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***Active-Learning Pedagogies as a Reform Initiative: The Case of Jordan***



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This study examines active-learning pedagogies<sup>1</sup> as a key aspect of educational reform in the context of Jordan's focusing its attention on access to and quality of early childhood education (ECE). We trace this process, which also involved participation by international (multilateral, bilateral, nongovernmental) organizations, drawing upon our review of published research as well as official national and international documents. In addition, we report the findings from our analysis of qualitative data, illuminating challenges, opportunities, and outcomes of efforts to implement active-learning pedagogies in Jordanian government kindergartens.

We sketch the cultural, political, and economic context prior to discussing multilateral, bilateral, and national discourses on improving educational quality, giving particular attention to calls for transforming instruction in ECE. We also describe international-organization-supported Ministry of Education initiatives to promote active-learning pedagogies in ECE, offering a more detailed portrait of the USAID-funded "Support Project" for the Government's "Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy" (ERfKE). Finally, we present qualitative focus group interview data to assess the extent to which change has occurred in teachers' behavior in classrooms.

## **CULTURAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF JORDAN**

The development of Jordan's educational system is as dramatic and compelling a story as the founding of the country itself. With the break-up of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the League of Nations created the British mandate of Palestine. Approximately 80% of the British Mandate of Palestine was east of the Jordan River and was named "Transjordan." In 1921 Britain gave semi-autonomous control of this territory to the future Jordanian King Abdullah I, of the Hashemite family. In 1946, the United Nations approved Britain's proposal to end British Mandate rule in Transjordan and, thus, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was born (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008).

Jordan emerged as a nation state during a turbulent era of political and social upheavals in the region. In 1950, Jordan officially annexed the West Bank, which had been under its control since the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. This annexation, however, was recognized only by Britain. In 1965 there was a land exchange between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, with Jordan giving up a

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<sup>1</sup> "Active-learning" (or what some have termed "progressive" or "student-centered") pedagogies constitute a model of teaching that highlights "minimal teacher lecturing or direct transmission of factual knowledge, multiple small group activities that engage students in discovery learning or problem solving, and frequent student questions and discussion" (Leu and Price-Rom 2006, p. 19). "Active-learning" pedagogies can be contrasted with "formal" or "direct instruction" approaches emphasizing teacher lecturing or direct transmission of factual knowledge (Cuban, 1984, p. 3; Spring, 2006, p. 6). There are two dimensions along which active-learning, student-centered pedagogies and teacher-centered, direct instruction pedagogies can be distinguished: behavioral and cognitive (see also Barrow et al., 2007; Ginsburg, 2006; Mayer, 2004). The behavioral dimension of active-learning pedagogies focuses on the degree to which instructional practices enable students to engage in verbal or physical behavior, learning by doing (a la John Dewey, but also Confucius, Socrates, and Pestalozzi), while the cognitive dimension highlights the degree to which teaching strategies enable students to engage in various forms/levels of thinking and construction of knowledge (a la Piaget and Vygotsky).

large area of inland desert in return for a small piece of strategic coastline near Aqaba. Jordan signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt in 1967, and allied with Egypt as well as Iraq and Syria in the June 1967 war against Israel. As a result of the war, Jordan lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem to Israel and received a large influx of Palestinian refugees, especially from the West Bank. Besides the humanitarian challenge posed by these refugees, Jordan also faced a threat to the Kingdom's sovereignty and security from the heavily armed Palestinian nationalists (*fedayeen*). Armed conflict erupted in June 1970, with the heaviest fighting occurring in northern Jordan and Amman and with most Palestinian nationalists being expelled from Jordan during "Black September." Fighting continued until July 1971, when the Jordanian army achieved a decisive victory over the *fedayeen* (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008).

After the upheaval of this civil war, Jordan pursued a path of peaceful co-existence with its neighbors. Jordan did not participate in the Gulf War of 1990-1991, during which a US-led alliance, including many Arab states, attacked Iraq to repulse its invasion of Kuwait. And at the Madrid Conference in October 1991, Jordan agreed to negotiate with Israel, leading to the July 25, 1994 joint declaration to end hostilities. Since that time, even as the Palestinian struggle and the Iraq War (beginning in 2003) has stretched the country's capacity to its limits, Jordan has emerged as one of the leaders of peace and economic growth in the Arab region (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008).

Today, Jordan is a country that is globally significant despite its small size. Situated between Iraq and Israel, it is an important player in Middle East politics, maintaining friendly and mutually helpful relations with the West. Jordan is a constitutional monarchy, based on the Constitution promulgated on January 8, 1952. The country is divided into 12 governorates, each headed by a governor appointed by the king. The total population is 5.8 million, with 40-45 percent being individuals of Bedouin or tribal origins and 50-55 percent of Palestinian origin, with a small percentage (less than 5 percent) from different ethnic minorities (e.g., Armenian) (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008). Jordanians are predominantly Muslim. While Christians comprise roughly six percent of the population, they are an influential minority, holding 20 percent of the seats in the parliament (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008).

Economically, Jordan is a middle-income country; its GDP per capita (PPP US\$) in 2004 was \$4,688 (United Nations Development Program, 2007). Since assuming the throne in 1999, King Abdullah has undertaken some broad economic reforms in a long-term effort to improve living standards. Since Jordan's graduation from its most recent IMF structural adjustment program in 2002, it "has continued to follow IMF guidelines, practicing careful monetary policy, and making substantial headway with privatization" (Central Intelligence Agency, 2004). IMF Executive Directors commended Jordan's continued strong economic performance in an increasingly challenging external environment. In its Public Information Notice No. 08/55 of May 19, 2008, the IMF noted that higher international food and fuel prices, given Jordan's high dependence on food and fuel imports, have pushed up inflation and widened the fiscal and external deficits (IMF, 2008). IMF Executive Directors therefore encouraged "the authorities to adhere to their current plan of macroeconomic policy tightening, in order to reduce vulnerabilities and ensure a continued favorable outlook" (IMF 2008, pg. 1).

## **EDUCATIONAL REFORM DISCOURSES: QUANTITY, CONTENT, AND PEDAGOGY**

In this section we sketch the goals and rationales for educational reform in Jordan, articulated by the Jordanian government and international organizations, including multilateral intergovernmental organizations (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank), bilateral intergovernmental organizations (e.g., Japan's Bank for International Cooperation [JBIC] and U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID]), and international nongovernmental organizations (e.g., Academy for Educational Development and American Institutes for Research). We focus on the discourses of the Jordanian government and international organizations beginning in the 1970s.

Jordan is one of the youngest countries in the Arab region, both in terms of its history and its populace – 42.2% of Jordanians are 14 or younger, while 31.4% fall between 15 and 29 years of age (Business Optimization Consultants (BOC), 2001). Currently almost one-third of the Jordanian population is enrolled in educational facilities (BOC, 2001). Starting from almost nothing in the early 1920's, Jordan has forged a largely comprehensive educational system geared at developing the human resources of its citizens. This notion of human resources is significant to the framework of the country – Jordan has very limited natural resources besides its people, and thus has embarked upon a serious and diligent mission to become a leader within the “knowledge economy.” The National Education Strategy, drafted in 2006, is “the consequence of deliberations concerning the importance of human resources development for the future of Jordan in order to achieve integrated economic and social development and implement His Majesty King Abdullah II's directives.” With the Strategy, educational leaders hoped to “achieve its goals in orienting the programs and practices of teaching and learning to provide students with the skills required for success in the Knowledge Economy” (Toukan et al., 2006). Such investment in and emphasis on education has thus far paid off well, as is demonstrated by Jordan's impressive improvements in its literacy rate, from 33 percent in 1960 to 85.4 percent in 1996 and 92.7 percent in 2007, which gives Jordan the highest ranking in the Arab world (UIS, 2007). However, although the overall literacy rate has climbed substantially, a considerable gender gap remains: two-thirds of all illiterate Jordanians are women (UIS, 2007).

The website of King Abdullah II asserts that one of the most significant policy choices that has benefited Jordan's educational development has been the decision to prioritize spending on basic education over higher education: “The consistent allocation of more than three-fourths of the total education budget to primary and secondary schooling has strengthened and supported the country's educational achievement in an egalitarian and sustainable manner, creating a national emphasis on learning that is supported by the school system more generally” (BOC, 2001). The strong opinions expressed in this quote highlight the emphasis the Kingdom has placed on basic education in the recent years.

After nursery and kindergarten years (ages 4- below 6), the education system in Jordan is comprised of a 12-year program that is divided into two cycles: basic and secondary. Kindergarten is provided both publicly and privately; however, there is a much stronger tradition of private preschooling. Ministry-run kindergarten only started in 1994, whereas private preschools serving the elite population have existed since the founding of the country, due in part to colonial influence. Education is free for all primary and secondary school students, and compulsory for all students up to the age of 16. Experts estimate that Jordan has achieved over a 95 percent enrollment rate for its school-age children, and unlike in many other countries, there is

a very small disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of primary school attendance rates (BOC, 2001). However, such successful statistics were not always the norm, as the history of educational reform in Jordan demonstrates.

### **Jordanian and International Organization Discourses: Pre-1970–1989**

Before Jordan's independence in 1946, education was only available to people who could afford it. The 1950s period witnessed a shift toward "education for all," reinforced by the *Knowledge Act No. 20* which made education compulsory for all children up to grade 6 (Abuhmaid, 2006). *Education Act No. 20*, passed by Parliament in 1964, made education compulsory for all children up to grade 9. The nascent economic growth and urbanization of the 1970's, the prevailing socioeconomic conditions, and "the desire to match education supply with labor market demands" led to the first attempt at major educational reform in 1973 (Eyango, 2003, p. 5). The Education Development Plan that was implemented between 1973 and 1975 focused on "diversifying the secondary cycle into academic and vocational streams; introducing prevocational education in the preparatory school grades (7-9); expanding teacher training and certification; and developing schools' infrastructure" (Eyango, 2003, p. 5). However, a USAID assessment concludes that the resulting reforms "were modest and had limited impact" (Eyango, 2003, p. 5). Persistent problems lingered in the education system until the mid-1980's.

Thus, between 1985 and 1987 the Jordanian government initiated a two-year process of critical review and assessment. Although in the late 1980s Jordan's school system was compared favorably with those in other Middle Eastern countries, this was not good enough. Public pressure to build more schools and increase teacher standards grew as the high birth rate and high urbanization rate increased population pressures (World Bank, 2000). The World Bank also contributed to the pedagogical reform discourse in Jordan when it became a major partner in Jordan's education reform in the 1980s. The Seventh Education Project (Education VII), a \$40 million loan approved in 1988, was designed to improve the quality, cost-efficiency, institutional capacity, and responsiveness to the labor market of the system of education and training (World Bank, 2000). The project was comprised of a large school construction component and several qualitative and institutional elements designed to benefit schools, community colleges, and project management (World Bank, 2000). At the time the Jordanian government (Ministry of Planning) considered the three-year preparation time of the project too long; however, the World Bank asserts that "in retrospect, it is clear that this investment project contributed substantially to preparing the way for the innovative follow-up operation" (World Bank, 2000, p.2).

### **Jordanian and International Organization Discourses, 1989-2007**

This process of reflection and planning resulted in a major, two-phase reform program, initiated in 1990, under the umbrella of the Human Resources Development Investment Loan Projects (HRDSIL I & HRDSIL II). This reform program was financed by the World Bank with additional grants and support from the European Union (EU), Japan's Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The first Human Resources Development Sector Loan (HRDSL I) was a \$73 million project to support improvement of the quality of basic and secondary education, while at the same time realizing cost efficiencies in school construction and strengthening sector institutions (World Bank, 2000). It included infrastructure and materials investment as well as

teacher training, monitored by the National Center for Education Research, now the National Center for Human Resource Development (NCHRD), a unique, semi-autonomous institution set up under the Intermediary Agency, which guides Jordan's human resource development policies (World Bank, 2000).

According to the World Bank (2000, p. 2), "Education VII and HRDSL I represented a turning point for the partnership in the education sector between Jordan and the Bank. The projects were designed to shift the focus ... from investment in infrastructure to investment in improving the quality of ... education." During the first phase of this reform program (HRDSL I) a new Education Law was adopted in 1994, ... extending the period of basic education to cover the first ten grades, ages 6-16. Also, a new secondary curriculum was put into effect in 1995, and a new General Secondary School Certificate Examination (*Tawjihi*) was set based on the new curriculum in 1997 (Eyango, 2003).

There also was a burgeoning awareness of and focus on teacher quality at the Ministry level. In 2006, a National Education Strategy was drafted with international donor support. The Strategy explicitly gears the education system toward the goal of investing in human resources development. As of 2007, around 20.6 percent of the Jordanian government's budget goes to the Ministry of Education each year (UIS, 2007). In its Strategy document, the Ministry of Education (2006, p.10) states that:

the general approach to education in Jordan is to transform programs and practices for teaching and learning ... to produce graduates with the orientation and skills necessary to be successful in a knowledge-based economy. This approach requires a thorough transformation process moving from a traditional and centralized system to one that is more distributed, collaborative, and attentive to both learning process and subject matter outcomes.

The 2006 Strategy document also accords great importance to issues of teachers and teacher education. It asserts that "the changing role for teachers requires new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and teacher preparation and training will occupy a higher priority within the investments of the educational system" (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 10). There is a direct allusion to active-learning pedagogies in its Key Principles when the Strategy affirms that "standards that recognize the professional nature of teaching will help to develop teachers as learning facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge" (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 14). Currently, the education system in Jordan is highly centralized, with the Ministry of Education (MoE) being represented by regional directorates of education, which are the intermediate authority between it and the schools (Abuhmaid, 2008). Each directorate has a mentoring department, which is responsible for post-workshop follow-up at both school and classroom level as well as for evaluating the performance of schools and teachers (Abuhmaid, 2008). Mentors conduct classroom visits to evaluate teachers, and also conduct trainings and workshops as necessary to support teachers' professional development and to improve their performance (Ministry of Education, 2005; cited in Abuhmaid, 2008).

In order to continue reforming its education system, so as to respond effectively to internal and external challenges, the government of Jordan extended its Education Reform Program (2003-2007) to a third phase, under the umbrella of HRDSL III. The most recent phase of World Bank support in Jordan is the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) project, the

third phase of the reform under the umbrella of HRDSIL III (funded by the World Bank). The project includes the following four components:

1. Reorienting of education policy, objectives, and strategy through governance and administrative reform;
2. Restructuring and realigning education programs and practices to achieve learning outcomes relevant to the knowledge economy;
3. Supporting provision of quality physical learning environments; and
4. Promoting learning readiness through early childhood education.

This program is the current engine, both fiscally and philosophically, behind the ongoing education reform in Jordan, and it is this program that USAID/Jordan has decided to focus on with the ERfKE Support Project (ESP Project) (2003-2007).

The Operating Guidelines for USAID Program Design reflect many of the same criticisms of the national education system as did the ECD Strategy document, as seen in the USAID Education Assessment for Jordan 2004-2009 Country Strategy:

- *Poor quality*: relatively high enrollment and matriculation rates mask some of the prevailing problems such as “the rote memorization methods that entail no critical thinking” (Eyango, 2003, p. 8). Jordan took part in the 1999 TIMMS study but was at the bottom in terms of mathematics and scientific achievement (Eyango, 2003).
- *Lack of educational relevance to the workforce needs*: Poor school to work transition rates are “compounded by chronic shortages of well-trained middle-level technicians and skilled laborers. Furthermore, the lack of relevant education for viable employment, and problems of [human resources] ... corresponding to employment, are attributed to the inappropriateness of the ... curriculum” (Eyango, 2003, p. 8).
- *Limited access to early childhood education*: ECE in Jordan has not received the necessary attention and has been too urban-center focused.
- *Poorly trained teachers*: Jordan no longer has pre-service training institutions, and in-service teacher training and assessment of teacher quality has “become increasingly positioned as an area of critical concern. In addition, the entering cadre of teachers at all levels of the schooling system is increasingly posited as not having the requisite skills or ... experience to teach in classroom settings” (Eyango, 2003, p. 8).

One of the core components of the ERfKE initiative is ECE, and this component has a strong focus on reforming teaching methods. This innovation is included in one of the ERfKE expected outputs: “Revised curriculum and teaching guides and other supporting learning materials in subjects and grade levels consistent with the overall ERfKE implementation schedule and consistent with the need to assist teachers to implement a child-centered, outcomes-based pedagogy...” (Supporting Jordan’s Education, 2007). When taken within the context of early childhood education within the Arab world, and in Jordan specifically, this focus on active-learning pedagogies is particularly appropriate. However, some trainers find that the active learning-oriented activities and principles of the ERfKE ECE curriculum have been extremely difficult for both teachers and families to accept; traditional modes of learning and ideas about childhood continue to define and constrain the practical application of this vision of instruction within ECE (Interview with Amman ECE Supervisor, 2007).

## **ECE AND ACTIVE-LEARNING PEDAGOGIES: SECTOR ACTIVITIES**

Many of the individual learner-centered concepts related to early childhood have been dominated by Western values, beliefs, and social and cultural practices. Arab culture generally emphasizes conformity, submission, group consciousness, and interdependence (Four et al., 2006). The cultural perspective on child rearing and education is often that which would create a “good” child, one who is “polite, obedient, disciplined, should be seen but not heard, and conforms to the values of the group” (Four et al., 2006, p. 9). There is also the perception of “early childhood as a period of weakness, ignorance, not valued in itself...waiting for adulthood” (Four et al., p. 9). Coupled with these cultural factors inhibiting dynamic childhood education is the complex history of ECE in the Arab world. For a period of time, each of these countries, Jordan included, was under Western colonial rule that included the imposition of a Western education system. The missionaries established kindergartens in their schools, which continued following the post-independence governments. These kindergartens were informed by a Western, active-learning, child-centered approach to learning.

However, these missionary kindergartens were “limited to elite groups; the other groups adopted a local formal education system, namely Koranic schools. These Koranic schools often operated in mosques, taught in Arabic and formed an essential part of the upbringing of a Muslim child” (Four et al., p. 12). The schools were, and still are, characterized by the passive transmission of the Arabic language through rote memorization and chanting of the Qur’an.

Early Childhood Education in Jordan specifically was addressed in 1999 when Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah commissioned a team of Jordanian professionals, representing different areas of expertise in dealing with young children, to develop a National Early Childhood Development (ECD) strategy (National Team for Early Childhood Development, 2000). The Strategy document focuses on children from birth to 9 years of age, who constitute 26.9% of the total population, as well as on pregnant women. The Strategy document consists of 14 sections covering a range of topics related to improved, comprehensive development of families and increased public awareness of childhood issues. The Strategy document became official government policy in 2000.

Prior to the 2000 ECD Strategy being developed and adopted, the 1994 Education Law “regulated the educational needs and requirements of primary education, but it did not deal sufficiently with preschool education” (National Team for ECD, 2000, p. 7). Thus, one of the goals of the Strategy document was to “develop the Education Law in relation to preschool education and its requirements, and in relation to compulsory basic education”(National Team for ECD, 2000, p. 9). According to the current education laws in Jordan, kindergarten is a formal educational cycle, but is not compulsory, though that may change: Dr. Khaled Toukan, the Minister of Education, stated in an interview with USAID officials on 1/28/2003 that “we [the MoE] have not looked at ECD [early childhood development] for over a century and we welcome [USAID’s] involvement in this area. In 3 years if the government is able to offer this service across Jordan, we will change the law and make ECD compulsory” (Eyango, 2003, p.11).

The vast majority of kindergartens in Jordan are run by private, domestic, and religious organizations, rather than by the government, with limited (and not very effective) government regulation. Moreover, the ECD Strategy document noted the following weaknesses in the then-current kindergarten provision:

- The Education Law states that the caregivers in kindergartens should hold a university degree in an appropriate field ... [but] a great number of caregivers do not have a university degree.
- There is a weakness in the contents and application mechanisms concerned with licensing criteria for kindergartens.
- There is a weakness in the curricula, educational materials, and guides available to both caregivers (teachers) and children in kindergartens. (National Team for ECD, 2000, p.16)

To address these concerns, the ECD Strategy document recommends a) developing “in-service training programs for kindergarten staff, quantitatively and qualitatively”; b) providing “the appropriate educational environment so that children will develop self-confidence and the ability to express themselves, in addition to taking initiative, cooperating, and participating in different activities”; and developing “programs, curricula, educational materials and guides for both caregivers and children in kindergartens” (National Team for ECD, 2000, p.17).

The Strategy document also addresses basic education in general. In this sense, it outlines the kinds of teaching and learning that its authors promote not only for preschooling but also for schooling. The Strategy document highlights the need:

- To raise the level of teachers’ efficiency and capability in general, and in the field of teaching methodologies and class management in particular.
- To develop the curricula, educational materials, and the school environment in general, and class environment in particular, [in order to] ... increase children’s interaction and participation in various activities. (National Team for ECD, 2000, p. 19)

The Strategy document outlines the procedures to meet the desired objectives in basic education through a framework similar to that outlined for kindergartens, such as teacher training and improving classroom and school environments. Such emphasis on *quality* improvement is also seen within the donor-funded initiatives in Jordan, which has some of the largest donor projects in the region.

In 2002, building on the ideas included in the Strategy document, the National Council for Family Affairs, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and UNICEF formed a steering committee, including representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and academia to draft a 10-year national plan for children. The resulting “Jordanian National Plan of Action for Children, 2004-2013” paid attention to early childhood education, mentioning that Jordan is amongst the first countries in the region to develop an early childhood development strategy and plan of action (MOPIC, NCFA, and UNICEF, 2004). The National Plan of Action also notes that, with regard to preschool education, the MoE oversees the establishment and licensing of kindergartens, establishes public kindergartens in disadvantaged and remote areas, and aims to expand the number of kindergarten rooms in their schools. The aims of the National Plan of Action are to:

- Increase the number of children enrolled in preschool (kindergarten 1) from 28% to 35% by the year 2008, and to 50% by the year 2013, and to increase enrolment in kindergarten 2 from 47% to 52% by the year 2008 and to 70% by the year 2013.
- Provide nurseries for children of working mothers.

- Define desired early childhood standards and outcomes that Jordanian children are expected to achieve at different stages of their development.
- Develop and evaluate preschool and nursery curricula
- Develop a national system for capacity building and certification for all professionals working in the field of early childhood.
- Outline a national regulatory framework for all early childhood institutions in the country.
- Expand parenting programs to empower parents to provide a nurturing environment for their children and promote the role of civil society organizations and local communities in providing early childhood programs. (MOPIC, NCFA, and UNICEF, 2004, p.22)

The National Plan of Action also highlighted the importance of aligning the following aspects of early childhood education with the “needs of the knowledge-based economy: a) class and school environment, b) school educational system, c) curriculum, d) learning resources and new learning outcomes, and e) methods of teaching and assessment” (MOPIC, NCFA, and UNICEF, 2004, p.36).

Following up on matters addressed in the National Plan, the MoE in concert with the National Council for Family Affairs developed a new National Interactive Curriculum and for kindergarten, drafted kindergarten licensing standards, planned and implemented training teachers and administrators on various topics related to early childhood education, and created and distributed to teachers training manuals and assessment materials. The National Interactive Curriculum is the first official kindergarten curriculum adopted by Jordan’s Ministry of Education. It was developed by a team of early childhood curriculum experts, accepted by the Ministry as the official curriculum for kindergartens in public schools in 2004, and put into use in the 2004-2005 school year. The curriculum is comprised of three parts:

- A textbook for teachers containing information on the historical development of early childhood education; children’s characteristics, developmental needs, learning styles, learning difficulties, and behavioral problems; teachers’ characteristics; and the environment of a kindergarten classroom.
- Ten thematic units that include over 1000 activities to be implemented throughout the school year.
- Five children’s practice booklets that include the Arabic and English alphabets, Arabic and English numbers, and a variety of exercises.

The National Interactive Curriculum is grounded in the principles of active-learning pedagogies. For example, one of the indicators in the main teaching objectives of the new curriculum is that “the curriculum guides teachers to engage in attentive, responsive interactions with children” (MoE, 2005, p. 4). In the second chapter, “Child Education,” the curriculum explains three approaches: learning by using senses, learning through playing, and learning through experimenting and exploring. The curriculum highlights that *learning through senses* is to train the senses as they are windows for knowledge. The teachers' role is limited to providing the sensual experiences to help the children to develop their senses and to show children how to use their senses. The curriculum values *learning through play*, consisting of activities in which children develop their behavior and mental, physical, and emotional abilities, expand their knowledge and ability to acquire knowledge, and satisfy their needs for enjoyment and amusement. The chapter also stresses that the curriculum must target *learning through*

*experimentation and exploration*, as it is a valuable tool to foster child development. The curriculum document claims that intrinsic motivation is what moves children towards gaining knowledge, and stresses the importance of teaching children concepts, rules, and research tools. Teaching is to be child-centered, such that the teacher:

- Benefits from intrinsic motivation and child's excitement to knowledge
- Encourages children to explore the relationship between things and events
- Develops children's exploration skills
- Organizes the learning environment/situation which allows children to explore
- Encourages children to conduct interviews and comparisons between things and events and open the door for them to guess and accept mistakes
- Provides educational environment which respects individual differences and encourages children to participate in the educational process.

### **ESP SUPPORT FOR PROMOTING ACTIVE-LEARNING PEDAGOGIES**

As noted above, a variety of initiatives were undertaken by the Jordanian government to promote active-learning pedagogies in ECE. Some of these were independently undertaken and others were pursued with financial and/or technical assistance from inter-governmental (multilateral or bilateral) agencies and/or international nongovernmental organizations. Here we will focus on the activities of the five-year, USAID-funded ERfKE Support Project (ESP), which was initiated in 2004 through cooperative agreements with the Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP2) consortia,<sup>2</sup> led by the Academy of Educational Development.<sup>3</sup> ESP, which began officially on July 1, 2004 and ended on November 30, 2008, was managed overall by AED, with AIR providing the technical lead for the early childhood education component, which is the focus of this study.

We will first give a brief background of the project and then describe ESP-supported efforts related to *teacher* professional development as well as relevant ESP-supported infrastructure projects. Then we will draw on qualitative data collected via focus group interviews to report on the perceived impact of the ESP-supported reform efforts as well as the factors reported to facilitate or impede change in classroom practices.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2003 USAID (in Washington, DC) funded three EQUIP Leader with Associates Awards. In negotiation with USAID missions in a range of "developing" countries, each EQUIP was to address a related set of concerns. "EQUIP1:" focuses on classroom- and school-level educational interventions that improve student learning and closely involve the local community; "EQUIP2: Developing Quality Education Systems at Local, Regional and Central Levels" targets policy and systems development, management, and education finance at the cross-community, district and national levels; and EQUIP3 highlights school-to-work transitions and the experiences of out-of-school youth.

<sup>3</sup> The *EQUIP2 consortium* is headed by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and includes the Aga Khan Foundation, American Institutes for Research (AIR), Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), East-West Center, Education Development Center, International Rescue Committee, Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, Learning Communities Network, ORC Macro, Mississippi Consortium for International Development, Michigan State University, Research Triangle Institute, University of Minnesota, University of Pittsburgh's Institute for International Studies in Education, and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

## **Background<sup>4</sup>**

In August 2004, the Ministry of Education's Promoting School Readiness Through Kindergarten Education initiative was in its early stages. Although over 150 kindergarten classrooms had been established, many lacked the furnishings, educational equipment, or age-appropriate materials needed to implement a quality kindergarten program. The national curriculum, though developed, had not been fully implemented; teachers were had not been trained to implement the new curriculum, and there were no field-based supervisory staff for ECE. Not all teachers came into the MoE with early childhood education backgrounds and specialties and as such, extensive training programs to empower teachers to implement the MoE's kindergarten curriculum were needed. While the MoE's resources were limited, it continued to open kindergarten classrooms in already existing public schools. From the beginning, ESP targeted the expansion of kindergartens in disadvantaged and remote areas of Jordan. These kindergarten classrooms were to be opened in all-girls schools, although kindergarten classes remained open to both boys and girls.

ESP worked closely with all related MoE directorates, particularly the Preschool Division, Supervision and Training Directorate; Curriculum Directorate; and Quality Assurance Directorate; to train teachers, supervisors, and school principals. Training programs, manuals, and supporting materials were developed collaboratively with the MoE's Training and Supervision Directorate. The same collaborative approach was employed to identify gaps, implement activities such as the development of the curriculum's general and specific outcomes, develop quality assurance documents, identify kindergartens to be refurbished, and implement the Parent Involvement Expansion Program. All ESP activities were, on a regular basis, integrated into the MoE's yearly work plan and approved by the Minister of Education. ESP assisted the Ministry's Curriculum Directorate in modifying the existing national curriculum. The second edition of the curriculum was used by all kindergarten teachers in government kindergarten classrooms.

## **ESP and Teacher Professional Development**

ESP was engaged in the capacity-building of Jordan's education staff at several levels. First, staff conducted a needs assessment of the ECE Division of the Ministry of Education. Some of the ECE Division staff had newly assigned responsibilities for kindergartens, and it was important to define the kinds of assistance they needed to do their jobs well. Second, staff worked with the ECE supervisors in each governorate to define their training needs. These individuals have the responsibility for visiting kindergarten teachers and advising them on ways to improve their teaching. Most had not come to their current positions with an early childhood background and needed increased knowledge in both the theory of child development and the practical skills of supervising teachers at this level. ESP staff continued monthly meetings with ECE supervisors throughout the year.

Thirdly, ESP staff, in cooperation with Ministry officials and other experts, organized the basic level of teacher training for new kindergarten teachers to introduce them to the many parts of the curriculum. This training was provided in the summer of 2004 to all

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<sup>4</sup> This entire section was taken from AED (2008).

newly appointed kindergarten teachers and again in February of 2005 to those who were appointed during or after the summer training. It was repeated in the summer of 2005 to ensure that all kindergarten teachers entering classes in the fall of 2005 had the initial 42 hours of training. To enhance the abilities of teachers to plan their lessons and to manage their classrooms, ESP staff/consultants organized advanced training in the summers of 2005, 2006, and 2007 to teachers who had completed the basic course. Training follow-up was provided through monthly meetings with groups of teachers, their ECE supervisors, and ESP staff to ensure that the lessons teachers learned in the summer training sessions were implemented during the year, to give teachers and supervisors the opportunity to exchange experiences, and to provide all concerned with a forum for discussion of best practices in teaching children of kindergarten age.

ESP worked with the MoE's Training and Supervision Directorate to develop training manuals and train supervisors, trainers, kindergarten teachers, and school principals. Anecdotal experience of ESP staff found that teachers were better able to understand and implement the National Curriculum, and supervisors guided the process of quality control through a systematic approach (AED 2008). This systematic approach consisted of regular visitations by supervisors to teachers in the classroom. These visits involved supervisors in providing guidance and support to teachers. This systematic approach also involved continuous field assessment of teacher needs by supervisors, which determined future training programs and teacher manual development.

### **ECE Training Programs<sup>5</sup>**

At the onset of the ECE component, kindergarten teachers generally did not possess the knowledge base or pedagogical skills needed either to implement the National Interactive Curriculum or to ensure student academic and personal growth and development (AED 2008). Based on these deficits, ESP staff/consultants prioritized teacher training as an essential prerequisite to children's development. In close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the ESP team provided kindergarten teachers with several training programs on the National Curriculum (Basic, Advanced I and II, Comprehensive, Child Assessment and Evaluation, Preparing the Classroom Environment using locally available household materials, and Modified National Curriculum). These trainings focused on theoretical and practical experiences for teachers to better prepare their classrooms and present educational materials in ways that facilitate children's personal and educational development. Teachers were trained to prepare their classroom environment to reflect the thematic nature of the National Curriculum, which focuses on reading, manipulatives, math, art, group work, and home corner activities. The trainings were designed to enhance teachers' ability to effectively apply their acquired child development knowledge and incorporate children's needs and learning styles into their teaching and learning environments.

ECE supervisors, many without an early childhood education background, were trained to deliver trainings to kindergarten teachers and school principals as a result of extensive training provided by ESP project staff. All MoE kindergarten teachers received at least 120 hours of training on the National Interactive Curriculum, through a variety of training programs. The training programs

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<sup>5</sup> This entire section was taken from AED (2008).

were meant to assist teachers in acquiring the necessary skills to effectively implement a kindergarten program that is developmentally appropriate and based on a *child-centered, active-learning* approach (see description of training programs and manuals in the Appendix). All kindergarten teachers with ESP-prepared classrooms received individual visits from ESP training and curriculum staff as part of the in-service training program. Teachers were guided by project staff and MoE supervisors on how to organize their classroom furnishings and use the various educational materials provided by ESP.

### **ESP and the Parental Involvement Program<sup>6</sup>**

Another key component of the pedagogical reforms implemented by ESP was the Parental Involvement Program (PIP), implemented by ESP and local subcontractors, including Whiz Kids. This initiative had female parent and family members volunteer in the classroom to aid kindergarten teachers. In the PIP pilot from 2006-2007, 350 family volunteers participated in 28 kindergarten classrooms in four directorates. In the PIP expansion program from 2007-2008, over 2,000 family members were involved in 190 classrooms in all 36 directorates. Additionally, 65 MoE parent involvement coordinators from all directorates were trained by ESP and subcontractor staff on the PIP Program.

### **ESP and Classroom Renovations**

As part of ESP, 170 MoE kindergarten classrooms, located in all 36 directorates, were completely refurbished. Renovations were undertaken through a cluster approach, which saw kindergartens grouped together based on geography. Prior to the refurbishment process, ESP designed a standard refurbishment framework, bearing in mind age-appropriate requirements. Each refurbishment plan included a complete renovation of the classroom and related toilet facilities; construction of an outdoor playground complete with three structures (swing, slide, climbing frame); and provision of a set of classroom furniture, carpeting, curtains, heater, and educational materials. In addition, 413 other MoE classrooms received a variety of educational materials to support and enhance delivery of the active-learning curriculum, such as toys, props, and games.

## **IMPACT OF ESP-SUPPORTED ACTIVITIES ON TEACHERS' CLASSROOM PRACTICE**

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

In this section we present the findings from our analysis of qualitative data assessing:

1. The extent to which, if any, teachers' classroom behavior moved toward the use of active-learning pedagogies;
2. The factors that facilitated or impeded such pedagogical change; and
3. The administrative and systemic support for implementing active-learning pedagogies.

Our source of evidence comes from data collected via focus group interviews with: 15 teachers from Jerash, from both ESP-renovated and non-renovated kindergartens; 15 teachers from Karak,

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<sup>6</sup> This section was informed substantially by AED (2008).

from both ESP-renovated and MoE non-renovated kindergartens; 15 teachers from Amman, from both ESP-renovated and MoE non-renovated kindergartens; 4 ESP staff members from the ECE component; 4 MoE staff members from the ECE Department; and 3 supervisors of the kindergarten level, one from each of the three directorates from which the teachers were selected.<sup>7</sup> The same focus group questions were asked of all participants, with a few alterations to delve into their specific role in the reform process (the specific questions addressed to each group regarding each topic are listed below at the beginning of the respective sections). For each of the three above-identified topics, we discuss separately the perspectives of teachers, supervisors, MoE staff, and ESP staff.

### ***Topic 1: Teachers' Classroom Practices***

**Teachers:** During the focus group interviews, these educators from three directorates were asked:

1. There are a variety of conceptions of “active-learning” pedagogy. What do YOU mean by active-learning pedagogies?
2. What are some of the key ideas that YOU associate with this term?
3. In YOUR view, what kinds of things would a teacher do when putting into practice active-learning pedagogy?
4. To what extent are you a promoter of the use of active-learning pedagogy?
5. In what ways, if any, do students in your classroom engage now more often in problem solving, creative play, independent activities, etc. (comparing now with before your participation in active-learning trainings)?
6. Have others (e.g., students, teacher colleagues, school administrators, supervisors, parents) reported to you that they noticed any changes in your classroom after implementing active-learning pedagogies? Can you give some examples?

Teachers from all three regions emphasized that active-learning pedagogies meant “learning through play.” They focused on the child’s role in active learning – using phrases like “learning by using senses,” “the child is the core of the learning process supervised by the teacher,” “the need to activate the senses while working,” and “the child participates in activities depending on the way s/he prefers to learn.” Teachers in Amman asserted that active-learning pedagogy is “far away from the traditional style,” while teachers in the other regions emphasized the flexibility of the curriculum and the variety of teaching strategies possible.

There seems to be a dominant theme of *agency* when it comes to how teachers perceive active learning – they as practitioners and children as learners have both been given agency to make choices about the content and processes of learning. Teachers also highlighted that active learning is associated with “cooperation between the children” and “participation and interaction between the children and the environment and the children themselves and with the teacher.” To this end, teachers implement active learning by “participating with the children’s play,” “using materials from the classroom,” “prepar[ing] the classroom,” and “identify[ing] children and their abilities.” The expression “learning through play” came up time and time again when teachers discussed their usage of active learning pedagogies – all teachers affirmed that they used “learning through play” in the classroom and that they encouraged parents to use such at home

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<sup>7</sup> All supervisors had PhDs in Curriculum and Pedagogy and had 25+ years experience, yet they only had 5 or less years of experience in ECE.

with their children. One teacher in Jerash said: “Yes, the parents prefer the children to write and read and have homework, [but] we convince the parents that through play children learn better and advise them to use the same methodology with their children.” This dichotomy is significant – there seems to be active learning (i.e., learning through play) on one side and reading and writing on the other. The teachers never mentioned specific curriculum content in their discussion of active learning; they always focused on the process of “learning through play.” Teachers in all three locations said parents were pleased with the new pedagogical techniques – children’s hygiene and behavior at home were improved, and they “gained new positive habits.”

**Supervisors:** During the focus group interviews supervisors from three directorates were asked:

1. There are a variety of conceptions of “active-learning” pedagogy. What do YOU mean by active-learning pedagogies?
2. What are some of the key ideas that YOU associate with this term?
3. In YOUR view, what kinds of things would a teacher do when putting into practice active-learning pedagogy?
4. To what extent are you a promoter of the use of active-learning pedagogy?

Supervisors generally remarked upon the child-centered nature of active-learning pedagogies, noting that the method is comprised of the child:

- Participating in the learning process
- Experimenting and being active
- Reaching and using high-level thinking
- Being the core of the learning process
- Learning by using senses
- Learning by doing

Supervisors also highlighted the “modern” aspect of active learning, in that it is “far away” from the “traditional style.” This is similar to what all teachers said. Supervisors also associated active learning with the environment in which learning takes place — the “physical environment is very important in implementing active learning.”

**MoE Staff:** During the focus group interviews MoE staff was asked:

1. There are a variety of conceptions of “active-learning” pedagogy. What do YOU mean by active-learning pedagogies?
2. What are some of the key ideas that YOU associate with this term?
3. In YOUR view, what kinds of things would a teacher do when putting into practice active-learning pedagogy?
4. To what extent are you a promoter of the use of active-learning pedagogy?

Ministry staff viewed active learning similarly to the other groups, using language like “learning through play,” “the child is the core of the learning process,” and “interactive learning.” Their answers differed from teachers in their usage of some more technical language and pedagogical framing, such as “core of learning process,” but supervisors used the same technical language. MoE staff conceptualized active learning in relation to multiple aspects, from “the physical and social environment” to “parental involvement” to “a trained and qualified teacher.” These

answers are quite different from the perspective of the teachers and reflect a more systems-oriented than implementation-oriented approach. The supervisors also reflected this systems approach, as they mentioned the environment and noted their role in encouraging and training teachers. MoE staff's responses to what teachers would do to implement active-learning pedagogy also reflect this more technical/psychological and systems framework, such as

- Prepare the physical and social activity
- Select interactive activities
- Provide materials required
- Know/understand children's experience and build on it accordingly
- Enhance motivation
- Understand the characteristics of child's development

**ESP Staff:** During the focus group interviews ESP staff members were asked:

1. There are a variety of conceptions of "active-learning" pedagogy. What do YOU mean by active-learning pedagogies?
2. What are some of the key ideas that YOU associate with this term?
3. In YOUR view, what kinds of things would a teacher do when putting into practice active-learning pedagogy?
4. To what extent are you a promoter of the use of active-learning pedagogy?

ESP staff discussed their conceptions of active-learning pedagogy in terms used by both teachers and supervisors/administrators, conceptualizing it as "physical and social interaction," "learning by doing," and "far away from the traditional way of teaching." Interestingly, they only mentioned "the physical environment" when asked to discuss key ideas associated with active learning, perhaps because of the high amount of kindergarten classroom renovations the team had been undertaking throughout the project. They viewed their own role as ones of "trainer," "facilitator," and "working toward sustainability."

### ***Topic 2: Factors Facilitating and Inhibiting Movement Toward Using Active-Learning Pedagogies***

**Teachers:** During the focus group interviews these educators from three directorates were asked the following questions related to the second topic:

1. In your view, what has *helped* you to at least begin to implement active-learning pedagogy in your classroom?
2. In your view, what has *hindered* your efforts to implement active-learning pedagogy in your classroom?

Teachers resoundingly agreed that the "availability of materials and props" and "the physical environment" had a direct effect on aiding or hampering active learning implementation. Teachers in ESP-renovated kindergartens said "the availability of the educational corners" greatly aided their active-learning methodologies. Teachers in non-renovated kindergartens did not have access to these types of materials, and they expressed that "teacher training," "university degrees," and "dealing with our children at home" all helped them in implementing active-learning techniques. Teachers in Amman were the most adamant of the three groups about the

importance of physical environment, perhaps reflecting the generally higher quality of school environments there, whereas teachers in the more rural southern group did not mention environment at all, even those teaching in the renovated facilities, focusing instead on training and experiential learning.

Teachers generally had *a lot* to say on what was hampering their efforts to implement active-learning methods, such as:

- The number of children in the class (too many)
- The size of some kindergarten classrooms (too small)
- Assistant teachers not being available
- English language not being known by teacher
- Some kindergarten classes not being furnished and equipped
- Limited financial rewards (lots of training with no consequent salary increase)
- Some administrators and colleagues not being aware of age-group needs

These issues were standard across all locales, and reflect system-wide criticisms from teachers.

**Supervisors:** During the focus group interviews, supervisors from three directorates were asked:

1. What are some systematic and/or cultural factors you see inhibiting active learning in ECE centers throughout the Kingdom?
2. What are some systematic and/or cultural factors you see promoting active learning in ECE centers throughout the Kingdom?
3. From your perspective, what, if any, changes have taken place in classrooms you supervise since teachers participated in these professional development activities?

Supervisors had a unique viewpoint from which to discuss this question, both from being “on the ground” with the teachers and as administrators linked with the Ministry. Their discussion briefly touched upon factors promoting active learning, noting the ERfKE reform and parental involvement as two large factors, and then quickly delved into factors inhibiting the implementation of active learning pedagogies:

- Teachers not dressing elegantly and not wearing colorful outfits
- Teachers not being fit (i.e., being overweight)
- Teachers not having financial incentives to attend obligatory and lengthy trainings, to face difficulties at work, and to deal with systemic/cultural challenges
- Centralized and bureaucratic nature of the ministry (hierarchy)
- All kindergartens not being refurbished, furnished and equipped
- work overload issues (only 12 supervisors supervise all the kindergartens in the kingdom)
- Some MoE staff, especially principals, understanding what active learning is
- Teachers preferring a female supervisor to supervise their work, but there being a shortage of female supervisors<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This gender issue may inhibit or discourage implementation of active-learning methodologies because female teachers feel more comfortable discussing some of the more physical tasks of active learning (i.e.

Supervisors also discussed changes they noticed in the system and shifts in attitudes and values regarding active-learning pedagogies and implementation:

- Teachers used to keep the toys and materials away from children to protect the materials; now they understand the importance of interaction between the child and materials.
- Teachers now know how to organize their classes and activate the educational corners.
- Some kindergarten teachers reached the final stages of award contests for quality teaching.

**MoE Staff:** During the focus group interviews MoE staff was asked:

1. From your perspective, what has been successful about the reform? What has hampered it?
2. What are some systematic and/or cultural factors you see inhibiting active learning in ECE centers throughout the Kingdom?
3. What are some systematic and/or cultural factors you see promoting active learning in ECE centers throughout the Kingdom?

MoE staff had a range of views of the reform. They noted successes achieved:

- Teachers were trained to build their capacity.
- Involving the parents inside the classroom had a positive effect on activating the learning process.
- Parents attitudes and concepts towards early childhood have been changed.
- Some kindergartens have been well-refurbished.
- Several important documents have been developed, such as: the developmental standards and indicators for early childhood, kindergarten learning outcomes.

They also noted challenges remaining to implementing active-learning pedagogies, including:

- The need for additional preparation of leaders in education (supervisors, principals and district directors)
- The need to narrow the gap between cities and villages
- Children from villages should have the chance to attend kindergartens
- The need to sustain professional development and other efforts beyond the 4-year period of implementation to date

While MoE staff remarked that cultural and systemic factors were inherent in the above-mentioned successes and lingering challenges, they also discussed other cultural factors:

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rolling around on the floor, sitting with the children) with a another female. This is the writer's assumptions, however, and was not explicitly stated by the teachers and/or supervisors.

- Immigration (such as the Iraqi refugees)<sup>9</sup>
- Teachers' attitudes (some not supporting active-learning methods)
- Principals' priorities (some paying more attention to higher grades than to kindergartens)

These points reflect not only a cultural tendency to resist change (be it supporting active-learning methods or recognizing the importance of ECE) but also significant national and regional events like the Iraq war, which flooded Jordan with refugees during the heart of this complicated and labor-intensive reform process. MoE staff also identified additional systemic factors that affected the implementation of active-learning pedagogies in kindergartens:

- Lack of human resources
- Lack of financial resources
- Some kindergartens not having suitable environments (materials/classrooms)
- Teachers becoming overloaded from intensive training schedule
- Few ECE experts in Jordan
- Few Jordanian universities provide qualified and pre-service trained teachers
- A need to revisit the organizational structure, and study employee roles
- Complication of a national move heading towards decentralization
- Teachers' salaries are low, and teaching kindergarten is not seen as prestigious
- Society's limited awareness about the importance of early childhood

Despite these inhibiting factors, Ministry staff also mentioned many factors they discussed as promoting active learning:

- Royal family's [or Queen's] commitment to childhood education
- MoE commitment to develop ECE sector
- Jordan's policies support childhood
- Women's role in Jordan has changed (women work)
- most parents are educated and seek to develop their children's skills and abilities
- International partners' and donors' commitment to ECE
- International interaction promotes ECE awareness in Jordan

**ESP Staff:** During the focus group interviews ESP staff was asked:

1. From your perspective, what has been successful about the reform?
2. What are some systematic and/or cultural factors you see inhibiting active learning in ECE centers throughout the Kingdom?
3. What are some systematic and/or cultural factors you see promoting active learning in ECE centers throughout the Kingdom?

ESP staff discussion raised points similar to those mentioned by Ministry staff, with their perspective on the success of the reform focused on both cultural and systemic shifts within the framework of ECE:

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<sup>9</sup> Teachers felt that the presence of Iraqi refugee children, who were often a source of disruption in the classroom, hindered their ability to implement active learning. They expressed that their energies were focused on dealing with the Iraqi refugee children's disobedience and other behavior issues.

- Building teachers' capacity
- Involving parents and the community in support of kindergartens
- Implementing the international methodology for working with children
- concentrating on developing children's skills, behavior and attitudes more than the academic achievement
- Opening more than one kindergarten class at the same school
- Teachers now asking to be moved to kindergarten, while before kindergarten teachers were not satisfied and wanted to move to higher grades
- Increasing parental demand for kindergartens (there is now a waiting list at each one)
- MoE adopting quality assurance for kindergartens
- Refurbishing and equipping kindergartens in the kingdom (e.g., by the MoE, the royal court, ESP, and other international projects)
- Changing principals' attitudes towards kindergarten
- ESP staff also discussed the following hindrances to the reform implementation:
  - MoE system (centralization and limited delegation)
  - Some of staff roles are unclear
  - Coordination between the departments in the MoE is weak, though some improvement has occurred
  - Not enough kindergarten supervisors
  - Gap between the field (principals, teachers, supervisors) and the Ministry
  - Some kindergartens are not adequately equipped
  - Some trained kindergarten teachers have been transferred to upper grades, despite the Ministry's clear instructions not to do so
  - Not enough assistant teachers available (to some extent addressed by involving parents in classes)
  - Some teachers resist change (from the traditional to active-learning pedagogy)

ESP Staff also mentioned that there are some significant cultural or systemic supports working to combat these challenges:

- Producing the kindergarten learning outcomes
- Developing and implementing the early childhood strategy
- Developing and implementing the Jordanian National Plan of Action for children
- Exposing MoE staff to international experience through study tours
- Increasing parents' awareness on the importance of ECE
- Expanding ESP parental involvement
- Increasing the competence of graduates from universities and colleges

### ***Topic 3: Administrative and System Support of Active-Learning Pedagogy Implementation***

**Teachers:** During the focus group interviews, these educators from three directorates were asked:

1. In your view, what has *helped* you to at least begin to implement active-learning pedagogy in your classroom?
2. Does the active learning pedagogy need a special physical environment to implement it?

3. Is it possible to implement active learning pedagogy in a traditional environment?

Several systemic and administrative factors were mentioned by teachers in all three locations as helping them to implement active-learning pedagogies in the classroom. The availability of materials, including curriculum materials and educational toys and props; renovations of classrooms; and teacher training (both pre- and in-service) were discussed as significant aids to implementing active-learning methods. *Every* teacher in *all* focus groups agreed that active-learning pedagogies need a special physical environment to be practiced, and that the environment directly affects the learning process. While some concurred that active-learning pedagogies *can* be implemented in the classroom, it “requires lots of preparation from the teacher and cooperation from the parents” to be successful.

**Supervisors:** During the focus group interviews supervisors from three directorates were asked:

1. In YOUR view, what kinds of things would a supervisor do to support active-learning pedagogy?
2. To what extent are you a promoter of the use of active-learning pedagogy?
3. How do you supervise implementing active learning in the classrooms?

Supervisors agreed that they worked hard to promote active learning, as “a few teachers resist the change; therefore, we raise their awareness.” However, they also said that they alone cannot promote active-learning methodologies; the “curriculum and the physical environment are vital to successful implementation.” Supervisors saw their role as one of trainer and mentor – “training teachers to implement active learning, encouraging teachers to be a facilitator rather than a traditional teacher,” and “raising awareness for teachers, school, and Ministry staff of the importance of this approach.” In practice, this meant supervisors considered the following activities under their scope of work:

- Attending class activities
- Evaluating children's work to evaluate teachers' achievements
- Filling out checklists and questionnaires prepared by the training and supervision department
- Preparing a visit report and submitting it to the district director

**MoE Staff:** During the focus group interviews MoE staff was asked:

1. Have you received training focusing on active-learning pedagogy?
2. In your opinion, do current MoE educational strategies and policies support the implementation of active-learning pedagogies?
3. How do you see active learning within the Jordanian ECE system having evolved over the last few years?

These focus group participants were engaged in training programs as participants, as well as designing the training system and enriching the training process for teachers and supervisors. The staff interviewed asserted that current educational strategies *do* support implementation of active-learning pedagogies, stating that “both the ERfKE reform and USAID policies do.” There was no mention, however, of real-life issues such as compensation for training time, classroom renovation, class and classroom size, lack of human capacity at the Ministry, and overworked

teachers and supervisors that dominated the discussions of teachers and supervisors; this may be because these had been mentioned earlier in their focus group discussions (see topic 2) and they did not want to repeat themselves. Ministry staff were very focused on the technical aspects of the reform rather than the contextual issues and details of policy impact at the classroom level. Ministry staff did, however, describe how the ECE system has evolved over the last few years in the Kingdom, raising developments, such as:

- Public kindergartens have started depending on active learning.
- The curriculum is based on active learning.
- Parents and teachers have become aware of the importance of ECE.

**ESP Staff:** During the focus group interviews ESP staff was asked:

1. In your opinion, do current MoE educational strategies and policies support the implementation of active learning pedagogies?
2. How do you see active learning within the Jordanian ECE system having evolved over the last few years?

ESP staff were similarly focused on the macro level of policy alignment rather than on issues related to the policy implementation process. They agreed that MoE educational strategies and policies do support active-learning instructional methods because “the MoE, the NCFA, ESP, UNICEF, USAID and the ERfKE project do.” In response to these questions, ESP staff did not mention any of the classroom- or teacher-level issues that were discussed by teachers and supervisors, though these issues had been mentioned earlier in the focus group discussions (see topic 2). ESP staff reflected on seeing a lot of change in the Jordanian ECE system during the past few years, such as:

- The kindergarten learning outcomes
- The national kindergarten interactive curriculum
- The ERFKE project
- The teacher training programs

## **CONCLUSION**

Our review of government, international organization, and project documents reveals increasing attention to improving quality of education in Jordan. Especially with the ascendancy of King Abdullah to the throne, this was the case not only for basic education but also for early childhood education. While basic education was a strategic focus of the country from independence onward (Education Act 20, etc.), the new millennium has seen a growing awareness of the importance of early childhood education, often framed as changing teaching and learning processes within the discipline from teacher-centered/transmission and memorization to student-centered and active-learning approaches (National Interactive Curriculum, National Education Strategy 2006). Both donor agencies and government ministries seemed to strengthen to this position throughout the late 1990’s and early 2000’s as Jordan’s quality of basic and secondary education improved, and the gap in early childhood education became highlighted by the parallel successes of the other levels of national education. Queen Rania became a passionate advocate for improvement of public early childhood education, and academics at the University of Jordan (Dr. Tagreed Abut

Taleb and colleagues) stepped up to the challenge to quickly and successfully enhance educational services in this sector.

As greater attention was directed to ECE, it became clear that there were both quantitative and qualitative problems that had to be addressed. In this context, the World Bank-supported ERfKE reform in Jordan included ECE as one of the four major components of the program. USAID also saw a need for technical and financial assistance to support this reform, and focused a significant portion of its financial commitment on its ERfKE Support Project (ESP) to improving ECE in the country, with particular attention given to increasing access and quality (i.e., enhancing classroom environments and improving teacher practices), especially in underserved rural areas. In terms of strategies for promoting active-learning pedagogies, ESP followed a variety of models, including direct training, training of trainers, and collaboration with multiple levels of the training system.

Focus group interviews revealed that teachers, school administrators, and Ministry officials were open to change, based on what they had heard about the reform pedagogies through formal and informal channels. The teachers were excited by the idea of child-centered, active-learning, and had a good grasp of methodologies they could use to foster such, though they were frustrated by the intense hours of training that had no subsequent recognition in terms of salary. Given that just a few years ago there were just 150 public kindergarten teachers in Jordan, the immense number of teachers (and supervisors and school administrators) who now instruct or interact with kindergarten levels and have come to value active-learning pedagogies speaks to the success of the Ministry and technical supporters in implementing and publicizing reform efforts. An interesting side note is the language used to discuss active learning – the technical term for active learning was not understood or recognized by teachers; they only responded to “learning by doing” or “learning through play.” ESP/MoE staff and supervisors were familiar with the technical language, but the more casual phrasing was often substituted once discussion started.

The sustainability of the reform is a looming question. As toys and playgrounds break down and as new teachers enter the system, can the Jordanian government sustain its quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement in ECE, while also dedicating efforts to improve other sectors within ECD, such as health and nutrition? There is a distinct need to create stronger incentives (i.e., salary increases) for teachers to improve their instructional methods and to develop a more comprehensive, ongoing professional development system that helps teachers to obtain the requisite capacity building, guidance, and support.

## **APPENDIX<sup>10</sup>**

### **Basic Kindergarten Teacher Training Manual (2005)**

The objective of this training program was to present newly appointed kindergarten teachers with information regarding all sections of the National Interactive Curriculum through a 42 hour training program. ESP and the MoE developed a teacher information booklet and a trainer's manual. The teacher's booklet included detailed information about the following topics:

- National Curriculum goals and objectives;
- Importance of the early childhood years;
- Developmental principles and characteristics;
- Classroom social environment;
- Organizing the classroom physical environment;
- First week of kindergarten;
- Children's activity booklets;
- Curriculum educational units;
- Planning;
- Importance of daily routine;
- Evaluation;
- School-home relationship.

This training manual included detailed information related to the following technical areas:

- Goals and content areas of the National Interactive Curriculum;
- Historical interest in early childhood education;
- Children's social, emotional, physical, language/cognitive, and perceptual developmental characteristics;
- Classroom social environment;
- Encouraging positive social interactions through a variety of developmentally appropriate practices such as modeling guiding, and reinforcing positive behaviors;
- Children's behavioral problems and strategies for minimizing these behaviors;
- Classroom physical environment and supporting educational materials;
- Supporting children's learning through providing educational corners that allow children to manipulate their environment under controlled circumstances;
- Importance of the first week in kindergarten;
- Curriculum's educational units;
- Planning;
- Kindergarten daily program/routine;
- Children's educational booklets;
- Strategies for evaluating young children;
- School-home relationship.

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<sup>10</sup> This appendix draws extensively on AED (2008).

### **Training of Trainer's Manual (2005)**

The objective of this training program was to enable the MoE's newly appointed kindergarten supervisors to effectively teach the various training programs to kindergarten teachers and school principals. The training manual was developed by project staff included topics such as:

- Basic training objectives
- Identifying trainee needs
- Training implementation strategies
- Adult learning styles

### **Advanced Training Manual I (2005)**

Following the basic training program, ESP collaborated with the MoE to develop a manual with more advanced topics that focused on pedagogy and application skills. This 40 hour training program targeted all kindergarten teachers and included a DVD, teacher support booklet, and a trainer's manual. The DVD included scenes of kindergarten teachers implementing the daily program while the trainer's manual focused on:

- Kindergarten programs
- Reading and writing preparedness activities
- Teacher-child positive interaction
- Parent involvement in kindergarten classrooms
- Assessing and evaluating children's performance

### **Advanced Training Manual II (2006)**

The Advanced Training Manual II was created jointly by ESP and the MoE staff to further teachers' acquisition of knowledge and skills. The objective of this 20-hour training program was to provide practical experience to public kindergarten teachers on utilizing environmental resources to enhance the learning and on enhancing story reading strategies. Kindergarten teachers were provided with in-depth information regarding the following topics:

- Using environmental resources and materials in the classroom;
- Identifying learning materials acquired from the surrounding environment;
- Strategies for developing art resources;
- Strategies for using environmental resources and materials in the playground.

Kindergarten teachers were also provided with information concerning the importance of children's literature and story-reading strategies. Topics included:

- Children's literature
- The importance of providing and reading stories to kindergarten children
- The basis for choosing age-appropriate story books
- Story reading steps and strategies
- The teacher's role in encouraging children to listen to stories
- Story book alternatives

### **Comprehensive Kindergarten Teacher Training Manual (2006)**

To aid new teachers joining the profession, ESP and Ministry of Education staff created the Comprehensive Kindergarten Teacher Training Manual. This manual was the compilation of all topics and content areas covered in the previous manuals. The main objective of this 48-hour training program was to provide Ministry of Education kindergarten teachers with curriculum content area knowledge and strategies for implementing curriculum activities successfully. The training manual's support materials included three DVDs that:

- Demonstrated how to obtain and organize appropriate environmental resources and materials to enhance teaching and learning;
- Showed kindergarten teachers implementing the kindergarten daily program; and
- Offered strategies for reading stories to young children and for creating printed materials appropriate for this age-group.

A kindergarten teacher's information booklet developed by the ESP and MoE team also provided teachers with the content materials relevant to the training program. The training manual included information about:

- The National Interactive Curriculum
- Planning strategies
- The daily kindergarten program
- Kindergarten classroom social and physical environment
- Reading and writing preparedness
- Children's literature
- Evaluation
- The MoE's parent involvement program

### **Training Manual for MoE Kindergarten Teachers with Refurbished Classrooms (2006)**

ESP staff/consultants and MoE personnel developed a specific training manual and teacher's booklet designed to enable teachers to fully take advantage of the furnishings, equipment and educational materials provided through the project. Training manual topics included:

- Securing a healthy and safe classroom environment with the newly provided materials
- Maintaining a clean classroom and safe playground area
- Organizing the classroom using ESP issued furnishings and materials
- Arranging educational areas in ways that promote learning and discovery with limited distraction
- Developing teaching aids, such as children's names/helping hands and days-of-the-week, weather, and emotion charts

### **Kindergarten Children Evaluation Strategies Training Manual (2007)**

The ESP and MoE team developed a training manual to teach all public kindergarten teachers to evaluate children's personal and educational progress and development. The supporting program materials included a teacher's booklet and a trainer's manual. The training manual topics included:

- Children's developmental characteristics
- Kindergarten teacher's role in evaluating young children
- Using initial and formative evaluation strategies
- Evaluation strategies used at the kindergarten level
- Strategies for completing children's MoE report cards

Teachers were provided with the report card and trained on strategies for gathering information to complete it.

### **Modified National Interactive Curriculum Training Manual (2007)**

Following the completion of the modified national curriculum, ESP and the MoE developed a manual that reflected the changes in the curriculum. This training program provided all MoE teachers with information concerning the modified curriculum including its activities and implementation strategies. The training manual support materials included two DVDs and a teacher's booklet. The training manual topics included:

- The modified national curriculum
- General and specific outcomes framework
- Children's learning strategies and styles
- Kindergarten classroom social and physical environment
- National Interactive Curriculum sections
- Evaluation
- Parents as volunteers in kindergarten classrooms.

### **MoE/ECE Supervisors Trainings**

The following trainings were organized by ESP and MoE staff:

- Training of trainers
- National Curriculum
- Developing teacher training manuals
- Organizing classroom environment

All kindergarten principals (over 400) received three awareness seminars on the importance of kindergarten education and how to support kindergarten teachers, children, and their families. In addition, three kindergarten newsletters were produced and disseminated to the field (public and private kindergartens).

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