

# POLICY BRIEF

## Assessment of Kindergarten Teacher Training in Jordan

### Abstract

*Since 1999, there has been rapid expansion in the development and availability of public school kindergartens (KG) in Jordan, with close to 1,000 classrooms and trained teachers today. This study assesses the KG training programs, KG teachers' self-reported competencies, and KG classroom practices, using a representative random sample of KG teachers from 38 directorates and 249 schools in Jordan. The study finds that 9 out of 10 teachers performed at a satisfactory level or above in their own classes and that attending one of the five teacher training programs has a significant benefit. Little benefit, however, was seen in attending more than one.*

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*The estimated KG net enrollment rate in Jordan is 38% in which MoE's managed KG programs represent only 17% of all KG programs in the country. Jordan's KG enrollment rate remains quite low compared to the international norm. For example, OECD average country net enrollment rate in KG education for 3-5 year-old children is 77% achievement.*

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The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's National Center for Human Resource Development (NCHRD), supported by USAID's Monitoring and Evaluation Partnership (MEP) program and implemented by World Education, Inc., recently conducted a formative evaluation of Kindergarten (KG) teacher training programs and the extent to which KG teachers' used what they had learned in the classroom. This policy brief has been developed based on the key results of the evaluation's analysis and report. For detailed discussion about all of its findings, and the study design and methodology, please see the full report (May 2013).

KG education in Ministry of Education (MoE) schools in Jordan has been growing rapidly since 1999 when the Education Reform for Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) I program was launched and there were only 15 KG classes. As of 2011-12, MoE has expanded the number of KG classrooms in its public schools to a total of 983 schools/classrooms and 950 trained KG teachers, all of whom were female. The estimated KG net enrollment rate in Jordan is 38% where MoE's managed KG programs represent only 17% of all the KG programs in the country. Jordan's KG enrollment rate remains low compared to the international norm. For example, OECD average country KG enrollment rate for 3-5 year-old children is 77%. (OECD 2008)

MoE's efforts to build KG teachers' competencies and expose teachers to a range of teaching techniques are evident. Multiple training programs have been in operation for a number of years supported by various funding agencies. However, the MoE has expressed concern about over-investment in training but with fewer than expected benefits. To probe the issue in more depth, the MoE established a technical committee to carry out the *Kindergarten's Teachers Training Program Mapping* with the goal of assessing how widespread these training programs were and to consider whether a

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*For the purposes of this evaluation, NCHRD selected a representative random sample of 267 kindergarten teachers from 38 educational directorates and 249 schools.*

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unified, comprehensive training guide for training KG teachers would improve the situation. This study attempts to address the MoE's interest by conducting detailed research on a number of related fronts.

## II. Study Objectives

To that end, the current study is designed to assess Jordan's KG training programs, teaching practices in classrooms, and KG teachers' self-reported competencies. The evaluation objectives for this study are to:

- Provide information that will assist the MoE in revising the existing training programs to improve the quality of KG teachers' practices and support a consolidation of training programs if necessary;
- Produce relevant policy recommendations to promote evidence-based, strategic policy development in the KG sector; and
- Define a set of key indicators pertaining to the current status of KG teachers' training and classroom practices so as to assist in monitoring the development and implementation of these KG policies.

The study is also intended to address the following questions:

1. What are teachers', principals', and supervisors' perceptions about the training programs they attended, including quality of the training, adherence to meeting MoE's standards for KG instruction, and improvement of teaching practices in the classroom?
2. How do teachers perform in classrooms after training and how do their practices differ depending on the various training programs they attended?
3. To what extent do KG teachers' self-reported classroom competencies validate actual teaching practices in classrooms?

## III. Methodology

There are total of 983 KG teachers in MoE schools across the country. For the purposes of this evaluation, we selected a representative random sample of 267 KG teachers from 38 educational directorates and 249 schools.

In addition to measuring teachers' self-evaluations of in-class performance, one well-trained observer sat in on every KG teacher's classroom for the entire class day to observe how the teacher practices teaching in his or her classroom. We also surveyed 24 KG supervisors who were trained in the KG training programs, in order to learn their views on teachers' post-training classroom skills, as well as a total of 249 principals who directly supervised teachers in the study.

Almost all these teachers attended training to enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching KG classes. The programs most commonly attended among the teachers were National Curriculum (NC), Working with Young Children (WYC), Hikayat Simsim, Parental Awareness, and Kidsmart. These training programs coexisted for several years in the past and many teachers

attended multiple training programs, with many attending most, or even all of them.

For this study, we developed multiple measures embedded in the following four instruments: (1) School Principal Interview; (2) KG classroom Observation Tool; (3) KG Teacher's Perception of Training Programs; and (4) KG Supervisor's Perception of Training Programs. All of these measures were geared toward eliciting the perceptions of the groups on the programs, including expectations and needs of the training programs.

## IV. Findings

### *General Profile of KG Teachers and Classrooms*

The study finds that by academic qualification, only 1.5% of KG teachers in MoE's KG classrooms have master's degrees, with the great majority, 84.6%, having bachelor's degrees, and 13.9% with two-year degrees in education. In addition, just 9.4% of all teachers have an education degree above their academic degree (diploma or master). With regard to their teaching experience, 51% of teachers have less than five years of teaching experience at the KG level and 45% have between five and ten years of KG teaching experience. A small percentage of teachers, slightly less than 5%, have taught KG children for more than ten years.

In recent years, many KG teachers have participated in extensive in-service training programs in KG education, mostly in: National Curriculum (NC); Wisconsin (WYC); Kidsmart Program; Hikayat Simsim; and a Parent Awareness Program. For example, 88.4% of all KG teachers in MoE schools attended the NC training program. 77.2% attended Simsim training and 77.2% the WYC training program. In addition, 58.5% of the teachers attended the Parent Awareness training program and 53.2% of them attended Kidsmart. Evidently, many teachers attended multiple training programs.

With regard to use of technology in KG education, the study shows that over 77% of classrooms have computers. However, in terms of internet connection, only 4.5% of those classrooms had internet connections. This means that, over 95% of KG teachers are currently unable to access internet resources in their classrooms if they need to.

### *Teachers' Teaching Practice*

As mentioned above, one well-trained individual observed each of the selected 269 KG teachers in their classrooms for a whole school day. The observers focused on various teaching and learning activities promoted by the KG education standards and the training programs mentioned above. A 33 observation checklist was developed, in which several sub-domains were measured. These include 1) Good KG teaching practice index [18 items]; 2) KG teachers' social interaction with kids [5 items]; 3) active use of Education Corners in classroom [3 items]; and a few others. Standardized composite scores for various sub-domains were computed, ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 means "failed performance," 2 means "needs improvement," 3 means "satisfactory," and 4 means "outstanding."

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*The MoE has placed strong emphasis on the professional development of KG teachers and supervisors.*

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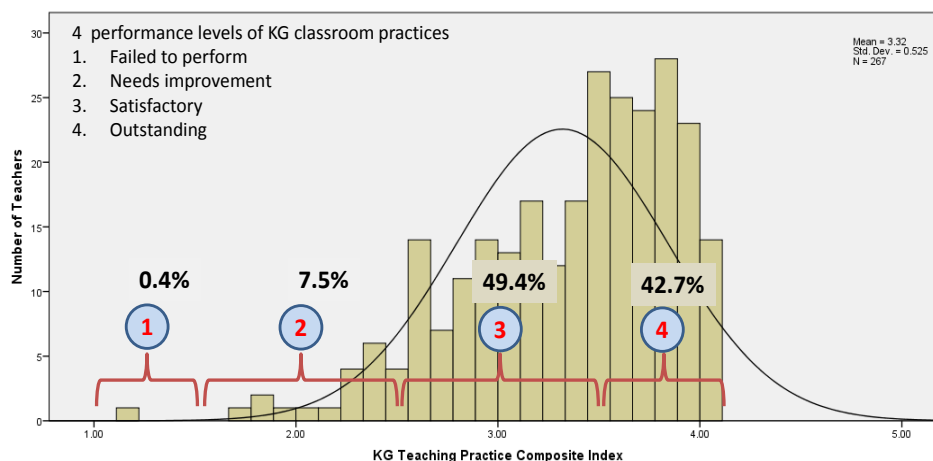
*88.4% of KG teachers attended the National Curriculum training program. 77.2% attended Simsim training and 77.2% attended the Wisconsin (WYC) training programs as well.*

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*The study finds that 92.1% of all KG teachers performed either outstandingly or satisfactorily in their own classes.*

As a result of the observations, the study finds that 92.1% of all KG teachers performed either outstandingly or satisfactorily in their own classes--specifically 42.7% at the outstanding level ranging from 3.51 to 4, and 49.4% at the satisfactory level ranging from 2.51 to 3.50 on the Good Teaching Practice index. Only 7.9% of KG teachers were considered poor performers. For details, see Graph 1 below.

**Graph 1: Average Performance Levels of All KG Teachers' Teaching Practices Index**



*Although each training program, funded by different source, intends to focus on different aspects of the KG education as the name of the program indicates, the study finds that there has been a significant "overlapping" in the training themes, which may have resulted in "redundancy" or "wastage".*

In addition, there were five specific items used to measure teachers' interactions with children in classrooms: 1) small group work; 2) reading to children; 3) asking children to read or examine pictures; 4) respectful interaction with each other; and 5) teachers addressing each child by name. 90.2% of all KG teachers performed outstandingly (47.9%) or satisfactorily (42.3%) by this measure. About 9.8% of teachers needed a significant improvement.

Almost nine out of every ten KG teachers (87.7%) utilized educational corners<sup>1</sup> in their classrooms at either a satisfactory or exceptional level. Of those, the majority (56.6%) was considered to be exceptional. Only 12.3% of KG teachers did not use educational corners and improvement in this area was clearly needed.

The study also finds that there are some regional differences in the quality of teaching practices. Teachers in the south of Jordan had significantly higher composite scores in the Practice Composite Index in all three sub-domains of classroom practices than did teachers in the central or northern regions.

### **KG-Training Programs**

The MoE and its partners have offered several KG level training programs in order to develop and enhance KG teachers' skills as KG education has rapidly expanded over the past decade. As mentioned earlier, many KG teachers participated in multiple training programs. Although each training

<sup>1</sup> Educational corners are dedicated spaces with educational materials for use and play, such as computers, books, and the like.

program, funded by different source, seemingly focuses on different aspects of KG education both in practice (and by name), the study finds that there has been a significant overlap in the training themes, which may have resulted in redundancies or “wastage” in the overall KG training. For example, many teachers participated in all 5 KG training programs (NC, Wisconsin WYC, Kidsmart, Simsim, and Parental Awareness). The study shows that while KG training in general has been quite useful and each is positively correlated with the index of Good Teaching Practice in classroom, attending more than one training program (any additional training for teachers, for example, attending 2 or more up to all 5 training programs) does not have any value-added effect on the index of teaching practice. In other words, there has been a “redundancy” in training programs, such as overlapping themes, which might have resulted in a fair amount of “wastage” (time, resources and opportunity cost). This finding suggests that there may be too many KG training programs focusing on the similar themes and that they may be offered too often and insufficiently coordinated.

The MoE should provide stronger leadership and coordination to consolidate and streamline KG training programs based on the national KG curriculum standards and framework and its strategic plan in the growing KG sector. It is also possible that different training programs funded by different sources focus on special regions of the country in the future, so there will be less redundancy in training.

### Teacher's self-reported competencies

This study also indicates that teachers' self-reported competencies are very high. In other words, teachers show a high level of confidence that they are meeting the required domains of knowledge and skills for KG education in Jordan. Most of all measured competency domains are taught in many training programs, including all the five training programs by this study. And almost all 267 KG teachers in the study (except for 17) participated in at least one training program. A great majority participated in multiple programs and some even attended all five of them. However, we caution that there has been no “causality link” between the training and the teacher competencies. In other words, researchers could not establish a claim that the teachers' self-reported high level of competencies is the direct result of the training. This is due to the lack of a baseline measure and a valid counterfactual “comparison” group (for more detail, please see the limitation of this study on page 15).

In addition, it is worth reiterating that the self-reported competencies are not all correlated with the index of Good Teaching Practices. Many are not correlated at all. That means teachers' confidence level in various knowledge and skill domains is not necessarily a good indicator of actual teaching practices in classroom. For example, many teachers think very highly about their own competencies in student evaluation and assessment area, but we found that the domain area is the weakest area for teachers, according to direct in-class observation. This finding suggests that policy makers need to be cautious about using data from self-reported confidence or competency level, but should rely more on actual teaching practices instead. In sum, classroom observation is a significantly more objective measure for evaluation purposes, even though it is more costly, must be

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well organized, needs a strong, scientific approach, and has to be consistently administered.

### Assessment of KG Teacher Training Needs

Although the study finds that teachers' perceptions of the training programs in terms of resources, facilities and conditions are quite positive, when teachers were asked about the needs for further training on various topics, most KG teachers expressed little or no interest in KG training for the near future. The study confirmed the following hypotheses regarding why there is little interest or need.

- 1) Teachers already learned the topics (proxy of high competencies);
- 2) Teachers already performed effectively in classes (good teaching practices);
- 3) Teachers felt "training fatigue" (more training offers no value-added).

However, we found that there are a few topics in which teachers expressed some level of interest and a few others that teachers showed no interest in at all. For example, the least needed training topics are:

- 1) Physical environment arrangement for KG children;
- 2) Learning about safety issues: and
- 3) Involving parents in KG programs.

On the other, the most needed topics are:

- 1) Preparing lesson plans;
- 2) How to teach thinking skills to KG children; and
- 3) Classroom strategies to engage and teach special needs children.

This further implies that not only should KG training be streamlined and consolidated, but that it should also focus on the specific skills teachers really need.

New and cutting-edge training and technology should replace traditional and general training topics for experience KG teachers, so they can be well prepared to teach 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills. Of course, newly hired KG teachers can still benefit from many existing training topics, so this is still important due to the ongoing expansion of KG education for the foreseeable future.

## V. Conclusion and Policy Options

In sum, over the last decade, the number of public school KG teachers has grown from virtually nil to nearly 1,000. The MoE is committed to expanding this number and is providing the appropriate training. However, large numbers of Jordanian children do not enroll in KG: only 38% of all eligible children enroll in KG, public or private. As such, Jordan still lags behind international norms of KG attendees, for example, OECD average country enrollment rate in KG education for 3-5 year-old children is 77%. (OECD 2008)<sup>2</sup>

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*The high demand for, and growth of, KG education demonstrates that the MoE needs to continuously make new and sustainable investment in KG education. These should include more teachers and classrooms, and expanded curriculum and materials while maintaining the quality of KG teaching at the system level.*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/37864698.pdf>



According to our findings, the high demand for, and growth of, KG education demonstrates that the MoE needs to continuously make new and sustainable investment in KG education. These should include more teachers and classrooms, and expanded curriculum and materials while maintaining the quality of KG teaching at the system level.

Although a large majority of KG teachers have attended training, this study shows that there is a wastage or redundancy when teachers attend more than one of these training programs (and some go to as many as five). The Ministry should limit attendance to only one training venue, or ensure that there is much more coordination and less redundancy. The MoE could also arrange for different training programs to focus on different topics in different regions. It is still vitally important, too, to provide the same or similar training to newly hired teachers, since attending one of these training programs has proven to be highly beneficial for teaching practices and self-confidence. Still the MoE needs to avoid unnecessary redundancy and wastage for teachers that are already trained.

In addition, the MoE should promote training that is better targeted to teachers' needs as they move away from their initial, relatively general training. The study has shown that teachers with training do not want to repeat most of the topics listed in the training programs, but do want to focus on: how to prepare lesson plans; how to teach critical thinking skills to KG children; and how to use classroom strategies to engage and teach special needs children - and supervisors strongly support this, too. Interestingly, involving parents is one of the things teachers are not interested in –which probably merits further discussion and study.

Based on these findings, we recommend that the 2014 follow-on study be conducted as planned. During this study we developed a number of different indicators that should be continuously monitored moving forward. Future data analysis against today's baseline benchmark will bring about new insights for informing and improving KG policies and programs. In sum, Jordan should celebrate the significant progress in KG education to date, and not rest on its laurels. There is clearly a need for ongoing and expanded investment in KG education in order to maintain and hopefully expand KG education's positive growth over the next decade.

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*There is a wastage or redundancy when teachers attend more than one of the KG training programs .Therefore, MoE should increase coordination, avoid redundancy by developing a comprehensive and an integrated KG training module that take in the account the national developmental standards for Jordanian children.*

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