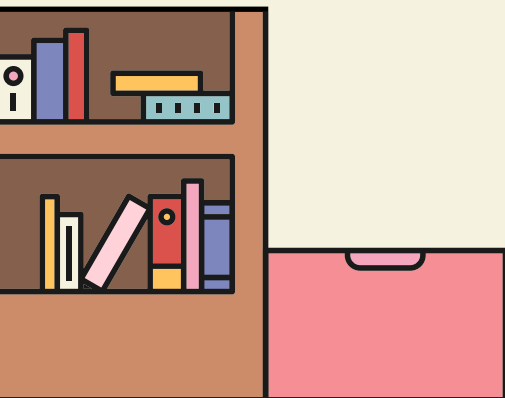


The Program for Improving the Quality of Education in Arab Kindergartens

Abstract of a Formative and Summative
Evaluation Study



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A word on the program:

In 2014, the Preschool Education Division at the Ministry of Education, JDC-Ashalim, and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation developed a unique program for improving the quality of education in Arab kindergartens in Israel.

The overarching goal of the program was to promote the development of preschool children in the Arab population in Israel and reduce developmental gaps between Arab preschoolers and children in the corresponding age group in the general population.

The program was operated for six years in ten local authorities countrywide: Abu Snan (local council), Yanuh Jat (local council), Arraba (town), Iksal (local council), Misgav (regional council), Jaljulia (local council), Umm al-Fahm (town), Rahat (town), Al-Kasom (regional council), and Neve Midbar (regional council). These communities represented different groups in the Arab population in Israel: Arabs living in mixed Jewish-Arab communities, Bedouin living in northern Israel, Bedouin living in southern Israel (the Negev), Muslims, and Druze. The program encompassed 153 kindergartens (15-18 kindergarten classes per locality).

The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted a formative and summative evaluation study of the program from 2016 to 2020.

This report describes the four core areas of the program, based on its four interim goals, as well as the strengths of the program.

The core areas of the program:

.1

Improving
the quality of
the educational
environment

.2

Improving the
quality of teaching
and learning
in the kindergarten

.3

Improving the quality
of the interactions in
the kindergarten

.4

Improving
parental
partnership

1.

Improving the quality of the educational environment

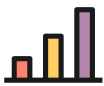
The program improved the educational environment in the kindergartens through the redesign of kindergarten classrooms, playgrounds, and indoor play spaces, to adapt them to the range of educational needs of the children.



Program inputs:

- Renovation of the kindergarten playgrounds and redesign of the classrooms
- A 30-hour guidance and training course for the kindergarten teachers and the instructors leading the program, focused on the organization of the educational environment as a means of supporting the growth and development of the kindergarten children – providing knowledge and tools for improvement in all core areas by upgrading the educational environment
- A 30-hour guidance and training course for all kindergarten teachers and assistants – providing knowledge and tools for developing and using the educational environment
- Development of a guidance and training course in Arabic on the organization of the educational environment, by four Ministry of Education national instructors

Interim outcomes:



- 96% of the participating kindergarten playgrounds were renovated.
- 86% of the kindergarten teachers reported improvement in the use of the kindergarten playground for learning and development.
- 82% of the kindergarten teachers noted that the upgraded kindergarten provided a friendly educational environment and ample space for the children to play, explore, and learn.

Recommendation:

- The participating local authorities should continuously maintain the kindergarten playgrounds and facilities and make sure that there are no safety hazards on the premises.



The kindergarten playground has become part of our daily work plan and of the playing and learning process in the kindergarten. We have created an educational botanical garden with various medicinal plants and flowers. We have upgraded the sand pit and started to use it for learning and creative purposes. We have also created a quiet corner for relaxation with a library of games made of natural materials such as wood and other materials." (a kindergarten teacher)

2.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning in the kindergarten

The program improved the quality of teaching and learning in the kindergartens by supporting the professional development of the pedagogical staff through training courses and ongoing guidance, providing knowledge and tools for improving the quality of education and enhancing classroom management and instruction skills.

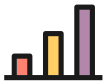


Educational instructors

Program inputs:

- Two nationwide guidance and training courses were conducted on instruction skills and the organization of the educational environment.
- A professional development team was formed, comprising experts on the CLASS from teacher training institutions.
- Guidance on the CLASS tool was conducted in small groups.

Interim outcomes:



- The job scope of the educational instructors was expanded. As part of the program, they were put in charge of 15 kindergartens (in addition to the 30 non-participating kindergartens under their responsibility), and their visits to the participating kindergartens were scheduled at a higher frequency.
- 57% of the kindergarten teachers reported a change for the better following the guidance provided by the educational instructor.
- 50% of the kindergarten teachers highly rated the contribution of the educational instructor to the improved communication with the supervisor.
- 46% of the kindergarten teachers highly rated the contribution of the educational instructor to the organization of the educational environment.

In the interviews conducted with the educational instructors, they noted that their role in the program was unique in the following aspects: (a) the guidance they received on the ground and the follow-up of their work; (b) the significant, in-depth learning as part of the program; (c) the creation of a common language with the kindergarten teachers; (d) the small number of kindergartens assigned to each educational instructor as part of the program; (e) the peer learning and teamwork; (f) the personal guidance conducted in small groups.

Recommendations:

- The Ministry of Education should continue to support the professional development of the educational instructors and provide them with the knowledge required for improving the quality of education, thereby enhancing their status as educational leaders. While the work process with the educational instructors was highly commended by all the parties concerned, ongoing efforts should be made by the Ministry of Education to further strengthen their professional status vis-à-vis both the supervisors and the kindergarten staff.
- More time should be allowed for instruction visits to the kindergartens by the educational instructors and a schedule of one instruction day per week for 20 kindergartens should be adopted.

Kindergarten teachers

Program inputs:

- Guidance and training courses were developed on various topics, including the organization of the educational environment, positive interaction in the kindergarten (based on the CLASS tool), and discourse and cooperation with the parents. The guidance and training courses were conducted over several years. Altogether, 40 groups – ten groups a year – comprising about 220 kindergarten teachers attended the courses. Nine guidance and training days were held for the educational teams in the participating local authorities.

Interim outcomes:



- 74% of the kindergarten teachers reportedly adopted improved work practices following their participation in the program.
- The kindergarten teachers reported improvement in their interaction with the children. They were reportedly more attentive to the children and more sensitive and responsive to their needs and allowed them more space for play and creativity. The kindergarten teachers also reported that following the guidance and training courses, they found a common language with the educational instructors.
- 88% of the kindergarten teachers noted that the guidance and training courses conducted as part of the program were unique, unlike the courses routinely conducted by the Ministry of Education.
- 63% of the kindergarten teachers reported that the program was effective in improving their work, especially with regard to the organization of the educational environment.

Recommendation:

- While the performance of the kindergarten staff noticeably improved, further steps should be taken to enhance the kindergarten teamwork and, in particular, the cooperation between kindergarten teachers and assistants, and the division of roles and responsibilities between them should be clearly defined. The administrative aspect of the work done by the kindergarten teachers should also be continuously enhanced and supported.

Kindergarten assistants

Program inputs:

- In view of the mapping conducted prior to the program implementation, which indicated that only 30% of the kindergarten assistants attended relevant guidance and training courses (the percentage was even lower in southern Israel – a mere 10%), guidance and training courses were conducted over several years. Altogether, 40 groups – ten groups a year – of about 95 kindergarten assistants attended the courses.

Interim outcomes:



- The kindergarten teachers reported that by the time the program was completed, 68% of the participating kindergarten assistants had attended guidance and training courses relevant to their job.
- 62% of the kindergarten teachers reported that the courses facilitated the creation of a common language between the kindergarten teachers and assistants, improved the interaction of the latter with the children (so that they were more attentive to the children and responsive to their needs), and strengthened their status as central to the kindergarten teamwork.

Recommendation:

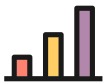
- The educational aspect of the work done by the kindergarten assistants should be enhanced and they should be given the opportunity for professional development tailored to their role in the kindergarten.

Supervisors

Program inputs:

- During the first two years of the program implementation (2016-2017), a work forum was held with the aim of promoting the supervisors' peer learning and enriching their tool kit.
- During the third year of the program implementation (2018), the work with the supervisors was conducted mainly through individual organizational consulting. The Ministry of Education undertook the task of enhancing the collaboration with the supervisors while highlighting their key role in the program and providing them with management tools, which, as realized, were more relevant to their job than pedagogical tools.
- During the last year of the program implementation (2019-2020), a three-session in-depth workshop on the CLASS tool was held with the participation of the supervisors to acquaint them with the tool and thus create a common language with the educational instructors and kindergarten teachers. The workshop was led by the two professional CLASS tool instructors who provided guidance for the educational instructors as part of the personal guidance conducted in small groups.

Interim outcomes:



- The supervisors described the tools they acquired as part of the program and subsequently implemented in the participating localities as well as in other localities where they served as supervisors, including tools for: organizational management, establishing joint committees, incorporating a common systemic approach, establishing a leading team, incorporating a work plan in each locality, strengthening the ties with the parents, and conducting workshops with the participation of the parents.
- At the end of the program, the supervisors reported that the program was helpful in enhancing the local residents' trust in the public kindergarten system and led to an increase in the public kindergarten enrollment, with a corresponding decrease in the private kindergarten enrollment. The supervisors also noted the important work done by the program leading team and the preschool forum, specifically the formulation of a common vision shared by all preschool education professionals in the participating local authorities.

Recommendation:

- The Ministry of Education should carry on its efforts and establish an effective plan for the ongoing professional development of the supervisors, so as to create a common language with the educational instructors and kindergarten teachers about the content worlds of the program.

“ You can see the difference between the educational instructors who participated in the program and those who haven't. In the team meetings that I conduct, there is shared learning, but you can still see the difference between those who participated in the program and those who haven't. There is a difference in perspective, in the way they evaluate the work done by the kindergarten teachers, in the issues they look at. You have the evaluation system of the Ministry of Education, and, on the other hand, you have the CLASS tool, with which the educational instructors were acquainted as part of the program. It is an observation tool used to monitor and evaluate the quality of the relationships and interactions between the kindergarten teacher and the children as well as the quality of learning and other aspects of the educational environment in the kindergarten. Also, You can see that the kindergarten teacher, the educational instructor, and the supervisor share a common language.” (a supervisor)

“ The workshop sessions were excellent. The discourse between the participants was constructive, courteous, and professional. We were a learning group. The workshop simulations were highly instructive. I personally learned a lot about the work done by the other supervisors. I wish we could have more such meetings over the years. In my eyes, just three meetings aren't enough.” (a supervisor)

“ Following the guidance and training course attended by the kindergarten assistant as part of the program for improving the quality of education, we found a common language, and the kindergarten assistant realized that the focus should be on the children and that the interaction with the children and the educational atmosphere in the kindergarten were of the utmost importance. In my opinion, just one guidance and training course isn't enough, and the kindergarten assistants should be offered more guidance and training courses.” (a kindergarten teacher)

“ The nature of the guidance changed and the discussions I had with the educational instructor became more constructive, in particular in terms of the feedback she provided. The questions she asked were focused on the aspects of my work that had to be improved, on my interaction with the children and how I could be more attentive and responsive to their needs and, in general, on the work practices in the kindergarten.” (a kindergarten teacher)

3.

Improving the quality of the interactions in the kindergarten

The program improved the quality of the interactions in the kindergarten. An improvement was observed in the participating kindergartens, as reflected in the average score achieved in the three areas assessed by the CLASS tool: emotional support, kindergarten organization and management, and learning support

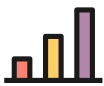


The observation CLASS tool is used to monitor and evaluate the quality of the interactions in the kindergarten. A study that analyzed data on children aged 3 to 6 in pre-kindergarten programs in 11 states in the USA established a basic threshold score for each of the three areas assessed by the CLASS tool (emotional support, kindergarten organization and management, and learning support) as vital for promoting the development of children¹.

Program inputs:

- Guidance and training courses on the CLASS tool were conducted for the educational instructors, kindergarten teachers, and supervisors.

Interim outcomes:



- The percentage of participating kindergartens that achieved the threshold score for each of the three areas assessed by the CLASS tool, established as vital for promoting the development of children, increased from 44% at the beginning of the program to 72% at the end of the program.
- The performance of the participating kindergartens was further evaluated in light of the standards applied by the Head Start program implemented on the federal level in the USA with the aim of providing comprehensive early childhood education, health, and nutrition quality services to low-income children and families. The program is committed to ensure the quality of the educational frameworks it administers, and it thus applies high quality standards with regard to human resources and intervention practices.
- The percentage of participating kindergartens that met the Head Start threshold standards increased from 22% at the beginning of the program to 44% at the end of the program. It should be noted though that at the end of the program, 28% of the participating kindergartens failed to meet the Head Start threshold standards in two or three of the evaluated areas.

Recommendations:

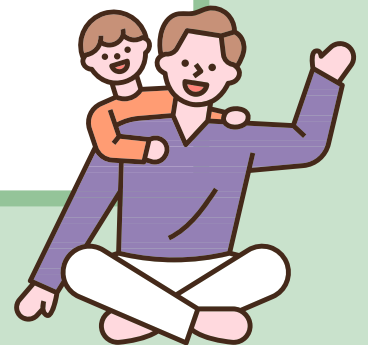
- The educational instructors and supervisors should adopt the CLASS tool as both an instructional and a supervisory tool in their work with the kindergarten teachers.
- The content worlds of the CLASS tool should be incorporated in the kindergarten teacher evaluation system.

¹ Burchinal, M., Vandergrift, N., Pianta, R., & Mashburn, A. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 166–176.

4.

Improving parental partnership

The program enhanced the involvement of the parents as partners in the educational activity in both the kindergarten and the locality. Noteworthy in that context was the establishment of a committed local parent leadership or kindergarten parent committee or the strengthening of the already established parent leadership or parent committee and the election of a parent board to represent the parents in the local preschool education forum.

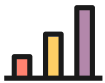


Program inputs:

- Parent guidance
- Parent-child enrichment activities
- Special events and shared activities enhancing the involvement of the parents

In 2019, 2-14 shared activities with the parents were held by the participating kindergartens in each of the localities. Altogether, 74 shared activities were held (not all of them as part of the program). The activities included informational workshops (on topics such as literacy and moving on to first grade) and community activities (for instance, building an educational botanical garden and going out on trips). On average, seven kindergartens and 150 parents participated in the activities in each of the localities. 54% of the activities were held over a period of time – from several meetings held over a limited period to a series of meetings throughout the year – while the rest were one-time activities.

Interim outcomes:



- 86% of the parents reported that they 'always' or 'often' participated in the activities held by the kindergarten.
- 62% of the parents reported that the kindergarten teacher 'often' involved them in decisions regarding the various activities taking place in the kindergarten.
- 50% of the parents reported that they consulted with the kindergarten teacher on issues related to raising their children.

Recommendation:

- Support and guidance should be provided for the kindergarten staff to enhance the staff collaboration with the parents



In my kindergarten, it's difficult to maintain continuous contact with the parents. Not all of them show up for scheduled meetings or shared activities. So, I took the initiative and asked one of those families if we could meet with the children at their encampment. The meeting was a great success. I felt that the parents' involvement in the kindergarten activities was subsequently enhanced. They even started to attend the workshops after that meeting."
(a kindergarten teacher)

General recommendations:

- The participating local authorities should continue to lead, assume responsibility for, and promote the preschool education system following the conclusion of the program.
- Collaboration with the supervisors managing kindergarten clusters should be enhanced given their key role in the professional development of the kindergarten staff. The division of roles and responsibilities between the supervisors managing kindergarten clusters and the educational instructors should be clearly defined.

Recommendations for the Negev kindergartens:

- Enhanced support should be provided for the professionals in the Negev given the special challenges facing them: the relatively low level of seniority of the kindergarten teachers, the distance between kindergartens in the same local authority and between localities, and the limited time allowed for the educational instructors' visits to the participating kindergartens.
- Local professionals should be recruited and trained for the Negev kindergartens. The local authorities as well as the Ministry of Education should continue to look for ways and develop measures to enhance the quality of the local professional staff, taking into consideration technical barriers such as the time schedule and location of the guidance and training courses, the language used in the courses (the need to recruit Arabic speaking instructors), and the need to appropriately reward the professionals participating in the program.

The program strengths:

1. A comprehensive long-term program

The program discussed in this report was a comprehensive long-term program, implemented over six years at various levels of activity with the aim of improving the quality of education in Arab kindergartens in Israel through redesign and renovation of their physical educational environment, professional development of the pedagogical staff, collaboration with the parents, and establishment of parent committees and community forums in the participating localities.

2. A program based on collaboration between three entities

The program was based on collaboration at headquarters level between three entities – JDC-Ashalim, the Preschool Education Division at the Ministry of Education, and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation as well as on cooperation with the participating local authorities. The involvement of the Ministry of Education from the very first stages of the program planning and implementation contributed to the optimal incorporation of work practices and the continuity of the program. Each of the partners to the program contributed to its successful implementation.

3. The selection of local authorities representative of all Arab population groups in Israel

Ten local authorities across Israel were selected for participation in the program. The participating local authorities were representative of all Arab population groups in Israel: Arabs living in mixed Jewish-Arab communities, Bedouin living in northern Israel, Bedouin living in the Negev, Muslims, and Druze.

4. Putting the issue of preschool education on the agenda of the local authorities

The program was helpful in putting the issue of preschool education on the agenda, harnessing the local authorities to the cause, and enhancing their commitment to the promotion of preschool education – through work on the locality level, by preschool forums and leading work teams that formulated a common vision, and by collaboration with the various departments in the participating local authorities as well as by pooling resources and using diverse funding sources (on top of the program budget) for investment in preschool education.

5. Using data for decision-making and for enriching the professional discourse

In the course of the program implementation, data provided by the study team were consistently used to evaluate the program, including: CLASS observation data regarding the quality of the work done in the kindergartens; mapping data concerning the situation in the kindergartens; reports by the educational instructors at the beginning of the program; and various interim reports on the program development stages and the level of satisfaction of the target population.

6. Knowledge sharing: Sharing the knowledge gained in the program with other kindergartens and localities

The program had a ripple effect on non-participating kindergartens and kindergarten teachers. Seeking to reduce gaps between participating and non-participating kindergartens in localities where not all the kindergartens were selected for participation in the program, a number of decisions were made at the program headquarters, including the decision to conduct guidance and training courses for all kindergarten assistants in these localities. In addition, the supervisors were instructed to apply the program principles to the non-participating kindergartens as well. Furthermore, the knowledge gained in the program was shared with other non-participating localities through the educational instructors, the supervisors, and the kindergarten teachers as part of the learning teams and the interlocal teams led by the supervisors.

7. Incorporation of solutions and common work practices in all the participating localities

In view of the lack of centralized information on relevant topics in the Arabic language and the unsystematic use of information from various sources found by the kindergarten teachers, culturally and linguistically-adapted learning kits were developed as part of the program for kindergarten teachers in the Arab population. In addition, as part of the program, more time was allowed for instruction by the educational instructors – one instruction day per week for each participating locality (about 15 kindergartens), compared with the standard schedule of one instruction day per week for 30 kindergartens in the non-participating localities.

8. Application of the observation CLASS tool to improve the quality of the interactions in the kindergarten

As part of the program, a reliable and validated observation tool developed in the USA was used for the first time in Israel to improve the quality of the interactions in the kindergarten. The tool is used in various countries for research as well as for supervision and guidance. As part of the program, professional development courses on topics related to the content worlds of the CLASS tool were conducted for the pedagogical staff (supervisors, educational instructors, and kindergarten teachers) so as to create a common professional language and thereby improve the quality of the interactions in the kindergarten.

9. Development of special professional development courses for the kindergarten assistants

As part of the program and in view of the need for creating a common language between the kindergarten assistants and the kindergarten teachers, special guidance and training courses were developed and conducted for the kindergarten assistants on topics relevant to their job and, unlike other guidance and training courses conducted outside the program, focused on the content worlds of their role in the kindergarten.

For further information
on the study,
scan the QR code



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