timelines and resource needs.

> HAVE ONE PROJECT THAT'S SLOW COOKING AND TALK ABOUT THE OTHER ONES IN THE MEANTIME TO HAVE SOME TANGIBLE PROGRESS TO PRESENT TO THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS.
>
> Executive Director for Research and Program Development

HOW QRF DID IT

QRF balanced the need for quick results with a commitment to long-term impact. While there was pressure to demonstrate early success, the team prioritized rigorous research and careful program design. To manage stakeholder expectations, we used international case studies to highlight the realistic timeframes required for behavioral change programs: 5–8 years for initial results and 10–15 years for scaling. This helped secure buy-in for the research phase and emphasized the importance of fully understanding the problem before designing solutions.

> THE VISION FOR IQRALI WAS TO SERVE AS THE VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH A DIVERSE RANGE OF PROGRAMS, BOTH FROM QRF AND ALIGNED EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS OR PARTNERS, COULD BE PUT IN PLACE.
>
> Chief Executive Officer

✓ HOW YOU CAN DO IT

To create an environment where evidence-based approaches can thrive:

- Allocate time and resources for research, testing, and data collection.
- Set clear expectations with stakeholders on timelines, goals, and complexities.
- Leverage existing programs to show progress and maintain momentum.
- Balance internal learning with external expertise for capacity building.
- Foster innovation by allowing teams flexibility for iterative learning.
- Pilot interventions on a small scale to test feasibility and effectiveness.
- Define success metrics to measure behavior change impact.
- Use test-learn-adapt cycles to refine interventions.
- Collect qualitative and quantitative data to assess outcomes and user experience.
- Engage stakeholders early to validate findings and support scaling.

4 DESIGN YOUR PROJECT
FOR SCALABILITY

Considering scalability from the outset and building on the ecosystem to support it is essential for achieving impact at scale.

WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Many organizations treat scaling as an afterthought, but it should guide program design from the start. Success depends on partnerships, alignment, and shared ownership, as most organizations do not scale alone. Clearly defining a role—whether as an incubator, a scaling organization, or a partner—helps ensure strategic focus and effective resource use. Moreover, scalability requires balancing ambition with practicality. The key is setting achievable milestones, fostering collaboration, and designing interventions that integrate into existing systems.

HOW QRF DID IT

> JORDAN ISN'T A RESOURCE-RICH COUNTRY, SO WE DIDN'T WANT TO WASTE RESOURCES. IF WE WERE GOING TO DO THIS, WE WANTED TO DO IT RIGHT. WE TRULY WANTED TO SEE LARGE-SCALE CHANGE.
>
> Research and Program Development Director

Achieving systemic change and scalability in early childhood education and development (ECED) required QRF to go beyond its own resources and engage partners with shared goals. Rather than creating parallel efforts, QRF collaborated with national programs already operating at scale, ensuring that Iqrali's expansion was both strategic and sustainable. This approach built on earlier efforts to define QRF's role within the ecosystem, reinforcing the importance of partnerships aligned with its core strengths and long-term impact. To facilitate this, QRF formed a consortium that included local organizations such as the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA) and the Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS), alongside international partners like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Plan International. Collaboration with five government ministries further ensured alignment with national priorities and created opportunities for cross-sector engagement. Therewith, by fostering strong partnerships and aligning efforts across organizations and ministries, QRF positioned Iqrali for sustainable, long-term growth.

✅ HOW YOU CAN DO IT

To design for scalability without compromising quality, organizations should:

Define their role early and decide whether to scale directly, support others in scaling, or serve as an incubator.

- Design interventions with scalability in mind by ensuring they are simple, cost-effective, and adaptable to different contexts.

- Develop partnerships with government, NGOs, and private sector actors to expand reach and resources.

- Align interventions with policies and systems to ensure sustainability and integration into existing frameworks.

- Establish roles and responsibilities through collaboration frameworks, ensuring accountability and ownership.

5 BUILD SOLUTIONS THAT ARE SUITED TO THE PROBLEM YOU ARE TRYING TO SOLVE

Recognizing that information alone rarely drives behavior change creates space for an organization to integrate behavioral science as a powerful tool.

WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

When tackling behavior-driven challenges, raising awareness alone is often insufficient. Psychological, social, and structural barriers can prevent action, even when people recognize its benefits. Behavioral science helps uncover what motivates or inhibits behavior, ensuring interventions translate intentions into consistent action.

> BEHAVIOUR IS COMPLEX AND CHANGING BEHAVIOUR IS DIFFICULT. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE APPROACHES AND METHODS HELP DECONSTRUCT A BEHAVIOUR, PULLING IT APART TO REALLY TRY AND UNDERSTAND IT, AND THEN HELPS YOU WORK THROUGH THESE MORE MANAGEABLE PARTS IN A SYSTEMATIC WAY.
>
> — Research and Program Development Director

HOW QRF DID IT

QRF initially assumed that providing books and raising awareness would be enough to encourage parents to read with their children. However, research revealed deeper psychological and social barriers. Many parents, especially fathers, lacked confidence in their ability to read with their children, while social norms reinforced the belief that early literacy was the school's responsibility. Time constraints further discouraged reading habits. To address these challenges, QRF conducted multi-phase research to understand the realities shaping parental behavior. Early studies identified reading as a key behavior to promote, given its role in exposing children to Modern Standard Arabic and building literacy skills. These insights shaped Iqrali's three pillars: correcting misconceptions, improving access, and making reading easier to integrate into daily life. QRF then refined interventions through testing.

> WE RECOGNISED THAT THERE WERE MORE THAN JUST INFORMATIONAL BARRIERS AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS. TO SUCCEED, WE NEEDED TO USE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE TO ADDRESS THE BEHAVIORAL BARRIERS AS WELL.
>
> — Research and Program Development Director

✔ *HOW YOU CAN DO IT*

Driving behavior change requires tackling the root causes of inaction, whether social, psychological, or systemic. To begin to apply behavioral science in your organization:

- Segment your audience based on characteristics, barriers, and motivators.

- Define target behaviors for each segment using frameworks like the BASIC framework.

- Map key decisions and actions needed for behavior change.

- Identify potential failure points by analyzing structural, psychological, and contextual barriers.

- Pinpoint key intervention moments where behavior change is most effective.

- Close the intention-action gap by applying behavioral insights that are easy, attractive, social, and/or timely (EAST framework).

- Design interventions that remove barriers and leverage enablers.

MILESTONES
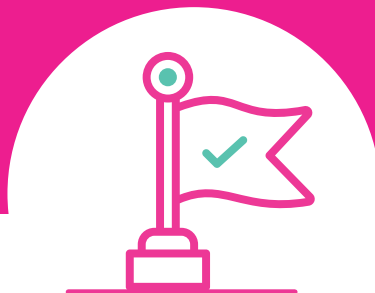
The milestones – A note before we begin

Before diving into the key milestones of Iqrali's development, it's helpful to step back and reflect on the broader journey that shaped it. This section traces QRF's experience in designing and implementing Iqrali, highlighting the critical decisions, challenges, and lessons learned along the way.

As you read through this timeline, consider:

- Do you recognize similar challenges in your own work?

- Which aspects of these approaches could be relevant to your organization?

- How do these milestones reflect the reality of designing for impact in complex systems?

2016　　　*2017*　　　*2018*　　　**2019**

1 DEFINING STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND PROGRAMMATIC FOCUS

Between 2016 and 2019, the Queen Rania Foundation shifted from a broad educational focus to a literacy-first strategy. Through structured reflection, strategic analysis, and internal debates, QRF prioritized literacy as the key to maximizing impact.

By 2019, it honed in on parental engagement, using behavioral science and evidence-based research to tackle literacy gaps—ultimately paving the way for the Iqrali program.

2019　　　*2020*　　　*2021*　　　*2022*　　　**2023**

2 FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

This phase marked QRF's shift from strategy to execution, refining its literacy-first approach through behavioral insights and barrier analysis in response to data gaps and COVID-19 disruptions. By 2023, Iqrali was firmly established with targeted interventions, strategic partnerships, and an evidence-driven framework set for scalable, long-term impact.

2024　　　　　　*2025*　　　　　　**2026**

3 SOLUTION TESTING, EVALUATION, SCALING – THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2024, QRF began piloting Iqrali's interventions, turning years of research into action to tackle literacy barriers like awareness and resource constraints. Through book distribution, community workshops, and mosque-driven initiatives, Iqrali is integrating reading into daily life, with iterative testing ensuring scalability and long-term impact.

1 DEFINING STRATEGIC DIRECTION
AND PROGRAMMATIC FOCUS
(2016–2019)

WHAT HAPPENED

Between 2016 and 2019, the Queen Rania Foundation (QRF) embarked on a journey of discovery, reflection, and bold decision-making—one that would ultimately shape the foundation of the Iqrali program.

In 2016–2017,

QRF was a dynamic organization brimming with ambition, tackling a wide range of issues: social-emotional learning, numeracy, literacy, gender achievement gaps, and more. Each initiative was innovative—a gamified math's program for grade 9, counselling for primary students, digital book apps—but collectively, they lacked cohesion.

Leadership began to ask a critical question:
Was meaningful, systemic impact possible without a sharper focus?

By 2018,

this realization prompted deep internal reflection. New leadership encouraged teams working on different thematic challenges to pitch their focus areas to the senior leadership team, setting off a spirited debate. Should QRF prioritize social-emotional learning to build emotional resilience? Focus on numeracy to strengthen foundational skills? Or champion literacy, the bedrock of all learning?

Teams made their case with passion, backed by research and global best practices.

But this was more than a competition—it was a discovery process. Tools like SWOT, PESTLE, and the Business Model Canvas helped ground discussions in data, systematically evaluating strengths, challenges, and strategic opportunities. The Theory of Change provided a roadmap for how QRF's interventions could lead to real impact. The answer soon became clear: Literacy, particularly in early childhood education and development (ECED), had to be a cornerstone of QRF's work.

QRF's desk research had already revealed a sobering reality—Jordan faced significant literacy gaps. Yet, much of the ECED space was occupied by the Ministry of Education and major international players like the World Bank. To carve out a unique role, QRF needed to find an untapped area where it could make the greatest impact. The answer lay in parental engagement—a vital but largely overlooked factor in children's literacy. Research suggests a strong link between emergent literacy skills and parents who read to their children from an early aged.[5] [6] Yet in Jordan, this practice was far from the norm.

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[5] https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/elm_brief_white_paper_final_august_2013.pdf/
[6] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/2158244016672715/10.1177

By 2019,

the shift was underway.

QRF aligned its programming with a **literacy-first strategy,**

transitioning from | a broad, fragmented approach | » | cohesive, evidence-driven plan

Recognizing the lack of data on parental reading habits, the organization launched a nationally representative study to explore what motivated and prevented parents from engaging in early literacy. Grounded in behavioral science, this research ensured that future interventions would address not only what parents needed to do but also what shaped their behavior.

These efforts weren't just steps forward—they were leaps toward creating Iqrali, a program designed to empower parents and transform early literacy in Jordan.

CHALLENGES

One of the most complex challenges was **navigating internal debates** about narrowing QRF's focus. Teams passionately advocated for their priorities—social-emotional learning, numeracy, literacy—leading to robust discussions and occasional tensions. Leadership played a crucial role in balancing perspectives, facilitating evidence-based decisions, and building consensus around a shared vision.

Externally, securing buy-in was no easier. Many stakeholders believed Jordan's literacy rates were strong, making it difficult to convey the urgency of early literacy gaps. QRF had to rely heavily on data and compelling advocacy to shift perceptions and gain support from government agencies, donors, and partners.

The crowded ECED space added another layer of complexity. With many major players focusing on formal education, QRF needed to carve out a unique role that complemented existing efforts.

This required careful ecosystem mapping to prevent duplication and ensure its approach filled critical gaps rather than competing with established programs.

Another major challenge was **the lack of comprehensive data on parental practices.** Designing an effective, contextually relevant program meant first understanding what parents actually did at home—a knowledge gap that delayed intervention design but ultimately reinforced the need for a **research-first approach.**

Finally, resource constraints underscored the importance of prioritizing cost-effective, scalable solutions to ensure long-term impact.

💡 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Defining a Focus Area

Narrowing QRF's efforts to literacy within ECED allowed for deeper impact and more effective resource allocation.

Encouraging Collaborative Reflection

Open, evidence-driven discussions helped align teams, build a shared vision, and ensure clarity in decision-making.

Emphasizing Ecosystem Mapping

Understanding the broader education landscape ensured QRF's work complemented existing efforts, avoiding duplication and strengthening partnerships.

Using Structured Tools for Decision-Making

Tools like SWOT, PESTLE, the Business Model Canvas, and the Theory of Change helped QRF strategically assess its role and refine its focus.

Balancing Short- and Long-Term Goals

While short-term wins created momentum and stakeholder confidence, QRF kept its sights on systemic, sustainable change.

Building on Existing Strengths

Open, evidence-driven discussions helped align teams, build a shared vision, and ensure clarity in decision-making.

This period of reflection and strategic refinement strengthened QRF's ability to drive meaningful, lasting change. **By focusing on literacy, parental engagement, and evidence-based interventions,** QRF positioned itself to transform early childhood education in Jordan—ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

THE SCIENCE OF EARLY LITERACY

Early childhood is a critical period for brain development, with foundational literacy skills emerging well before formal schooling begins.

Research highlights five key emergent literacy skills that shape children's future learning:

- **talking and listening**
- **understanding print**
- **alphabet awareness**
- **phonological awareness**
- **book knowledge**

Despite these universal principles, fewer than 6% of parents in Jordan reported reading to their children regularly, and less than 1% read on a typical day.[7] Iqrali's focus on parental engagement addressed this gap by integrating practical, culturally relevant solutions to empower parents as active contributors to their children's literacy journeys.

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[7] Queen Rania Foundation. (2021). Parental Behaviour in the Early Years. Retrieved from https://www.qrf.org/sites/default/ files/07-2022/parenting_study.pdf

2 FROM STRATEGY
TO ACTION
(2019-2023)

? WHAT HAPPENED

This phase marked the transition from strategy to action, where QRF moved from planning to laying the groundwork for Iqrali. It was a time of reflection, learning, and iteration, shaped by a commitment to evidence-based practices and collaboration. Integral to this phase were two research studies, parental behavior in the early years part one and part 2.

PARENTAL BEHAVIOR IN THE EARLY YEARS - PART 1 RESEARCH: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN

By 2019,

QRF had begun aligning its early childhood education and development (ECED) work with its literacy-first strategy, but a critical question remained:

How were parents engaging in school readiness activities at home?

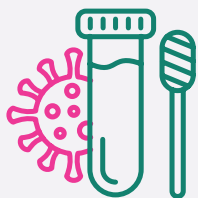The team sought to understand how parents engaged in early learning at home:

reading   **talking**   **singing**

but lacked comprehensive data on parental practices. This made it clear that a robust research agenda was essential before moving forward.

Then came an unexpected turning point—the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. While it disrupted plans initially, it also created an opportunity to pause and refine QRF's approach. Research tools were redesigned to include a behavioral science lens, shifting the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) study into a barriers analysis. This adaptive approach strengthened data collection while ensuring continuity during uncertain times.

At the same time, **QRF began shaping a clear roadmap for its ECED work**, focusing on emergent literacy and the role of parents in building foundational skills. Insights from literature reviews, expert consultations, and behavioral science principles helped align existing programs, such as the Parent Education Program (PEP), with the literacy-first strategy. External feedback, including from the University of Chicago's Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab, highlighted the need for greater focus, leading QRF to streamline its initiatives into a cohesive, scalable program.

Phase 1 research initially took a broad view of school readiness, covering social-emotional learning, physical development, language and communication, mathematics, and literacy. However, narrowing the focus was critical. By the end of Phase 1, the team identified five key behaviors for further exploration—aligned with stakeholder priorities, particularly those of the Ministry of Education.

In 2021,

after extensive deliberation and input from behavioral science consultants, university advisors, and practitioners, reading was selected as the primary behavior to promote. The decision aligned with QRF's literacy-first strategy and factored in the unique role of Modern Standard Arabic in early literacy development.

From the start, Iqrali's research was not just academic—every insight was gathered with the clear purpose of informing intervention design. Deliberately delaying program development until robust data was available demonstrated a disciplined, evidence-driven approach, ensuring that every decision was rooted in research rather than assumptions.

PART 1 RESEARCH FINDINGS: 3 MAIN BARRIERS

Insights from this research illuminated 3 critical barriers faced by parents:

- **Lack of awareness:**
  Many parents underestimated the significance of reading to their children in early childhood.

- **Limited access to resources:**
  Families, especially in underserved areas, lacked age-appropriate books and materials.

- **Stress, lack of time, and competing domestic priorities:**
  Parents faced challenges balancing daily responsibilities with fostering reading habits.

To address these barriers, Iqrali focused on making reading an achievable part of parents' daily routines, ensuring its approach was both practical and culturally relevant. The findings shaped Iqrali's three pillars:

- **Addressing Misconceptions:**
  Informing parents about the importance of reading to their children from birth.

- **Improving Access:**
  Ensuring the availability of resources through initiatives like book gifting.

- **Facilitating Behavioral Change:**
  Providing tools such as goal-setting guides and digital nudges to help parents establish reading habits.

PARENTAL BEHAVIOR IN THE EARLY YEARS - PART 2 RESEARCH: SHARPENING THE FOCUS

With Phase 1 complete, 2022 marked a shift from foundational research to applied research, focusing on how to **translate insights into action.** This phase refined Iqrali's behavior change communication strategy.

A key goal of Phase 2 was to determine which messaging styles and delivery mechanisms resonated with parents. Using **Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) principles,** the team tested segmentation strategies—identifying groups most likely to adopt reading habits with the right support. This process identified two key subgroups within **the Moveable Middle** see section below **"Target audience: The movable middle"** for more information):

Early Adopters	Potential Readers
Highly educated, often employed mothers who already engaged in reading but inconsistently.	Stay-at-home mothers who valued reading but lacked confidence or routine.

By targeting these groups,

Iqrali aimed to create a behavioral shift at scale, using visible social proof, familiar routines, and practical guidance to help parents integrate reading into daily life.

During this phase, QRF also conducted extensive consultations with local and international organizations to validate findings and refine intervention design. Experts from Save the Children, the Wonder Words program, USAID, and other literacy initiatives provided insights on operational models and best practices. Additionally, existing materials such as videos, images, and resources from QRF's PEP program were tested with parents to assess what resonated most. This rapid feedback loop helped refine the SBCC strategy, ensuring interventions were relevant and impactful.

Throughout this process, behavioral science experts, university advisors, and practitioners played a key role—refining the research methodology, study design, and intervention strategies. Their insights helped shape Iqrali's approach, ensuring it was both evidence-based and contextually relevant.

By the end of Phase 2, the groundwork had been laid for Iqrali's program design and implementation. The team leveraged findings from secondary research and international SBCC case studies to finalize intervention strategies, ensuring that Iqrali was both evidence-based and scalable.

PHASE 2 RESEARCH FINDINGS: TAILORED MESSAGING FOR IMPACT

- **Behavioral Stages:** Parents were at different stages of behavior adoption—from awareness to maintenance—highlighting the need for segmented messaging.

- **Emotionally Resonant Messaging:** Messaging that emphasized emotional and relational benefits, such as bonding with children, resonated most strongly with mothers of older children.

- **Influence of Role Models:** Messages showcasing fathers reading and interacting positively with their children had a significant impact on shifting norms and perceptions.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCALABLE IMPACT

By 2023,

Iqrali had taken shape as a fully conceptualized program, built on years of research, refinement, and strategic collaboration. Recognizing that lasting change requires collective effort, QRF prioritized ecosystem-wide collaboration rather than isolated interventions. Therefore, the program worked closely with government bodies, NGOs, and other key players to align efforts and integrate literacy interventions into existing systems rather than building from scratch. Moreover, a co-design workshop brought together government representatives, consortium members, a creative agency, and the QRF team to jointly develop the program's strategy, vision, and direction. This emphasis on collaboration ensured that Iqrali's interventions were aligned with national priorities and broader education efforts.

To solidify this shared responsibility for literacy, QRF conducted an interest-versus-power mapping exercise, identifying key stakeholders and their roles in Jordan's literacy ecosystem. This process helped engage a wider network beyond the NGO sector, strengthening Iqrali's potential for scalable, sustainable impact.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDED:

- **Technical Partners:** Provided expertise in behavioral science, education, and content development to drive evidence-based interventions.

- **Dissemination and Government Partners:** Reached diverse populations through community organizations and media outlets.

- **Donor Collaborations:** Offered financial backing, resource provision, and access to networks for broader dissemination.

- **Government and Civil Society Engagement:** Ensured alignment with national priorities and credibility within local communities.

THE ROLE OF DATA IN IQRALI

While partnerships enabled scalability, data ensured effectiveness. Insights from the Parental Behaviors in the Early Years Studies (Phase 1 and Phase 2) and segmentation research (see section "Target audience: The movable middle" below) identified key barriers to parental engagement, ensuring solutions targeted real behavioral challenges rather than simply raising awareness. Additionally, a flexible, iterative approach allowed QRF to test, refine, and adjust interventions in real time, ensuring strategies remained relevant and responsive. Robust monitoring and evaluation further guided program improvements while laying the foundation for national expansion.

This commitment to learning and adaptation aligns with Iqrali's Adaptive Management strategy.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Iqrali's dynamic, responsive management approach enabled it to thrive in a complex, evolving environment. By integrating regular evaluations and feedback, the program continuously refined its methods to maximize impact and efficiency while navigating challenges.

Key mechanisms included:

Frequent Monitoring

Using data to improve interventions, inform decisions, and align strategies.

Feedback Loops

Gathering diverse perspectives from stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Scenario Planning

Developing contingency plans and applying lessons from implementation.

For example, early feedback helped refine culturally relevant messaging and improve resource distribution for better outreach. During COVID-19, Iqrali quickly pivoted to digital platforms for focus group discussions, demonstrating its adaptability. This flexible, iterative approach remains central to Iqrali, reinforcing its resilience and effectiveness while offering a model for navigating the complexities of early childhood education and development.

TARGET BEHAVIOR: MAKING READING EASIER FOR PARENTS

Iqrali aimed to make reading with children more accessible and manageable by addressing three key barriers identified in research. Practical interventions, such as book gifting and WhatsApp nudges, provided resources and encouragement, while the program emphasized reading as a bonding experience rather than a chore.

A key innovation was reducing decision fatigue. By offering clear guidance and structured resources, Iqrali eliminated guesswork, making it easier for parents to start and sustain reading habits. Pre-selected books with engagement tips further simplified the process. Thereby, by embedding reading into daily routines, Iqrali empowered parents to take meaningful steps toward literacy development. This behavior-focused approach not only improved reading habits but also laid the groundwork for long-term educational success.

TARGET AUDIENCE: THE MOVEABLE MIDDLE

Iqrali's strategy was guided by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory[8], which explains how behaviors spread within a population. Rather than focusing solely on innovators—who adopt behaviors early without needing encouragement—or struggling to convince the late majority and laggards, Iqrali concentrated on the Moveable Middle, the segment most likely to shift behaviors with the right support.

| 2.5% | 13.5% | 34% | 34% | 16% |
| Innovators | Early Adopters | Early Majority | Late Majority | Laggards |

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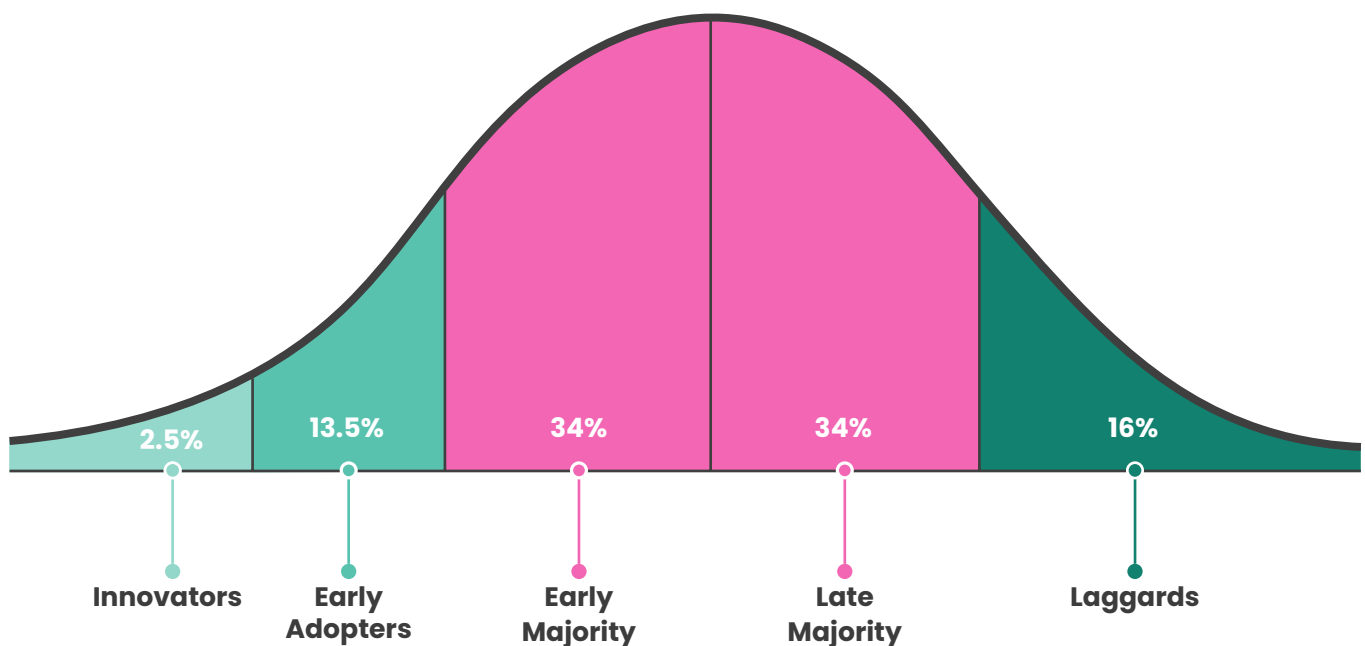
[8] Hoffmann, V. (2007). Book Review: Five editions (2003-1962) of Everett ROGERS: Diffusion of Innovations. Knowledge and Innovation Manage- ment, 64.

According to QRF's analysis of parental reading practices, the Moveable Middle consisted of two key subgroups:

Early Adopters

These are highly educated mothers, often employed, who already engage in reading activities with their children but do so inconsistently. They are the most open to influence and can act as role models for others.

Potential Readers

These are mothers in smaller households, primarily housewives, who share similar characteristics with Early Adopters but lack structured reading habits. They recognize the importance of reading but struggle with self-efficacy (a belief in their own ability to successfully support their child's learning), time constraints, or simply not knowing how to engage their child effectively.

By targeting these groups, Iqrali aimed to shift behaviors at scale. Early Adopters could reinforce reading as a social norm, while Potential Readers could adopt and sustain new habits with the support of tailored interventions. By focusing on these subgroups, Iqrali worked to trigger a tipping point in which reading with children would become a widespread, normalized practice in Jordanian households.

THE ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE IN IQRALI

Behavioral science is the study of human behavior, exploring how people make decisions and act based on psychological, social, and environmental factors. It provides evidence-based frameworks for understanding and influencing behaviors in practical, targeted ways.

For Iqrali, behavioral science was key to tackling the intention-action gap—the disconnect between parents' desire to read to their children and the challenges they face, such as fatigue, lack of guidance, or competing priorities. By designing interventions grounded in behavioral insights, Iqrali made reading more accessible, rewarding, and sustainable. Practical tools, clear guidance, and motivational support enabled parents to turn intentions into consistent action, fostering long-lasting literacy habits in homes across Jordan.

USER JOURNEY
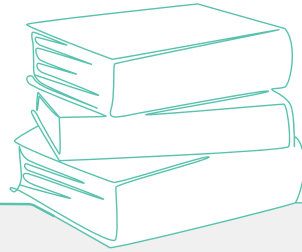
Iqrali's journey-mapping process ensured that every step aligned with parents' experiences and needs, transforming reading from an unfamiliar activity into a cherished habit. The journey began with:

Awareness
sparked by mass media campaigns and community outreach that positioned literacy as a home-based activity.

Consideration phase
In the consideration phase, relatable stories and videos highlighted the emotional and developmental benefits of reading, inspiring parents to take the first step.

Trial phase
As parents moved into the trial phase, Iqrali provided practical tools to make reading feel achievable. Book gifting ensured access to resources, while WhatsApp nudges offered timely encouragement, goal-setting, and simple tips to help parents integrate reading into daily routines.

Adoption phase
In the adoption phase, parents began reading regularly, supported by social proof, community engagement, and peer stories, reinforcing reading as a normal, celebrated activity.

Sustainability phase
The final sustainability phase aims to make reading a lasting part of family life, with ongoing encouragement, fresh resources, and community support to maintain engagement

Parents see and hear about reading with chidlren throughout their social environment: from the pediatrician, at prayers, online, at the mall, at work, on the radio, from their mother who saw it on a TV talkshow, from their father who was given a flier at work

Parents look for ways to use their new awareness and find ideas, information and resources. An organized multi-partner campaign (QR codes in parks, clinics, malls, salient giveways, social media) directs them to the new parenting platform and/or local accessible resources

Resources are easy to access, engaging, supportive and targeted. Parents find related and salient information. Reading feels accessible and feasible. Reminders support ongoing engagement.

Social proof influences more and more people to engage with information and ideas

Parents are supported to turn the motivation generated by information and social proof into action through specifically targeted interventions

Evidence is shared and feeds into ongoing comm#unciation and refined resources and support offering through a range of partnerships

New parents encounter well established, effective support for reading in their social environment and incorproate it into their family routines

Through this step-by-step approach, Iqrali isn't just promoting a behavior; it is nurturing a transformation, empowering parents to take an active role in their children's literacy development. Each phase is a testament to the program's belief that lasting change begins with small, meaningful actions supported by a clear, compassionate roadmap. As an ongoing program, Iqrali continues to evolve with more learning and changes expected in the future.

CHALLENGES

The journey from strategy to implementation was not without obstacles. QRF had to navigate complex decisions, external disruptions, and competing priorities while ensuring its long-term vision remained intact.

⬧ Narrowing Behavior Selection

Choosing a single focus within Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) proved challenging. While reading, talking, singing, and playing all contribute to emergent literacy, QRF needed to prioritize. Early discussions, influenced by stakeholder expectations and internal debates, initially considered a broad school readiness approach before focusing on reading and talking—the behaviors most aligned with its literacy-first strategy.

⬧ Adapting Research During a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the research timeline, forcing QRF to rethink data collection methods. Traditional surveys shifted to a mix of virtual and in-person approaches, requiring creative solutions to maintain data quality and engagement. While challenging, the disruption created space to reassess methodologies, ensuring they were behaviorally informed and well-aligned with program goals.

⬧ Balancing Speed with Rigor

The extended research timeline, compounded by the pandemic, created pressure to accelerate progress. However, the team remained committed to methodological integrity, prioritizing quality over speed to ensure findings effectively shaped program design.

⬧ Managing Stakeholder Expectations

Securing buy-in from board members, partners, and donors required clear communication about timelines, resources, and long-term impact. While stakeholders often expected quick implementation, QRF emphasized the value of evidence-based design, requiring persistence and strategic framing to gain support.

⬧ Aligning Program Components

Integrating existing initiatives, such as the Parent Education Program (PEP) and K&J apps, with Iqrali's literacy roadmap required careful coordination. Lessons from these projects, like the PEP chatbot (now used in WhatsApp interventions), were adapted for Iqrali, demonstrating the importance of leveraging past innovations while ensuring alignment.

💡 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Embrace Iteration and Adaptability

The need for flexibility extended beyond the pandemic, as evolving insights, expert guidance, and shifts in Jordan's education landscape continuously refined the approach. This process highlighted how adapting quickly to new knowledge can preserve both rigor and momentum.

Balance Ambition with Focus

While ECED is broad, narrowing focus is essential for impact. Internal debates and stakeholder consultations strengthened buy-in and ensured that ambitions were aligned with organizational capacity and long-term goals.

Leverage Collaboration and Expertise

Engaging a brain trust of behavioral science experts, stakeholders, and international partners enriched the research process, ensuring interventions were evidence-based and culturally relevant.

Prioritize Patience and Rigor

Despite pressure for faster implementation, the team remained committed to quality. Deliberately delaying program design until data-driven insights were available ensured every decision was grounded in evidence, reinforcing the importance of long-term impact over short-term speed.

SOLUTION TESTING, EVALUATION, SCALING
THE ROAD AHEAD
(2024–2026)

WHAT HAPPENED

This phase marked the culmination of years of research, planning, decision making and collaboration, bringing Iqrali's vision into the real world. In 2024, QRF began piloting interventions that had been co- designed with key consortium partners. This was the year to test the program's strategies, gathering real-world feedback to refine solutions and assess their feasibility for scale. The process was iterative and adaptive, as QRF prioritized evidence over assumptions to ensure interventions resonated with families and addressed lived barriers to literacy.

The piloted interventions were designed to address barriers identified during earlier research, including limited awareness, resource constraints, and time pressures.

Key interventions included:

Vaccination Appointments as Literacy Touchpoints

Building on the insight that parents regularly visit health centers, QRF collaborated with midwives to distribute children's books during vaccination appointments. With high child vaccination rates in Jordan, this approach leveraged an existing touchpoint to effectively engage parents and promote literacy. Midwives also demonstrated effective reading techniques, emphasizing the importance of integrating literacy activities into daily routines. WhatsApp nudges through a chatbot mechanism followed these appointments, offering parents goal setting for reading with their children, reminders and tips to sustain engagement over time.

Community-Based Literacy Workshops

Partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs), Iqrali organized workshops where trainers explained the value of early literacy and modelled practical strategies for reading with children. These sessions provided hands-on guidance and encouraged parents to share their experiences, fostering a sense of community and mutual learning. Mothers also read with their children during the sessions, received a book package, and signed up for the chatbot/WhatsApp messages, like the approach used in the vaccination intervention.

Mosque-Based Literacy Promotion

Recognizing the influence of religious leaders, particularly on fathers, QRF collaborated with mosques to embed literacy messaging into sermons and distribute reading materials. Imams encouraged fathers to view reading as an act of nurturing and bonding, aligning it with values of care and education emphasized in religious teachings. Additionally, Imams demonstrated the reading activity during sessions where children attended with their fathers, further reinforcing the practice and its importance.

Currently, Iqrali adopts an iterative, evidence-based approach, emphasizing early testing before finalizing designs to refine interventions effectively. Quick feasibility studies—conducted before full-scale pilots—help gauge initial perceptions, allowing for rapid adjustments before rigorous impact evaluations.

The program engages partners flexibly—sometimes they are deeply involved during testing phases or strategically updated during refinement—to optimize processes, adjust messaging, and enhance scalability. Iqrali's phased scaling plan ensures structured progress: two years of testing (2024–2025), followed by two years of adaptation and three years of scaling and evaluation. This approach ensures interventions are impactful, adaptable, and responsive to real-world needs.

By addressing behavioral and structural barriers through relatable messaging, book gifting, and trusted community touchpoints, Iqrali continues to develop culturally relevant, scalable solutions. Its integration of behavioral science and collaborative design positions it as a transformative model for early literacy development.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS LOOK PROMISING

These interventions are tested through pilots in diverse contexts, such as urban and rural vaccination centers, to ensure scalability and cultural relevance.

Results from the four-month pilot randomised control trial (RCT) showed that more than half of parents who received the intervention and had never read to their child before reported reading to their child in the past three days. Additionally, of the 62% of parents who set a reading goal after visiting the health center, 40% set a reading goal in the week before survey administration. More than half (66%) met their goal to some degree, and 27% achieved it fully. With regards to habit formation, 27% of parents who received the intervention reported having a reading routine, whereby they read to their child at the same time each day or in similar situations.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A:
FIVE-STEP CHECKLIST FOR
MOBILIZING EVIDENCE

The Iqrali Program distils key lessons and strategies into a five-step checklist for driving impactful change. These are based on the five key principles as mentioned at the beginning of the guide. Each step is designed to guide organizations through the complex process of identifying challenges, designing effective interventions, and ensuring sustainable impact. These steps offer a pathway for translating evidence into action, ensuring that programs remain adaptable, scalable, and culturally relevant.

☑ 1. WHAT'S YOUR UNIQUE ROLE IN THE ECOSYSTEM?

Description: Conduct a thorough analysis of the ecosystem, mapping key stakeholders, resources, and contextual factors. Reflect on your organization's strengths, expertise, and niche. Align your focus with unmet needs in the ecosystem to maximize impact.

- ◇ Assess your organization's strengths and expertise using tools like SWOT analysis and the business model canvas.
- ◇ Map key stakeholders their roles, influence, and priorities, identify existing resources and partnerships, and explore opportunities for collaboration with other actors to maximize impact using stakeholder mapping tools.
- ◇ Identify gaps and unmet needs in the ecosystem where your organization can create impact.
- ◇ Define how your organization can create the most value by aligning its mission with ecosystem needs.
- ◇ Secure internal buy-in from leadership and key stakeholders for your strategic focus.
- ◇ Address potential constraints (e.g., funding, capacity) to ensure feasibility.
- ◇ Analyze external factors (e.g., cultural, political, economic) that affect the issue using tools like PESTLE.
- ◇ Pinpoint power dynamics and barriers within the ecosystem that could influence your work.

☑ 2. ARE YOU READY TO ADJUST YOUR APPROACH AS YOU LEARN?

Description: Continuously challenge assumptions by using data to validate beliefs, identify gaps, and guide evidence-based decisions. Foster a growth mindset and embrace adaptive management to refine strategies, remain flexible, and ensure programs stay effective and responsive to change.

- ◇ Challenge assumptions by using data to uncover hidden issues and validate (or refute) existing beliefs.
- ◇ Collect and analyze data continuously to identify gaps, refine hypotheses, and guide decisions based on evidence rather than assumptions.
- ◇ Cultivate a growth mindset by fostering a culture of learning, collaboration, and resilience at all levels of the organization.
- ◇ Balance rigor with action by knowing when to transition from research to implementation, ensuring progress without sacrificing quality.
- ◇ Develop an adaptive management plan to systematically track progress, outcomes, and potential deviations from goals using the Cynefin Framework.

- Implement frequent monitoring to use real-time data for assessing outcomes and improving interventions.
- Incorporate feedback loops to gather diverse perspectives from stakeholders, beneficiaries, and data sources.
- Use scenario planning to create flexible contingency plans for addressing potential disruptions or shifts in context.
- Facilitate periodic reviews to ensure interventions remain aligned with goals and adapt to changes effectively.

☑ 3. CREATE SPACE TO DO IT WELL: THE DICHOTOMY OF QUICK WINS VS. SLOW AND STEADY

Description: Empower your teams to embrace evidence-based practices by managing expectations, allocating adequate time for research, and fostering capacity-building. Support teams by transparently communicating the timeline and effort required to stakeholders, while implementing strategies to balance progress with learning and development.

- Allocate sufficient time and resources for data collection, research, and testing.
- Manage expectations with stakeholders (internal and external) by clearly communicating timelines, goals, and the complexity of behavior change efforts.
- Leverage existing programs and progress to demonstrate interim achievements and maintain momentum.
- Balance capacity-building with external expertise by fostering internal learning while working with experts.
- Create space for iterative learning by shielding teams from undue pressure and providing them with the necessary flexibility to innovate.
- Develop a small-scale pilot plan to test the feasibility and effectiveness of your intervention in a controlled setting.
- Set clear success metrics to measure the impact of the pilot against the desired behavior change.
- Use iterative testing cycles (e.g., test-learn-adapt) to refine interventions based on pilot results.
- Collect qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate both outcomes and user experiences.
- Engage stakeholders throughout the pilot to validate findings and build support for scaling successful interventions.

☑ *4. IS YOUR PROJECT BUILT TO SCALE?*

Description: Design interventions that are simple, cost-effective, and adaptable, by creating partnerships, and aligning with policies to ensure sustainable impact at scale.

⬥ Design interventions with scalability in mind by ensuring they are simple, cost-effective, and adaptable to different contexts.

⬥ Develop partnerships with government, NGOs, and private sector actors to expand reach and resources.

⬥ Align interventions with policies and systems to ensure sustainability and integration into existing   frameworks.

⬥ Develop clear communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed, engaged, and invested.

⬥ Build trust and maintain relationships by addressing concerns, incorporating feedback, and demonstrating results.

⬥ Establish roles and responsibilities through collaboration frameworks, ensuring accountability and ownership.

☑ *5. BUILD SOLUTIONS THAT ARE SUITED TO THE PROBLEM YOU ARE TRYING TO SOLVE*

Description: Understand your audience by segmenting them, defining the target behaviors, and mapping their journey to identify how to guide them toward sustained change.

⬥ Segment your audience into actionable groups based on shared characteristics, barriers, and motivators using theories like the Diffusion of Innovation theory.

⬥ Narrowly define the specific target behavior for each segment, focusing on the change you want to achieve using frameworks like the BASIC framework.

⬥ Break down the journey into key decisions and actions people must take to reach the desired outcome using tools like Behavioral Mapping and Blueprinting. Rather than focusing on attitudes or intentions, map out the specific choices and behaviors that need to shift.

⬥ Develop hypotheses for why each step might fail. Consider structural, psychological, and contextual barriers that could prevent follow-through using frameworks like the BASIC framework.. Use field research and behavioral diagnostics to refine and test these hypotheses.

⬥ Identify intervention points within the user journey where behavior change can be most effectively   influenced.

⬥ Bridge the intention-action gap and move beyond awareness raising by designing interventions that make the desired behaviors easy, attractive, social, and timely using tools like the EAST framework.

⬥ Design interventions that address identified barriers and leverage enablers for the target behaviors.

[9] Hoffmann, V. (2007). Book Review: Five editions (2003-1962) of Everett ROGERS: Diffusion of Innovations. Knowledge and Innovation Manage- ment, 64.

[10] Hansen, P. G. (2019). Tools and ethics for applied behavioral insights: the BASIC toolkit. Organization for Economic Cooporation and Develop- ment, OECD.

[11] White, A., & Trower, M. R. (n.d.). Behavioral Mapping and Blueprinting Cheat Sheet: A quick reference guide to creating behavioral maps and behavioral blueprints. Center for Advanced Hindsight.

[12] Hansen, P. G. (2019). Tools and ethics for applied behavioral insights: the BASIC toolkit. Organization for Economic Cooporation and Development, OECD

[13] Behavioral Insights Team. (2024). EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioral insights (Revised and updated edition). Behavioral Insights Team.

APPENDIX B :
TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS

NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK

The Nurturing Care Framework, developed by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the World Bank Group provides a roadmap for ensuring optimal early childhood development from pregnancy to age three. It emphasizes five key components essential for a child's healthy development:

1. **Good Health:**
   Access to quality maternal and child health services.

2. **Adequate Nutrition:**
   Proper nourishment for mothers and children.

3. **Security and Safety:**
   Protection from harm and a stable environment.

4. **Responsive Caregiving:**
   Prompt and appropriate responses to a child's needs.

5. **Opportunities for Early Learning:**
   Stimulating interactions to promote cognitive and emotional growth.

The framework is intended for policymakers, program managers, and stakeholders across sectors such as health, education, and social protection. It guides the development and implementation of policies and services that support families and caregivers in providing nurturing care, especially during the critical early years when children's brains are most sensitive to environmental influences.

Implementing the Nurturing Care Framework is particularly crucial in contexts where children are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential due to factors like poverty, malnutrition, or lack of access to education and healthcare. By adopting this framework, communities and nations can work towards ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive and develop to their full potential.

You may access the resource at:

https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle /10665/272603/9789241514064-eng.pdf
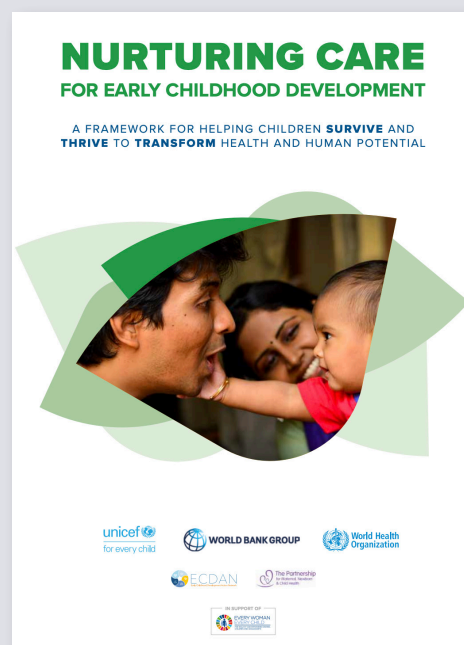
HOLISTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HECDI) FRAMEWORK

The Holistic Early Childhood Development Index (HECDI) Framework, developed by UNESCO, provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and monitoring early childhood development. It identifies key targets, sub targets, and indicators designed to evaluate the well-being of young children at both country and international levels. The framework emphasizes a holistic perspective, integrating domains such as health, nutrition, education, social protection, and parental support.
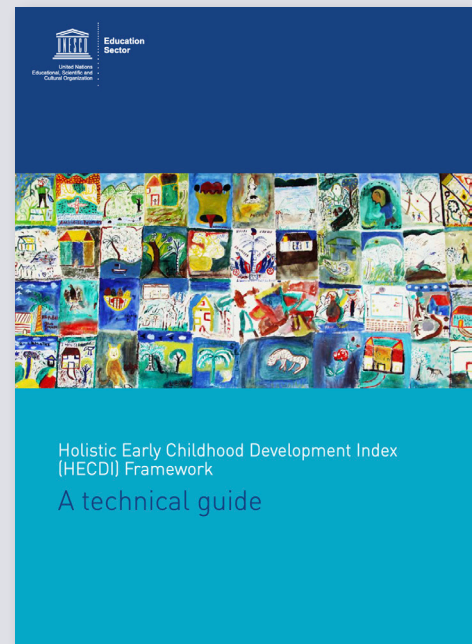
Key features of the HECDI Framework include:

1. **Targets and Indicators:** A structured set of measurable outcomes for monitoring progress across various dimensions of child development.

2. **Guiding Questions:** A process to help organizations evaluate their unique strengths, identify niche areas, and pinpoint gaps that may need external collaboration or partnerships.

3. **Holistic Perspective:** Encourages inter-sectoral collaboration by linking policies, programs, and child/family outcomes.

This framework can inspire organizations to adopt a holistic and data-driven approach when designing early childhood interventions, ensuring systemic gaps are addressed and meaningful outcomes are achieved.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000229188

Holistic Early Childhood Development Index (HECDI) Framework
A technical guide

PESTLE ANALYSIS

The PESTLE Analysis is a strategic tool designed to assess the external factors that can influence a program or organization. It evaluates six critical dimensions:

◇ **Political:** Examines governmental policies, regulations, and political stability.

◇ **Economic:** Considers economic conditions, funding availability, and market trends.

◇ **Social:** Analyses cultural norms, demographics, and societal attitudes.

◇ **Technological:** Looks at technological advancements and access to innovation.

◇ **Legal:** Reviews legal frameworks, compliance requirements, and potential legal risks.

◇ **Environmental:** Considers ecological and environmental factors that could affect the program.

For Iqrali, the PESTLE Analysis provided insights into the systemic barriers and opportunities within Jordan's educational landscape. It informed strategic decisions by ensuring interventions were contextually grounded and aligned with external conditions.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning framework used to assess internal and external factors that impact an organization, project, or individual. It is divided into four key components:

◇ **Strengths (S):** Internal attributes or resources that give an advantage over competitors. Examples include strong brand reputation, skilled workforce, advanced technology, or proprietary assets.

◇ **Weaknesses (W):** Internal factors that may hinder performance or competitive standing, such as limited resources, outdated technology, skill gaps, or poor location.

◇ **Opportunities (O):** External factors or trends that the organization can capitalize on to grow, improve, or gain a competitive edge. Examples include emerging markets, regulatory changes, technological advancements, or shifts in consumer preferences.

⬦ **Threats (T):** External factors or challenges that could negatively impact the organization, such as increased competition, economic downturns, changing regulations, or negative public perception.

By examining these elements, SWOT helps organizations identify their current position, leverage their strengths, address weaknesses, seize opportunities, and mitigate threats, ultimately supporting informed decision-making and strategic planning.

BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS (BMC)

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a visual framework that helps organizations define and communicate their value proposition, operational strategies, and financial models. It consists of nine interconnected components:

1. **Key Partners:** Identifies essential external collaborators.
2. **Key Activities:** Highlights the critical actions needed to deliver value.
3. **Key Resources:** Lists the assets required for success.
4. **Value Proposition:** Defines the unique benefit offered to stakeholders.
5. **Customer Relationships:** Describes how relationships are managed and maintained.
6. **Channels:** Outlines how value is delivered to stakeholders.
7. **Customer Segments:** Identifies target audiences or beneficiaries.
8. **Cost Structure:** Details the major costs associated with the program.
9. **Revenue Streams:** Explains how the program generates or sustains funding.

In the context of Iqrali, the BMC was crucial for mapping out the program's operational and strategic elements. It helped QRF identify key activities and partnerships necessary for delivering literacy-focused interventions, ensuring that resources were effectively allocated to maximize impact.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 https://www.strategyzer.com/library/the-business-model-canvas

THEORY OF CHANGE

The Theory of Change (ToC) is a strategic framework used to define how and why a desired change is expected to occur in a particular context. It maps out the pathway from specific activities to long-term outcomes, identifying the causal links and assumptions underlying the process. Key components of a Theory of Change include:

◇ **Inputs** - e.g., staff time, beneficiaries, workshop materials, volunteers

◇ **Activities** - e.g., creative writing workshops with young people

◇ **Outputs** - e.g., number of young people worked with, number of workshops delivered

◇ **Outcomes** - e.g., young person's writing skills improve, increased interest in literature, increased self confidence

The ToC provides a clear roadmap for aligning goals with interventions. By outlining the logical progression from activities to outcomes, the ToC ensures efforts are evidence-based and outcome-focused. This framework also facilitates continuous evaluation and adaptation, ensuring programs remain responsive to emerging insights and challenges.

You may access a resource at:

🌐 https://figurative.org.uk/resource/theory- of-change-guide-and-template/

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT COUNTRY SITUATION ANALYSIS (ECD CSA)

The Early Childhood Development Country Situation Analysis (ECD CSA), developed jointly by WHO and UNICEF, is a practical tool for assessing the state of early childhood development (ECD) services, policies, and systems within a country. It is grounded in the guiding principles of the European Framework on Early Childhood Development and provides a structured approach to understanding gaps and opportunities in ECD provisions.

Key features of the ECD CSA include:

◇ **Comprehensive Coverage:** The tool evaluates multiple domains critical to ECD, including health, nutrition, education, social protection, and responsive caregiving.

◇ **Gap Identification:** By mapping existing services and policies, the tool helps identify critical gaps, such as low enrolment in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) or insufficient access to health and social services.

◇ **Stakeholder Involvement:** The assessment process encourages participation from a variety of stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society, service providers, and parents, ensuring a multi-perspective understanding of ECD systems.

Actionable Outcomes: The findings from the assessment can be used to inform national dialogue, shape new policies, and prioritize investments in underfunded or underdeveloped areas of ECD.

World Health Organization
European Region

unicef for every child

Early Childhood Development country situation analysis
Assessment tool and methodological guidance

This tool is ideal for organizations aiming to establish a baseline assessment of their ECD ecosystem or to monitor progress in achieving optimal developmental outcomes for children. Its participatory and evidence- based approach makes it a powerful resource for driving systemic change in ECD policies and practices.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO- EURO-2024-9614-49386-73866

CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK

The Cynefin Framework, developed by David J. Snowden, is a decision-making tool designed to help organizations navigate complexity and uncertainty. It categorizes situations into five domains, providing tailored strategies for each:

◇ **Simple:** Stable environments with clear cause-and-effect relationships where best practices can be applied.

◇ **Complicated:** Situations requiring expert analysis and good practices to determine the optimal solution.

◇ **Complex:** Scenarios with emerging patterns that require experimentation and iterative learning (probe-sense-respond).

◇ **Chaotic:** Crises demanding immediate action to stabilize the situation before further analysis.

◇ **Disorder:** Situations lacking clarity, where breaking down the problem into constituent domains is necessary.

The Cynefin Framework is particularly useful for adaptive management, as it encourages leaders to match their responses to the context of the challenge they are facing. By fostering an understanding of complexity, the framework supports iterative decision-making and the identification of emerging opportunities and risks. It is a valuable tool for programs like Iqrali, where dynamic environments necessitate continuous learning and adjustment.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Kurtz_Snowden.pdf

🌐 https://hbr.org/2007/11/a-leaders-framework-for-decision-making

BASIC FRAMEWORK

The BASIC Framework (Behavior, Analysis, Strategy, Intervention, and Change) is a practical and ethical toolkit for applying behavioral insights in program design. Developed by the OECD, it provides a systematic method for creating interventions that are evidence-based and contextually   grounded.

Key stages of the BASIC Framework include:

◇ **Behavior:** Identifying the specific behavior to target, ensuring it is measurable and action oriented.

◇ **Analysis:** Investigating the underlying barriers, enablers, and contextual factors influencing the behavior.

◇ **Strategy:** Designing an intervention plan that incorporates behavioral insights and aligns with organizational goals.

◇ **Intervention:** Implementing the plan while considering scalability, adaptability, and ethical implications.

◇ **Change:** Evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention and ensuring sustainability through iterative learning and adaptation.

The BASIC Framework emphasizes ethical considerations, encouraging practitioners to balance effectiveness with respect for autonomy and equity. Its structured approach is particularly useful for programs like Iqrali, where understanding complex human behaviors and designing impactful interventions are critical to success.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/tools-and-ethics-for-applied-behavioural-insights-the-basic-toolkit_9ea76a8f-en.html

BEHAVIORAL MAPPING AND BLUEPRINTING

The Behavioral Mapping and Blueprinting tool, developed by the Center for Advanced Hindsight, provides a structured approach to understanding the user journey and optimizing behavioral interventions. It focuses on defining measurable target behaviors and mapping the end-to-end steps required to achieve them.

Key features of Behavioral Mapping and Blueprinting include:

◇ **Target Behavior Definition:** Clearly defines action-based, specific, and measurable behaviors to guide intervention design.

◇ **Step Mapping:** Maps both visible (user-facing) and invisible (system/ process) steps that contribute to achieving the target behavior.

◇ **Barrier Identification:** Identifies structural and psychological barriers that prevent users from completing desired actions, including friction points and cognitive biases.

◇ **Opportunity Analysis:** Highlights areas where motivation can be enhanced to improve behavioral outcomes.

◇ **Data Integration:** Encourages layering on relevant metrics, such as completion rates and time spent on each step, to contextualize and refine interventions.
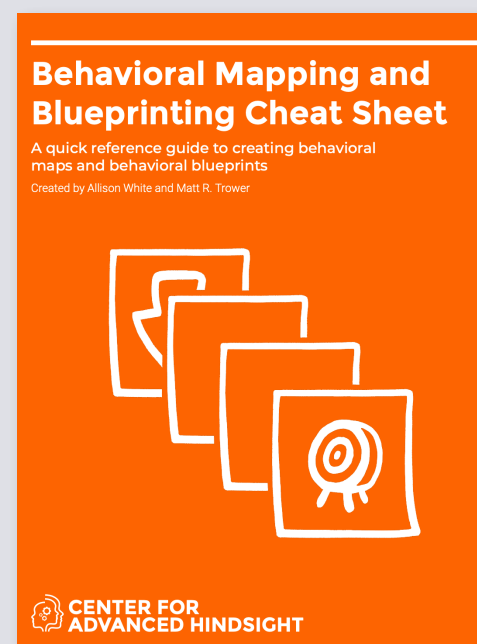
This tool is particularly valuable for initiatives like Iqrali, which aim to encourage recurring behaviors such as parents reading to their children. By providing a detailed understanding of the user journey, it supports the design of targeted interventions that address specific challenges and opportunities.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 https://advanced-hindsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Behavioral-Mapping-and-Blueprinting-Cheat-Sheet.pdf

TESTS FRAMEWORK

The TESTS framework, developed by the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT), is a structured methodology designed to guide practitioners through the process of applying behavioral insights to policy challenges. The acronym TESTS stands for:

1. **Target:** Clearly define the specific behavior you aim to influence. This involves identifying measurable outcomes and understanding the context in which the behavior occurs.

2. **Explore:** Investigate the underlying factors affecting the target behavior. This may include conducting qualitative and quantitative research to uncover barriers and enablers.

3. **Solution:** Develop interventions based on behavioral science principles to address the identified factors. Tools like BIT's EAST framework (Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely) can aid in designing effective solutions

4. **Trial:** Implement the proposed interventions on a small scale to test their effectiveness. Employing robust evaluation methods, such as Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), helps determine the impact of the interventions.

5. **Scale:** If the trial demonstrates positive results, expand the implementation to a broader audience or context, ensuring the intervention is adaptable and sustainable.

The TESTS framework is particularly useful for policymakers, organizations, and practitioners seeking a systematic approach to designing, testing, and scaling behavioral interventions. By following these steps, one can ensure that interventions are evidence-based and tailored to the specific behavioral challenges at hand.

| Target | Explore | Solution | Trail | Scale |

COM-B

The COM-B model, developed by Susan Michie and her colleagues at the University College London (UCL) in 2011, is a behavior change framework that identifies three essential components for any behavior (B) to occur:

1. **Capability** (C): An individual's psychological and physical ability to perform the behavior, including knowledge and skills.

2. **Opportunity** (O): External factors that make the behavior possible or prompt it, encompassing both physical and social opportunities.

3. **Motivation** (M): Internal processes that direct and energize behavior, comprising reflective processes (e.g., planning and decision-making) and automatic processes (e.g., habits and impulses).
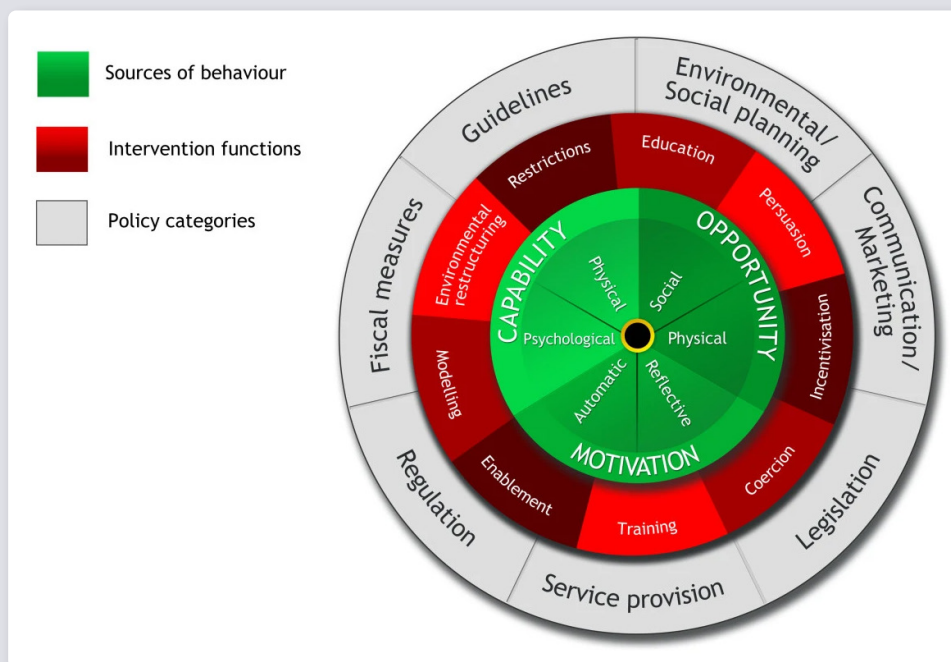
These components interact dynamically, influencing one another to shape behavior. The COM-B model serves as the core of the broader Behavior Change Wheel (BCW) framework, providing a systematic approach to understanding and influencing behavior.

The COM-B model is particularly useful when designing interventions aimed at behavior change. By analyzing and addressing deficiencies in capability, opportunity, or motivation, practitioners can develop targeted strategies to facilitate desired behaviors. This model has been applied across various fields, including public health, organizational behavior, and social marketing, to understand and influence behaviors effectively.

You may access the resource at:

🌐 https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/ articles/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42

EAST FRAMEWORK

The EAST Framework (Easy, Attractive, Social, and Timely) was developed by the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) to provide a simple yet effective approach for designing interventions that influence behavior. It focuses on four key principles:

◇ **Easy:** Simplify the process by removing friction points, making the desired behavior effortless. For example, reducing the steps required for parents to access reading materials can significantly increase participation.

◇ **Attractive:** Capture attention and make the behavior appealing through incentives, personalization, or design. For instance, creating visually engaging and personalized reading materials for parents and children.

◇ **Social:** Leverage the influence of social norms and peer behavior. Highlighting how other parents are actively reading to their children can motivate similar actions.

◇ **Timely:** Deliver interventions at moments when individuals are most likely to act. For example, sending reminders to parents at bedtime, a natural moment for reading.
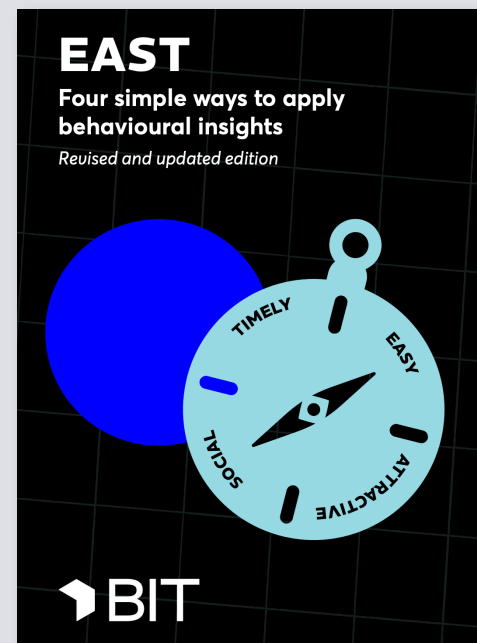
The EAST Framework is highly adaptable and particularly useful for early childhood education programs like Iqrali. It offers actionable insights for crafting interventions that resonate with target audiences, ensuring they are intuitive, engaging, and impactful.

You may access the resource at:

https://www.bi.team/ publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioral-insights/

ABOUT US:

مؤسسة الملكة رانيا
QUEEN RANIA FOUNDATION

QUEEN RANIA FOUNDATION

The Queen Rania Foundation for Education and Development (QRF) is a pioneering organization dedicated to transforming education in Jordan and the Arab world. Established by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah, QRF aims to ensure that every child receives quality education, fostering skills and knowledge essential for the 21st century. By leveraging innovative research, technology, and strategic partnerships, QRF works to address educational challenges and create scalable solutions that promote equity and excellence. Rooted in a vision of empowerment through education, QRF is committed to unlocking the potential of young minds and shaping a brighter future for generations to come.

Contact us at https://www.qrf.org

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee includes Sam Sternin, Stuart Mathers, and Dante Castillo. Sam Sternin brings over 18 years of expertise in international development and humanitarian response across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia, with a strong focus on behavioral and organizational change. Stuart Mathers has led initiatives on evidence mobilization, professional development, and early childhood education, shaping impactful policies and practices in his roles at the Education Endowment Foundation and the UK Department for Education. Dante Castillo, a sociologist and researcher with a master's degree from the London School of Economics, has dedicated his career to social research and innovation in education, particularly in Latin America, as part of SUMMA.

CUBIC @ SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children is the leading independent organization for children, working in 117 countries to ensure children survive, learn and are protected. Launched by Save the Children in April 2020, the Center for Utilizing Behavioral Insights for Children (CUBIC) is the world's first applied behavioral science team focusing specifically on the world's most marginalized children's rights and welfare. Our mission is to create positive change for children by applying behavioral science.

Contact us at allison.zelkowitz@savethechildren.org

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