



The quality assurance of Palestinian kindergarten education in the light of Japanese standards

Mahmoud Obaid ^{a 1} 

^aArab American University, Palestine

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to promote quality development throughout kindergarten. The quality assessment system consists of a knowledge base, tools, procedures, and goals for key actors on different levels. Therefore, the present research paper is an attempt to know the quality assurance of Palestinian kindergarten education in the light of Japanese standards. The researcher have purposely selected a number of research papers and reviewed them so as to highlight not only the reality of kindergarten education, but also to emphasize the global interest in developing and assuring the quality of education provided at kindergarten schools. Much focus has been made on the Japanese experience in the field of kindergarten experience and the methods adopted to develop and enhance the quality of pre-school education in Japan. More importantly, an attempt to highlight the importance of the inclusive kindergarten has been made. The researcher has found that there is a global tendency to assure and enhance the quality of education provided at kindergarten schools. However, this important field of education is still below the level especially in the developing countries like Palestine. The point is that the kindergarten programs in Palestine need to open new branches so as to cover all parts of the country and ultimately target all Palestinian disabled children.

Keywords: Kindergarten education; quality assurance; Palestine; Japan; pre-school education; inclusive kindergarten; Japanese standards

1. Introduction

Pre-school education, also known as kindergarten education, is the cornerstone in the world of education in the sense that it is the first stage at which children acquire the basics of knowledge, life and the world. "Frederick Froebel formed the first kinder garten in Germany in 1837" (Dhuey, 2011). Other pioneers of kindergarten education are Dewey and Piaget (ibid). They have different views concerning kindergarten education. "Dewey emphasized the importance of social context in a child's understanding of self in relation to others... Piaget believed in learning taking place through problem solving and in the ability of teachers to facilitate that learning" (ibid). Some scholars emphasized the development of developing learning skills in kindergarten, "An important part of the kindergarten curriculum could be learning skills that will smooth the transition to the variety of learning situations" (Wilkinson, 1988). Others focus on problem-solving processes "The construction of a model or

¹ Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Mahmoud2.Obaid@aaup.edu

representation of a problem situation is one of the most fundamental problem-solving processes” (Carpenter, Ansell, Franke, Fennema & Weisbeck, 1993).

Kindergarten education aims at developing children at the social, psychological and intellectual levels. “The contemporary kindergarten program is aimed at opening the way for maximum growth for all five-year-old children. Intellectual, affective, psychomotor, and social areas of the developmental model do not function separately or independently, but rather as a whole (Yawkey & Silvern, 1976). Moreover, Kindergarten can ultimately be viewed as the first chance for children to start understanding that school is a place for both learning and working. In kindergartens, children will learn about many social activities like sharing, respecting the rights of others, taking turns, and taking care of themselves.

Researches on kindergarten have brought about what is known as compensatory preschool education programs (Barnett, 1992). The kindergarten program ultimately provides experiences of initial learning especially the experiences related to language development, creative skills, number concepts, problem-solving, and social as well as physical growth (Carpenter, Ansell, Franke, Fennema & Weisbeck, 1993). In this context, using concrete experiences at kindergarten schools, pupils are ultimately given the basics for perceiving, thinking, as well as problem solving. Moreover, educational experiences provide balance as well as variety among physical, spiritual, mental, and social activities in the sense that the child's awareness is ultimately extended from his first place; the home, to the classroom.

Therefore, kindergarten education is both academic and developmental. “Two different orientations (academic and developmental) have been consistently present in the discourse about kindergarten” (Russell, 2011). Apart from this, the classroom kindergarten is really a language-rich experience. Truly, students at kindergartens are introduced to a number of skills, including basic reading skills, which they acquire through what is known as shared reading experiences, poems, rhymes, classic stories, as well as stories created by the children themselves. Moreover, the modern technology is ultimately introduced as an effective learning tool. Visual skills as well as auditory discrimination skills, along with vocabulary development and left to right orientation, relationships between letters as well as sounds, whole word recognition, are ultimately taught in the context related to responding to children's literature as well as what is known as Houghton Mifflin program of integrated language arts.

The concept of assurance of quality in kindergarten education - early childhood education (ECE) - is an integral part of ensuring that children in kindergartens have an experience that effectively helps them in developing their skills and acquiring knowledge.

1.1 Kindergarten education in Palestine, Japan and Norway: Methods and Approaches of Quality Assurance

The Palestinian experience in kindergarten education differs from the Japanese and Norway experiences in many aspects related to objectives, methods and the nature of education provided at pre-school establishments. Despite the fact that Japan has now an advanced pre-school educational system, kindergarten education was not included as a compulsory part of the Japanese educational system in the first two decades of the last century. But this is not a point of concern since Japan has developed its kindergarten education. “Although kindergartens were not part of the compulsory education system in Japan, most parents were able to send their pre-school children for one if not two or more years to a professionally-run establishment” (Henry, 1986). More interestingly, the focus of Japanese kindergarten is social integration rather than the acquisition of basic skills. “The early acquisition of basic skills such as reading and writing is encouraged by mothers themselves...” (ibid). The point is that “some private kindergartens reinforce their teaching, but the more universal

expectation of early institutional education is concerned with other aspects of a child's preparation for school. It is the aim of this paper to describe and explain the nature of the concerns involved" (ibid).

According to the Japanese ministry of education, the first kindergarten was established in 1876. By the year 1914, Japan had almost 2000 kindergartens which were attended by 200000 children. Such Japanese pre-school establishments were not fully owned by the government. That is, 40% of Japanese kindergartens "were publicly owned" (Henry, 1986). Other kindergartens were religious in nature. They were owned and administered by churches and temples. Moreover, several kindergartens were devoted to teaching music and English, and few of them were academically oriented. Now Japan had more academically oriented kindergartens than before.

The nature of kindergarten educational system in the three countries reflect many differences. In Japan, for example, there are distinctions related to seniority and age groups. "Within one kindergarten, hierarchical distinctions are made between groups based on school years. Younger children are encouraged to watch and learn from the achievements of the older children, and a child from the final year may be assigned a new child to take care of in the early days of travel on the school bus" (Henry, 1986). The same rule is followed by the Norway kindergarten establishments. It is also practiced in the Palestinian kindergartens. But no final year child is assigned the role to take care of any new child. In this context, Japan focuses on the social aspect of dealing with kindergarten children. That is, the focus is made upon dividing children into groups and keeping them in the same peer groups for the whole period. "In many cases, children in Japan remain with the same peer group throughout the period of compulsory education" (ibid).

It should be noted that all advanced countries, including Japan and Norway, have digitized their educational systems. That is, technology has become an essential part of the educational systems of such countries. The Japanese experience in this regard is an obvious example. "Japanese children have access to a variety of technology-related activities in early childhood educational settings. However, many educators consider technology as one aspect of children's play, and should be used to enhance play" (Taylor, 2004).

On the other hand, Norway has been witnessing a great change in the field of education from kindergarten to the highest level of education. "Everything is under change, from kindergarten to graduate school, from cradle to doctoral defence" (Hernes, 1994). It has digitized its educational system, including the kindergarten education, and made information accessible to every child. Moreover, the country spends much on early childhood education. "Norway is among the OECD countries with the highest share of public income spent on early childhood education and care, and public funding for the kindergarten sector has strongly increased over the past 15 years, enabling a rapid expansion of service provision" (Engel, A., Barnett, W. S., Anders, Y., & Taguma, M., 2015). Reports also reflected that Japan spends much on its pre-school education. In this respect, Palestine spends less on its kindergartens.

Psychosocial support in kindergartens is as important as the education being provided. At this stage of education, children are more in need of acceptance and positive response to their psychosocial needs. In this respect, Palestine is different from Japan and Norway concerning the provision of psychosocial support in kindergartens. This is due to the conflict and violence taking place in Palestine as a result of the Israeli occupation. Being exposed to daily violence, Palestinian children therefore need more psychosocial support than other children in politically stabled countries like Japan and Norway. "In Palestine, there is a high awareness of the psychosocial challenges of a country in conflict and the long-lasting exposure to traumatic events; thus, many strategies have been developed for health promotion programs, both through national instances and by non-governmental organizations" (Al Ghalayini and Thabit, 2017; Joma et al., 2021).

Norway has no external kindergarten quality assurance. According to its educational system, kindergartens are subject to internal quality assessments. In this respect, children, at the individual and group levels, are assessed on an ongoing basis. Interaction among children, between children and their teachers as well as the interaction among the staff themselves is emphasized. Moreover, the Kindergarten Act works as a framework plan that organizes, describes and analyzes kindergartens. According to this Act, kindergartens are free to choose their methods as per the needs and requirements of the local circumstances.

Generally, the aim of assuring the quality of kindergarten education is to develop children at the educational, social, cultural and psychological levels. It is not an arbitrary process. Rather, it is a systematic process that is based on research, statistics, and various tools and resources of quality development. This systematic process allows kindergartens, their owners, local and national authorities to have direct access to information related to the kindergarten sector and its methods of assuring quality. In this respect, parents and all those interested in kindergarten education can get information about the state, methods and quality of kindergarten education. They are able to know much about the research, data, and analysis related to the kindergarten sector and its quality. In Norway, for instance, the Directorate for Education and Training annually collects data from kindergartens and carries out a survey to know the conditions in the pre-school establishments. Some voluntary tools are used in this process, including the Status Analysis, which is a reflection of pre-school establishments. This list includes the Kindergarten Parent Survey which is conducted on an annual basis.

2. Problem Statement

Kindergarten education, also known as pre-school education, is the essence of children's early development. Many advanced countries like Japan have paid attention to this important stage of education. In Palestine, as is the case in many developing countries, kindergarten education is still below the desired level in the sense that kindergarten programs fail to include all disabled children. Thus, the present research mainly seeks to show the reality of kindergarten education in Palestine and provide valuable recommendations that will hopefully help the concerned authorities in developing the programs of pre-school education in Palestine.

2.1 Research Questions

The present research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the reality of kindergarten education in Palestine in comparison to other countries like Japan?

2.2 Research Objectives

The researcher have purposely selected a number of research papers and reviewed them so as to highlight not only the reality of kindergarten education, but also to emphasize the global interest in developing and assuring the quality of education provided at kindergarten schools. A special focus has been made on the reality of kindergarten education in Palestine and how Palestine has benefited from the global experience in the field of kindergarten education to develop and assure the quality of pre-school education.

This research seeks to achieve the following objective:

1. To provide insight into the reality of kindergarten education in Palestine in comparison to other countries like Japan.

3. Methodology

The present research is descriptive and it follows the descriptive approach. Since it mainly seeks to make a review of a number of previous studies on kindergarten education, the descriptive approach is the most appropriate method to achieve its objectives. The research data has been collected through published articles on kindergarten education. Besides, the researcher has described and made a review of the data collected.

In the collection and analysis of data, the researcher has selected six research papers that deal with the kindergarten education in Palestine, Japan and Norway. The purpose was to know the reality, similarities and differences of kindergarten education in the three countries. The analysis is done in the form of a review of each study after reading and making a theoretical background to the pre-school education.

4. Findings

To analyze the selected research papers, the researcher has made a review of each paper separately.

Table 1. Overview of the Studies

Author	Country	Studies
Ahmad, N. Ayoub (2020)	USA	This study aimed to highlight the transition to online education in Palestinian kindergartens during the corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic. It was applied on Al-Ameen kindergarten as a case study. It mainly attempted to highlight the reality of online education, traditional kindergarten education, and pre-school education in Palestine during the corona virus pandemic. The results reflected the efficacy of online education in assuring the quality of kindergarten education at Al-Ameen kindergarten.
Hamand, (2019)	Philippines	This research paper highlighted the importance of kindergarten learning centers. The researcher effectively reviewed a number of studies related to the field of kindergarten. The necessity of learning centers in the field of kindergarten curriculum was the center of the researcher's analysis. Moreover, the legislation related to the play-based learning was highlighted. It was found that play-based learning is an integral part of kindergartens, but more importantly, the learning centers are crucial and integral parts of kindergarten education in the sense that the pre-school education necessitates the development of children's academics.
Hegde et al (2014)	Japan	The study aimed to explore the Japanese day nursery. An in-depth interview was used as a tool to collect the data of the study. The merger of the educational systems and childcare in Japan was provided through the in-depth teacher interviews. The findings of the study offer insights for all those interested and working in the field of kindergarten and education in Japan.
Carbonaro, (2006)	USA	This study mainly attempted to highlight the sector differences concerning achievement and learning opportunities in kindergarten. Through his analysis of the study data, the researcher indicates that there was a difference concerning the school sector. That is, it was found that the difference related to school sector sometimes favored public schools. It was also found that learning opportunities in kindergartens have greatly affected the process of learning.

Through the analysis, it has been found that:

1. Kindergarten education is the cornerstone of any educational system and the first stage of child educational development.
2. Advanced countries, like Japan, have made efforts in the field of kindergarten education.

3. Palestine, like other developing countries, still needs to develop, assure and enhance the quality of kindergarten education.

The researcher has found that there is a global tendency to assure and enhance the quality of education provided at kindergarten schools. However, this important field of education is still below the level especially in the developing countries like Palestine. Though the system in Palestine emphasizes the necessity of seeing the quality process as a continuous and recurrent one, involving assessment of information, analysis, target-setting, planning changes to practices, implementation, and subsequent assessment of the outcomes of the changed practices, kindergarten education is still below the required level. In this respect, Laws and regulations oblige kindergarten owners, local authorities, and county authorities to take a systematic approach to quality development in kindergartens and schools. This requires involvement and dialogue both within an organization and between different responsible bodies.

The point is that the kindergarten programs in Palestine need to open new branches so as to cover all parts of the country and ultimately target all Palestinian.

5. Conclusion

Kindergarten education is so important for the development of children education. It represents the first attempt of any child to acquire knowledge and learn the basics of life and the world. In this context, global educational systems have been concerned with the notions of pre-school education, kindergarten education, inclusive kindergarten, play-based educational system and music-based education. Japan, like other advanced countries, has done renowned efforts in the field of kindergarten education. But the pre-school education in the developing countries like Palestine is still below the level.

6. Limitations of the Research

This study has analyzed six research papers which deal with kindergarten education. It has also focused on the reality of kindergarten education in Palestine. One major limitation was the lack of data available on kindergarten education in Palestine. Another limitation is related to the lack of sources that deal with kindergarten education in Palestine.

7. Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following:

1. The educational authorities in Palestine and other developing countries should pay much attention to Kindergarten education since it is still beyond the required level.
2. The child-related educational curriculum in Palestine and other developing countries should include play-based activities, music-based activities and inclusive kindergarten programs.
3. There is a strong and urgent need to have a look at the Palestinian kindergartens with the aim to modify their teaching methods as well as their syllabus.

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AUTHOR BIODATA

Mahmoud Obaid is currently working as an assistant professor at Arab American University, Palestine. He has published articles in journals and conferences.