

Effects of Some Demographic Factors on KG-2 Children's Scholastic Aptitudes: Implications for the Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at recognizing the importance of kindergarten curricular provisions in smoothly introducing the child in Kuwait to next years of compulsory elementary schooling. It further taps into the effectiveness of KG-2 curriculum in brushing up on children's aptitudes in literacy, numeracy, and social skills. This is done through running a content analysis, which was a preliminary study precluding this one, in order to develop a 4-Likert scale of aptitudes that taps into children's natural inclinations to reading, writing, arithmetic, sociability and group work habits. The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. The Aptitude Test was administered by teachers 515 children between the ages of 5-to-6 in six educational districts in Kuwait. Fifteen teachers were further interviewed to tap into their opinions about the effectiveness of the enhanced KG-2 curriculum in brushing up on child aptitudes in the three R's and social skills as well as the ability of this new curriculum to effectively promote the children to elementary schooling. Major findings indicated the effectiveness of this curriculum to smoothly move children to elementary schooling. The paper ends on a discussion of findings against a rich background of research and finally provides recommendations in this light.

Introduction

As kindergarten education has become nearly universal around the world, with more children now entering kindergartens and developing their early childhood education experience, disagreements have arisen about what kindergarten curriculum should include, and how this curriculum affects children's scholastic aptitudes, or is affected by other factors, such as demographics. There has been research gusto, accom-

panied by public and political advocacy in Kuwait exercising pressure to raise academic standards of kindergartens and to assess all students' progress towards meeting standards. This gusto arises from the fact that kindergarten is a critical period in children's early school careers. It sets them on a path that is thought to influence their school achievement and subsequent learning (Yassin, 1995; Alber-Kelsay, 1998; Holmes & McConnell, 1990; Zill et al., 1995; Ladd et al., 1999; Bruner, 1999; Augustyniak, Cook-Cottone & Calabrese, 2004; Al-Hooli & Jawher, 2006). As well, kindergarten is primarily viewed as a socializing experience, "allowing children to adjust to life in the elementary school" (Spodek, 1988: 202). Contemporary researchers tend to perceive kindergartens as intermediary educational institutions where children can develop their natural aptitudes such as curiosity and the inclination to explore the world nearby, as well as to socialise, accommodate to environment and adapt to self and others (Spodek, 1988; Al-Hooli, 2001; Jawher & Al-Hooli, 2004; Badran, 2002; Bahader, 1994).

State of the Art in Kuwait

The State of Kuwait is a leading country in the region to have established a developed kindergarten educational system, specifically designed to cater for the maximal, comprehensive developmental needs of children; the intention is to help those children of the KG phase to grow physically, psychologically, intellectually, socially and ethically in the light of established cultural and religious principles of contemporary life in Kuwait (Ministry of Education, 2000). Therefore, the primary objective of KG education is to develop curiosity and discovery in order to prepare the children for the next elementary schooling system which is more formal and rigid. The objective is also to stimulate children's creative thinking and social and ethical development. In this vein, educators and policy-makers in Kuwait set the goals of the enhanced KG curriculum movement as including the following:

- 1 - helping the child self-learn via play and activity;
- 2 - gearing the educational process to be child-centered;
- 3 - developing curiosity and discovery skills in the child;
- 4 - helping the child get accustomed to work in group;

5 - preparing the child for formal learning;

These goals and the guarantees in the new enhanced KG-2 curriculum are compatible with contemporary kindergarten educational philosophy - i.e., to engender behavioral change in children by getting them to pass organized learning experiences that are meaningful to their lives and commensurate with their developmental phases (Boethel, 2004). This is acceptable all over the world because educators, east and west, are in consensus of the most important goals of kindergarten as providing, via a flexible curriculum that embedded activities conducive to stimulate lifelong successful skills, a socio-cognitive milieu for developing academic and social aptitudes in preschool children (Khalil, 2005; Brewer, 2005; Khalaf, 2005; Issa, 2004; 2005).

Children are admitted to kindergartens at the age of four, expectedly to exit at the age of six, with expectations that the kindergarten should have developed in them natural aptitudes towards literacy, numeracy, primary thinking skills, hygiene and moral behavior habits as well as sociability in order to be prepared for elementary schooling. This goal is compatible with Froebel's conception of what a kindergarten system should aim to: "...to strengthen their bodily powers; to exercise their bodily powers; to exercise their senses; to employ their awakening mind; to make them thoughtfully acquainted with the world of nature and of man; to guide their heart and soul in the right direction, and lead them to the origin of all life" (Froebel, cited in Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998: 6). Therefore, the kindergarten in Kuwait is strategically seen as a vehicle for preparing children for civil life as well as for compulsory education in the elementary school, with these objectives to be obtained through a curriculum that is geared towards the development of natural aptitudes, tendencies and abilities of intellect, psyche and body and the participation of other official bodies in the country such as information and media channels (Ministry of Information, 1996). Kindergarten was used more as a social introduction to school, thus playing a strong emphasis on play, music, and riddles as conceived of by the originator of this educational system, Friedrich Froebel (Carey, 2006; Morrow et al., 1998).

Furthermore, concerns for preparing students for compulsory education, and consequently for standardized testing programs, have made many school districts search for ways to reach students at

younger age levels, thus causing variations in the KG curriculum by school district which may deviate from the main curricular provisions guidelines nationally set (Cryan et al., 1992; Gullo, 1990; Phillips, Norris & Mason, 1996; Alexander & Entwisle, 1998; Augustyniak, Cook-Cottone, & Calabrese, 2004; Watson & West, 2004; Carey, 2006; Al-Hooli and Jawher, 2006).

For many children, kindergarten represents the first form of formal schooling (Morrow et al., 1998). Researchers think the stage represents the time ripe for the children's acquisition of basic skills and the value of providing teachers with additional time to help students with individual needs (Ross, 1976; Morrow et al., 1998; Carey, 2006). Parker and Temple (1923), in this sense, explain that...

{p}lays and games, construction and drawing, and the study of social life and nature, which were once considered the peculiar curriculum of the kindergarten, now continue through the first grade. On the other hand, reading, once considered unsuited to kindergarten children, is introduced in the kindergarten for some as soon as their mental age assures the successful learning of this useful art. The reading which is taught, however, is not the "scourge of infancy," as Rousseau called it in 1762. Instead, the reading methods are so playful and delightful that the children find in them the same pleasure that they experience in listening to nursery rhymes and fairy-tales and quickly have opened to them the road to the fairy-land of children's books (p.13).

KG Curriculum: the Need for Reform

With the advent of the new millennium, KG curriculum in Kuwait has been audited and reformed in the light of a new vision called "the Enhanced KG Curriculum Movement in Kuwait". The premise the enhancement project was based on reverberates Helm and Beneke's statement that "{t}he kindergarten curriculum should incorporate both formal and informal learning as providing opportunities for children to engage in a collaborative manner while taking the initiative to become competent learners" (Helm & Beneke, 2003: 1). The newly enhanced curriculum passed through three stages: in the first stage, there was analysis of current experiences of developing KG curricular provisions in Arab countries and in the countries of the Arab Gulf. The second

stage involved some sort of experimentation; a newly enhanced curriculum was developed out of the experiences analyzed and it was piloted in five different school districts to check for its effectiveness. In the third stage, the newly enhanced curriculum was generalized to all KG institutions in Kuwait (Jawher & Al-Hooli, 2004). The philosophy of kindergarten programs with available curricular provisions, theoretically speaking, are designed today to place strong emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic, traditionally known as the Three R's (Denton, Hausken, & West, 2000; Walston & West, 2004; Meisels & Xue, 2004; Cook-Cottone & Calabrese, 2004; Al-Hooli & Jawher, 2006). This objective of laying emphasis on endeavors to enhance the three R's in the kindergarten curriculum has been set to underlie the Enhanced KG Curriculum Movement in Kuwait as well as embodying another objective of developing social skills and adaptation. Kindergarten is not only geared towards achieving academic purposes in the intellectual development of individuals in their tender years; in this vein, Badran & Ammar (2000) suggested in their research that kindergarten is a timely preschool intervention program for the socially, culturally, economically, emotionally, and cognitively deprived children. However, they indicated that the gender of the children as well as their ages, and the school districts they belong to affect the efficacy of the curricular provisions given to KG children. They contend that though the goals and curricular guidelines are nationally agreed on, yet teachers have liberty to adapt or change the curriculum in accordance with the situation of their pupils. As well, the quality of the teachers and their performance which is affected by their pre-service preparation and their in-service training greatly affect the effectiveness of the curriculum and the efficacy of their instruction (Badran & Ammar, 2000). Other researchers (Al-Hooli & Jawher, 2006; Khalaf, 2005; Issa, 2005) suggested that demographics, including child gender, age, parent education, social status and background of families, and school district as indicated by quality of teachers and academic freedom to present the national curriculum may influence the effectiveness of the KG curriculum.

Statement of the Problem

This study is conducted to investigate whether the curricular provisions in KG-2 is satisfactory for the promotion of children to the

elementary school, having provided ample training and education in basic academic and social skills in children of kindergarten in different school districts and with both genders of the children. Thus, the problem of this study can tacitly be expressed in the following research question:

What are the effects of some demographic factors on KG-2 children's scholastic aptitudes?

In other words, do kindergarten outcomes (reading, writing, arithmetic, and sociability and work habits) vary as a function of child gender and school district? How effective is the KG-2 curriculum in relation to kindergarten curriculum outcomes as differing by kindergartners genders (male and female) and district (The City, Hawalli, Farwaniya, Jahra, Ahmadi, and Mobark Al-Kabir) as perceived by teachers?

Research questions:

This research question branches off to the following:

- 1 - What is the effect of child gender and school district on reading aptitudes in children?
- 2 - What is the effect of child gender and school district on writing aptitudes in children?
- 3 - What is the effect of child gender and school district on arithmetic aptitudes in children?
- 4 - What's the effect of child gender and school district on sociability and work habits in children?
- 5 - What are the perceptions of teachers about the efficacy of KG-2 curriculum as provided to male/female children in the different districts?

Methodology

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches through administering a child aptitude scale to KG-2 children, running a content analysis of the KG-2 curriculum, and conducting structured interviews with 15 kindergarten teachers in the different school districts to which the kindergartens are affiliated.

Participants

The population of the study was all children in Kuwaiti kindergartens in the academic year 2005-2006. The subjects included in this study were randomly drawn from this population, using a random number table, to include 515 children of both genders in six educational districts. There were 15 kindergarten teachers from different school districts who voluntarily consented to participate in the qualitative interview investigation after letters of consent were signed by them. The teachers were rounded up and informed about the objectives of the investigation and their roles therein, as well as being interviewed about the effectiveness of the KG-2 curriculum in preparing children for elementary schooling and developing their natural aptitudes in the Three R's and sociability.

Instrument:

The researcher has run a comprehensive content analysis of KG-2 curriculum (purposes, content, methodology of teaching, aids and educational technology, curricular and extracurricular activities, and evaluation) in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of what was being provided for children at this level of kindergarten, and to build an aptitude scale for Kuwaiti children at this level. The Child Aptitude Scale was meticulously built to measure children's aptitudes as a result of the children's interaction with the curricular provisions in KG-2, with all experiences embedded in order to determine whether these experiences could well prepare them to the primary school. The Kindergarten Child Aptitude Scale was developed in four dimensions or sub-scales: Reading Aptitude (12 items); Writing Aptitudes (6 items); Arithmetic Aptitudes (14 items); and Sociability and Work Habits Aptitudes (9 items), all developed after a four-Likert scale. The Kindergarten Child Aptitude Scales were filled in for each child by their respective teachers in the sample kindergartens in the study after they were introduced the problem and objectives of the present investigation.

Validation

The validity of the scale was determined by kindergarten educators and experts who responded to the scale in terms of appropriateness of

items and wording. Items that received less than 80% of consensus were eliminated. A correlation was further run between the four dimensions of the scale related to the total score, with all of which being significant at 0.01.

Reliability

Reliability for the scale was assessed via Alpha-Cronbach for each item in each dimension, then for all dimensions to check for internal consistency using SPSS. Table (1) summarises the reliability co-efficient for each subscale:

Dimension	Reliability Co-efficient
Reading Aptitude Sub-scale	0.90
Writing Aptitude Sub-scale	0.82
Arithmetic Aptitude Sub-scale	0.88
Sociability and Work Habits Sub-scale	0.90

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for this investigation:

- 1 - There are no statistically significant differences between male children and female children on their scores on The Aptitude Scale (Subscales and Total);
- 2 - There are no statistically significant differences attributed to the school district of the children and their scores on The Aptitude Scale (Subscales and Total).

Findings

Hypothesis One for this study which reads "there are no statistically significant differences between male children and female children on their scores on The Aptitude Scale (Subscales and Total)" has been verified using a *t*-test for non-independent samples. Table (2) shows the results of this *t*-test:

Table 2: *t*-test for the mean scores of male and female children on the Aptitude Scale and Subscales

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i>	Sig.
READING	Female	253	35.4585	7.6684	0.063	0.950
	Male	260	35.4154	7.7885		
WRITING	Female	252	17.5516	4.0447	0.723	0.470
	Male	260	17.2808	4.4124		
ARITHMETIC	Female	253	41.9209	8.3477	0.101	0.920
	Male	260	41.9962	8.4973		
SOCIABILITY	Female	253	31.7470	4.7725	2.115	0.035
	Male	260	30.8115	5.2283		
APTITUDES	Female	252	126.5635	21.1364	0.555	0.579
	Male	260	125.5038	22.0308		

The above table shows that:

- 1 - there were no differences between mean scores of males and females on the reading aptitude subscale;
- 2 - there were no differences between mean scores of males and females on the writing aptitude subscale;
- 3 - there were no differences between mean scores of males and females on the arithmetic aptitude subscale;
- 4 - there were statistically significant differences between mean scores of males and females on the sociability and work habits aptitude subscale to the advantage of female children;
- 5 - There were no differences between mean scores of males and females on the aptitude total score.

Hypothesis Two for this study which reads "there are no statistically significant differences between the school district of the children and their scores on The Aptitude Scale (Subscales and Total)" has been verified using One-way ANOVA. Table (3) below shows the results of this test:

**Table 3: One-way ANOVA for Significant Differences
in Aptitudes by School District**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
READING	Between Groups	1318.736	5	263.747	4.570	.000
	Within Groups	29377.567	509	57.716		
	Total	30696.303	514			
WRITING	Between Groups	608.154	5	121.631	7.208	.000
	Within Groups	8572.049	508	16.874		
	Total	9180.202	513			
Arithmetic	Between Groups	1778.313	5	355.663	5.225	.000
	Within Groups	34645.831	509	68.066		
	Total	36424.144	514			
SOCIABILITY	Between Groups	389.155	5	77.831	3.158	.008
	Within Groups	12543.692	509	24.644		
	Total	12932.847	514			
APTT	Between Groups	8804.368	5	1760.874	3.888	.002
	Within Groups	230070.474	508	452.895		
	Total	238874.842	513			

The above table shows:

First - In terms of Reading Aptitude:

There were statistically significant differences between children

attributable to school district. In order to pinpoint the directionality of significance, the Scheffé test for multiple comparisons was calculated bearing out the following findings in Table (4):

**Table 4: Scheffé Test for Multiple Comparisons
of Reading Aptitude by School District**

School District (I)	School District (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Hawalli	Farwaniya	3.2936	.219
	Jahra	3.5536	.569
	Ahmadi	1.1574	.982
	The City	-.5873	.999
	Mobark Al-Kabir	.5461	1.000
Farwaniya	Jahra	.2600	1.000
	Ahmadi	-2.1363	.481
	The City	-3.8809	.005
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-2.7476	.231
Jahra	Ahmadi	-2.3962	.836
	The City	-4.1408	.256
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-3.0075	.668
Ahmadi	The City	-1.7446	.778
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.6113	.998
The City	Mobark Al-Kabir	1.1333	.964

The above table shows that:

- 1 - there were statistically significant differences between children in Farwaniya and children in the City in favour of the City children; this is shown in Table (5) below;
- 2 - There were no statistically significant differences between pairs of other school districts in Reading Aptitude.

Table 5: Mean Scores of Children in Different School Districts on Reading Aptitude

School District	N	Mean
Hawalli	48	36.8750
Farwaniya	172	33.5814
Jahra	28	33.3214
Ahmadi	85	35.7176
The City	106	37.4623
Mobark Al-Kabir	76	36.3289

Second - Writing Aptitude:

Findings of analysis showed that there were statistically significant findings between children attributable to school district. In order to determine the directionality of the significant differences, Scheffé test was run, bearing the findings below:

Table 6: Scheffe Test for Multiple Comparisons of Writing Aptitude by School District

School District (I)	School District (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Hawalli	Farwaniya	9.364E-02	1.000
	Jahra	1.2880	.885
	Ahmadi	-1.3662	.647
	The City	-2.4607	.041
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.6481	.982
Farwaniya	Jahra	1.1944	.844
	Ahmadi	-1.4598	.209
	The City	-2.5543	.000
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.7417	.886
Jahra	Ahmadi	-2.6542	.120
	The City	-3.7487	.003
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-1.9361	.475
Ahmadi	The City	-1.0945	.647
	Mobark Al-Kabir	.7181	.942
The City	Mobark Al-Kabir	1.8126	.127

The above table shows that:

- 1 - there were statistically significant differences between Hawalli children and The City children in favour of the City children;
- 2 - there were statistically significant differences between Farwaniya children and The City children in favour of City children;
- 3 - there were statistically significant differences between Jahra children and the City children in favour of the City children;
- 4 - there were no statistically significant differences between other pairs on the Writing sub-scale.

Table 7: Mean Scores of Children in Different School Districts on Writing Aptitude

School District	N	Mean
Hawalli	47	16.6809
Farwaniya	172	16.5872
Jahra	28	15.3929
Ahmadi	85	18.0471
The City	106	19.1415
Mobark Al-Kabir	76	17.3289

Third - Arithmetic Aptitude:

Findings show there were differences in arithmetic aptitudes of children by school district. To determine the directionality of significance, Scheffé test was used:

**Table 8: Scheffé Test for Multiple Comparisons
of Arithmetic Aptitude by School District**

School District (I)	School District (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Hawali	Farwani	2.0891	.790
	Jahra	-.5238	1.000
	Ahmadi	-1.5167	.959
	The City	-2.5016	.694
	Mobark Al-Kabir	1.4912	.965
Farwani	Jahra	-2.6130	.789
	Ahmadi	-3.6058	.056
	The City	-4.5907	.001
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.5979	.998
Jahra	Ahmadi	-.9929	.998
	The City	-1.9778	.937
	Mobark Al-Kabir	2.0150	.943
Ahmadi	The City	-.9849	.984
	Mobark Al-Kabir	3.0079	.378
The City	Mobark Al-Kabir	3.9928	.067

The above table shows that:

- 1 - there were statistically significant differences between Farwnaniya children and the City children on this subscale in favour of the City children as shown in Table (9);
- 2 - there were no differences between other pairs of comparisons on this sub-scale.

**Table 9: Mean Scores of Children in Different School Districts
on Arithmetic Aptitude**

School District	N	Mean
Hawalli	48	42.0833
Farwaniya	172	39.9942
Jahra	28	42.6071
Ahmadi	85	43.6000
The City	106	44.5849
Mobark Al-Kabir	76	40.5921

Fourth - Sociability and Work Habits Aptitude:

There were statistically significant differences between children attributable to school district. To determine directionality, Scheffé test was calculated:

**Table 10: Scheffé Test for Multiple Comparisons
of Arithmetic Aptitude by School District**

School District (I)	School District (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Hawali	Farwaniya	-2.7626	.042
	Jahra	-3.6488	.091
	Ahmadi	-2.5975	.138
	The City	-2.6313	.100
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-3.2259	.031
Farwaniya	Jahra	-.8862	.979
	Ahmadi	.1650	1.000
	The City	.1313	1.000
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.4633	.994
Jahra	Ahmadi	1.0513	.967
	The City	1.0175	.968
	Mobark Al-Kabir	.4229	1.000
Ahmadi	The City	-3.3740E-02	1.000
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.6283	.986
The City	Mobark Al-Kabir	-.5946	.986

The above table shows that

- 1 - there were statistically significant differences between Hawalli children and Farwaniya children on this subscale to the advantage of Farwaniya children;
- 2 - there were statistically significant differences between Hawalli children and Mobarak Al-Kabir children in favour of Mobarak Al-Kabir children as shown in the table below:
- 3 - there were no statistically significant differences between other pairs of comparison.

Table 11: Mean Scores of Children in Different School Districts on Sociability Aptitude

School District	N	Mean
Hawalli	48	28.7083
Farwaniya	172	31.4709
Jahra	28	32.3571
Ahmadi	85	31.3059
The City	106	31.3396
Mobark Al-Kabir	76	31.9342
Total	515	31.2757

Fifth - Total score on all subscales:

Findings indicated that there were statistically significant differences between children in the different school districts attributable to local In order to determine the directionality of differences, Scheffé test was run, the findings of which have been summarised in the table below:

Table 12: Scheffé Test of Total Score on the Aptitude Scale by School District

School District (I)	School District (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Hawalli	Farwaniya	2.0684	.997
	Jahra	2.356E-02	1.000
	Ahmadi	-4.9685	.895
	The City	-8.8262	.349
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-2.4821	.995
Farwaniya	Jahra	-2.0449	.999
	Ahmadi	-7.0369	.287
	The City	-10.8946	.005
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-4.5505	.790
Jahra	Ahmadi	-4.9920	.949
	The City	-8.8497	.575
	Mobark Al-Kabir	-2.5056	.998
Ahmadi	The City	-3.8577	.907
	Mobark Al-Kabir	2.4864	.990
The City	Mobark Al-Kabir	6.3441	.560

The above table shows that:

- 1 - there were statistically significant differences between Farwaniya children and The City children in favour of The City children as shown in their mean scores in Table (13) below;
- 2 - there were no statistically significant differences between pairs of other school districts on totals of the aptitude scale.

Table 13: Mean Scores of Children in Different School Districts on Total Score on the Aptitude Scale

School District	N	Mean
Hawalli	47	123.7021
Farwaniya	172	121.6337
Jahra	28	123.6786
Ahmadi	85	128.6706
The City	106	132.5283
Mobark Al-Kabir	76	126.1842

These findings can be explained in terms of the better quality of teachers available in The City. The City district recruits better teachers from all around the world. As well, the higher living standards of the pupils, their better family social backgrounds, and their parents' better educational levels which are typical to the capital anywhere in the world may explain for some of the differences between the children in their aptitudes in the three R's and in social skills.

Findings from the Structured Interviews:

Interviews have been audiotapes, transcribed and then their responses have been coded. The following are highlights from the findings:

As for the first question on the interview, which reads: "Does the KG-2 curriculum prepare the children for elementary school?"

All teachers concurred that the enhanced curriculum is a spring-board for the elementary school, and despite the absence of no specific education into the basal literacy and numeracy skills, the curriculum provides a pretty-well ample opportunity for children to be tuned into

formal schooling. This is done usually through play, songs, music and other forms of entertainment and amusement. Teacher 1 says, *"The curriculum incorporates pictures for teaching words and meanings and discriminating between letters, uses narratives in teaching reading and logic as well as phonics, but the curriculum, overall, does not provide a rigid method of linking reading instruction to the kindergarten experiences. As well, there is not a formal instruction into writing; only do we train them how to hold a pencil and start imitating letters and figures, and in arithmetic, we only tend to train them how to say and pencil down the first ten digits as well as discriminating basic geometric configurations"*. Mostly all teachers agree with this, thinking that the curriculum is not a rigid introduction to literacy and numeracy skill development; according to Teacher Two, *"The curriculum does not teach reading; it only teaches children how to discriminate letters and figures, and at best, teachers how to pencil numbers"*. The same opinion is held by most teachers. But whether this is good or not, Teacher Seven says, *"I think the enhanced KG curriculum is a good introduction to primary schooling in simplistic terms; the children learn a lot about civic education, religion, Arabic, Arithmetic and gets involved in extra-curricular activities which initiates exploration and discovery skills in the children as well as scientific curiosity. Even if this is not perfect, it at least gets children to get accustomed to formal schooling, classroom seating, attentive listening, responsible behavior, positive behavioral modes, eating etiquette, prayers, rest, etc."* This is almost agreed upon by all teachers interviewed.

As for the second question on the interview, which reads: "Does the KG-2 curriculum develop in the children their natural aptitudes to literacy, numeracy and sociability?"

Most teachers concurred that the enhanced curriculum is geared at developing natural inclinations in children towards reading, writing, math, and social skills. But, it places great emphasis on group work, sociability skills and more on basal reading at the letter/concept level, but no rigid formal instruction into writing skills is required. According to Teacher Ten, *"We cannot teach formally the writing skills except at the letter discrimination and phonics; this is prohibited. Some children are physiologically immature and cannot even hold the pencil between their fingers. Too early instruction in penciling may jeopardize their psychomotor skills. They may doodle and draw; this is only allowed. In mathematics,*

they can only be introduced to the digits, and see or draw them. At the social level, they can only be instructed work group habits and socializing. The child is introduced regular attendance, seating, attentive listening, cooperation with others, but there is no place ever for corporal punishment; but sometimes, the teacher may resort to rebuking or depriving the child to play or entertain with others when there is a misbehavior". Teacher Eleven agrees to this, and adds, "The child further gets introduced in the kindergarten to classroom climate, and learns how to rely on oneself, have courage communicate with others, and learn basal Arabic and Arithmetic". Teacher Twelve further agrees, and remarks that "Comparing the KG child to other children who don't go to kindergarten before formal elementary schooling, we can find that it is easier for KG children to adapt well to the formal schooling system in the primary school much more than those deprived of attending kindergarten". Teachers Fourteen and Fifteen think that still, "More could be done to enhance the KG curriculum and make it more rigid; the hiatus between kindergarten curriculum and the primary school curriculum is wide, and the curriculum in the KG is far less rigid and restricted compared to elementary curriculum. If only we could enrich this curriculum as the children are more open and liable to learning because of their strong aptitudes".

Discussion

The enhanced KG curriculum movement in Kuwait is grounded in a sound philosophy of self-learning and initiation of discovery and curiosity in children. It seeks to set the stage for stimulating self-learning, yet at a more basal level, to develop children's natural inclinations towards literacy, numeracy, and more importantly, towards social skills. This is grounded in a sound theory advocated by Bruner (1999) and confirmed by other researchers (Jawher & Al-Hooli, 2004; Pence, 2005; Al-Hooli, 2001; Bahader, 1994). The idea is to instigate in children thinking skills commensurate with the developmental characteristics of the children and the requirements of this stage intellectually, socially and physically. That there are differences attributable to district locale is explained by the living standards of families, social background, parent education levels, and high quality performance of teachers living in The City. This finding is confirmed by previous research (Mosenthal et al., 2004; Al-Hooli & Jawher, 2005; 2006).

Findings from the qualitative analyses of interviews confirm what Badran and Ammar (2000) think that experiential learning is best for children at this stage to achieve functionality in their behavior, social and academic, and the stage is, at best, a good introduction for the formal elementary schooling to come, and well provides remediation for the socially, cognitively and culturally deprived children. The findings in the study, especially from the qualitative data reinforce these views, and uphold the theoretical bases introduced in the introduction and background to this paper (See Bowen, 2006; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Morrow et al., 1998; Walston & West, 2004; Carey, 2006; Abdul-Aal, 1983; Saber, 1995; Fusaro, 1997; Gullao, 2000; Al-Hooli, 2001; Walston & West, 2004; Brewer, 2005; Hassan, 2005). As well, the kindergarten curriculum, and the children's reactions to it, together with other factors such as demographics and parenting can be seen as strong predictors of the children's successful literacy development, especially reading achievement; this finding is commensurate with research findings in the Western perspective (Morris, Bloodgood, & Perney, 2003).

Findings from the aptitude tests suggest differences attributable to gender and the locale of the kindergarten in school districts. This is expected due to other variables that may be attributed to the quality of teacher preparation, socio-economic levels of children and their families, and the cooperation levels between parents and teachers in the different school districts. No wonder then that this happens in Kuwait. According to Saluja, Scott-Little, Clifford (2000), there are discrete variations between the different fifty states in the USA as to the goals, curricular provisions, and aptitude tests used in the different states to evaluate children's ability of entry into the next elementary formal schooling (Cited in: Al-Hooli, 2001). The interview responses in this study further the findings from previous research (Wood & Bennet, 1999; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Abdul-Aal, 1993) that kindergarten prepares children for formal education in the elementary stage, and smoothly tunes their attitudes and aptitudes to literacy and numeracy and social skills. As well, findings of this study correlate successful literacy skills development to effective schooling in the kindergarten and a rigid literacy curriculum leadership (Mosenthal et al., 2004; Morris, Bloodgood, & Perney, 2003).

Recommendations

Based on findings from this study, and from previous research furthered and supported by present findings, the following recommendations have been extracted:

- 1 - Making enrollment into the kindergarten stage a prerequisite for formal schooling in the elementary school, and part and parcel of the elementary stage by enacting a law that would make the stage a compulsory educational phase, not a preschool optional.
- 2 - Gearing the curriculum to stimulate more self-learning and scientific curiosity and providing curricular and extracurricular activities specifically designed for higher-order thinking skills and inclinations.
- 3 - No rigid formal education into writing skills should be required as this may jeopardize the neuro-motor development of the child's hands and fingers.
- 4 - Evaluating KG teachers' performance inasmuch as their academic freedom is concerned; in other words, teachers instructional approaches should be audited every now and then to match the national KG curriculum guidelines.
- 5 - Making sure that teachers in the KG stage should be graduates of licensed and accredited teacher education institutions.
- 6 - More attention should be paid to kindergartens in remote and rural regions.

أثر بعض العوامل الديمغرافية على الإستعدادات التعلمية لأطفال المستوى الثاني لمرحلة رياض الأطفال: تضمينات منهجية

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الهيئة العامة للتعليم التطبيقي والتدريب - الكويت

الملخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى التعرف على مدى فاعلية منهج رياض الأطفال (المستوى الثاني) في تهيئة طفل الروضة للعملية التعليمية في المرحلة الابتدائية في دولة الكويت فيما يتعلق بصقل مهاراته في تعلم القراءة والكتابة وتعلم الأعداد ومدلولاتها وعادات العمل الجماعي والمهارات الاجتماعية. استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الكمي والكيفي اشتملت أدوات الدراسة على ما يلي: (١) أداة تقيس الميول الطبيعية لدى الأطفال تجاه مهارات القراءة والكتابة وتعلم الأعداد ومدلولاتها وعادات العمل الجماعي والمهارات الاجتماعية على عينة قوامها ٥١٥ طفل تتراوح أعمارهم ما بين الخامسة والسادسة في جميع المناطق التعليمية، (٢) أداة تحليل محتوى منهج رياض الأطفال (المستوى الثاني)، (٣) مقابلات شخصية مع خمس عشرة معلمة وذلك للتعرف على رأيهم بشأن فاعلية منهج رياض الأطفال في تطوير مهارات الأطفال في تعلم القراءة والكتابة وتعلم الأعداد ومدلولاتها وعادات العمل الجماعي والمهارات الاجتماعية وقدرة المنهج على تهيئة الأطفال للعملية التعليمية في المرحلة الابتدائية. وقد جاءت النتائج إيجابية فيما يتعلق في فاعلية المنهج لتهيئة الأطفال للمرحلة الابتدائية، كما أسفرت النتائج عن وجود تفاوت في نتائج الأطفال في تعلم القراءة والكتابة والأعداد ومدلولاتها وطرق التعامل والعمل الاجتماعي يعود إلى الاختلاف في الجنس والمنطقة التعليمية. وانتهت الدراسة بمناقشة مفصلة للنتائج ومقارنتها بالدراسات السابقة مع تقديم عدة توصيات.

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