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EVALUATING THE EFFICACY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES

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Abstract

The role of assessment and evaluation in early childhood is a complex process. Many children in early childhood programs can be influenced by these practices, with the impact—positive or negative—being largely dependent on the teacher's grasp of the process. Comprehending assessment and evaluation in early childhood entails knowing when and how to implement these practices, understanding how a child's development influences them, and recognizing the connection between assessment, evaluation, and a curriculum that is suitable for the child's developmental stage. While some aspects of this understanding may be intuitive, others require formal and intentional learning by early childhood professionals. It necessitates moving beyond conventional wisdom and good intentions, as these alone can lead to unsuitable practices.

Keywords: Evaluation, Early childhood, preschool education systems, improvements , education policies.

1.Introduction

Early childhood education is typically defined by grade levels, particularly in the school setting, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education . It encompasses the grades from prekindergarten to third grade. An increasing number of schools are integrating prekindergarten into their regular academic curriculum, usually starting at age 4, although some programs may begin as early as age 3. In a broader sense, early childhood education refers to programs suitable for children from birth to 8 years old.

It is crucial for professionals working with young children to have a deep understanding of the principles behind assessment and evaluation in early childhood. This knowledge is necessary for selecting suitable assessment tools and methods. Additionally, they must be able to make informed and appropriate decisions about children and curriculum based on assessment results. The complexities of testing and measurement in early childhood have increased, and the appropriate or inappropriate use of assessment information can significantly impact a child's or group's educational and developmental paths. This book aims to help early childhood practitioners acquire the essential understanding they need and to highlight the various issues involved in assessment and evaluation.



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Evaluating early childhood education (ECE) involves assessing the effectiveness, quality, and outcomes of educational programs designed for young children, typically from birth to age eight. This evaluation is crucial for understanding how well these programs prepare children for future academic success and overall development.

2.Objectives of the Research:

- ☐ Evaluating the efficacy of Early childhood education system in Egypt
- ☐ Studying the advantages and disadvantages of Early childhood education policies in Egypt
- ☐ Showing the challenges in developing early childhood programs.
- ☐ Studying the relationship between early Childhood curriculum and the process of evaluation
- ☐ Looking at early childhood and preschool education systems in Egypt from different perspectives.
- ☐ Exploring how to improve the politics of Early childhood education in Egypt.

3. Main Topic :

1.3 What is the process of Evaluation?

Evaluation is the process of making judgments about the merit, value, or worth of educational programs, projects, materials, or techniques. Assessments are often used in this process to inform these judgments. Evaluation frequently involves research-like techniques, as the conclusions drawn are based on evidence. This evidence can include both systematic and unsystematic observations of program outcomes.

2.3 The Early childhood and preschool education systems in Egypt:

The preschool education system in Egypt consists primarily of kindergartens and nurseries. Kindergartens are structured programs with educational curricula aimed at preparing children for school and cater to children aged 4-6 years. Nurseries, which vary widely in quality, provide childcare for younger children aged 2-4 years. Both types of institutions are overseen by multiple ministries, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Approximately half of kindergarten enrollments in Egypt are in private schools, with many programs operated by NGOs, religious schools in the Al-Azhar system, workplace childcare centers, and informal childcare in organizations and private homes. NGOs provide around two-thirds of nursery services, with the remaining portion covered by the private sector. There are no precise estimates of the number of children in these settings.



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The Egyptian government plans to expand kindergarten access, recognizing that early childhood care and education (ECCE) significantly improve educational outcomes, reduce dropout and repetition rates, and enhance academic achievement and test scores. A study by Krafft found that ECCE attendance reduced dropout rates so significantly that children who attended ECCE completed over an additional year of schooling on average. These children were also less likely to repeat grades and had higher test scores. Expanding ECCE access is viewed as a beneficial investment for Egypt, offering returns in the form of increased adult wages due to additional education.

Publicly-provided preschools are uncommon in Egypt and are often linked to the type of school. Preschool attendance is more prevalent in urban areas, with 62% of urban students attending preschool compared to 32% in rural areas. Metropolitan regions have the highest preschool attendance rates, exceeding 70%, while rural Upper Egypt has the lowest at 20%. There is a significant wealth disparity, with 74% of the wealthiest children attending preschool compared to only 20% of the poorest.

Preschool attendance is most common among students who later attend language private schools (97%), followed by experimental public schools (90%) and regular private schools (86%). It is least common among students who attended regular public schools (41%) and Al-Azhar schools (37%).

3.3 Evaluating the efficacy of early Childhood and preschool education systems/programs in Egypt:

A. The Advantages:

1. Early childhood education programs in Egypt are designed to stimulate cognitive development through structured play interactive activities, and early literacy and numeracy skills. This foundational learning supports better academic performance in later years.
2. Preschool environments provide opportunities for children to interact with peers, helping them develop essential social skills such as cooperation, sharing, and conflict resolution.
3. Preschools in Egypt often incorporate elements of Egyptian culture and traditions, helping children develop a sense of identity and pride in their heritage.
4. Early childhood education provides a smooth transition into primary education by familiarizing children with the school environment, reducing anxiety, and increasing readiness for more formal learning.
5. Many preschools in Egypt are designed to be inclusive, accommodating children with diverse backgrounds and abilities, promoting an inclusive society from an early age.

B. The disadvantages



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1. Children are confined to learning in ways that don't match how humans learn best. The way schools approach learning is like being taught how to run with lead shoes. If it's begun in preschool it's so you can spend 12+ years running with lead shoes. Children are born as learning machines. They don't need to learn how to learn. They master a language — without even know what a language is — in 4 years. (Everything after that is just refinement.) Children learn best through free exploration of what sparks their curiosity and play. Anything else is lead shoes.
 2. Children are taught to suppress their emotions rather than develop an understanding of them. They learn to ignore their feelings rather than growing to understand them
 3. Parents often feel inadequate compared to preschools in terms of providing education and care for their children, which is truly disheartening. They are led to believe that they require professional expertise to facilitate their children's learning. Preschools often make bold claims, suggesting they possess exclusive insight into what is best for preschoolers. While the finest preschools may offer a stimulating environment, they cannot replicate the nurturing and joyful exploration that a parent can provide. Even if a preschool appears impressive, it remains an artificial simulation of the genuine world. The authentic richness and spontaneity of real-world experiences are unparalleled, especially when shared with the most cherished loved one.
 4. Some early childhood education programs may lack proper standards of quality, including qualified teachers, appropriate curriculum, and adequate learning materials. This can impact the effectiveness of the education provided
 5. Limited infrastructure and resources, such as classrooms, playgrounds, and educational materials, can hinder the delivery of comprehensive early childhood education services.
 6. Weak systems for monitoring and evaluating early childhood education programs can hinder efforts to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.
- C. Challenges of preschool education systems in Egypt:
1. The need to improve access and equity by ensuring that the children (especially girls) of the poor are adequately prepared to enroll and persist in schools
 2. The need to improve and maintain higher standards in teaching, curriculum and learning outcomes-from early childhood education (ECE)' through university to create the knowledge and problem solving skills required to improve global competitiveness of Egypt;



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3. The need to strengthen management at the community level and at various levels of the MOE to provide support and guidance to the education process
4. The need to increase efficiency in the use of resources.

4.3 The relationship between Early childhood curriculum and Evaluation:

The alignment between Evaluation and curriculum in early education is fundamental. The curriculum encompasses a diverse range of experiences that occur wherever children engage in activities, not solely confined to formal classrooms. It encompasses the physical environment, materials used, specific content taught, and social and physical interactions. Within this context, two key aspects merit consideration regarding the interplay between curriculum and evaluation.

Firstly, there should be congruence between what is assessed and what is taught within the curriculum. This necessitates a close correspondence between the content and methods of the curriculum and the tools and techniques employed in evaluation. Secondly, the question arises as to whether the curriculum should influence the selection of evaluation methods and materials, and conversely, whether evaluation should impact how and what content is taught.

It is imperative that there is comparability between curriculum and evaluation. Individual assessment occurs within the framework of the curriculum, meaning that the specifics of evaluation should mirror the content and instructional approaches utilized. Failure to achieve this alignment may lead to a discrepancy between children's actual achievements and their assessed performance, particularly relevant in the case of young learners.

4. Methodology:

Here are some general principles for guiding and evaluating early childhood programs:

Principle 1 : Benefit children :

The first principle underscores the necessity of ensuring that assessments yield positive outcomes for children. The process of gathering precise assessment data, crucial for making informed decisions regarding children, can be arduous and demanding. Additionally, it carries a significant financial burden, potentially diverting resources from programs and services dedicated to children. Moreover, the time allocated to implementing assessment procedures may detract from the direct services offered to children. Therefore, it's essential to clearly demonstrate that assessments will lead to tangible benefits for children, either by enhancing the quality of participating programs or by increasing the quantity of direct services provided to them.



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Principle 2 :Be used for a specefic purpose:

Evaluation should serve a specific purpose and must possess reliability, validity, and fairness tailored to that purpose. Standardized assessments, designed with a singular goal in mind, lose their validity when utilized for other objectives, often leading to the misinterpretation or misapplication of test results. Decisions made based on many high-stakes tests nowadays often stem from this misuse. It's crucial to use assessments solely for their intended purposes, and the principles outlined below aim to address these concerns.

Principle 3 : Recognize the limitation of young age :

As per the third principle, policies should improve as children grow older. Essentially, the principle suggests that assessing younger children poses challenges in obtaining reliable and valid results, particularly concerning their cognitive abilities. It advises against administering certain assessments until the child reaches a certain age. If assessments are conducted on younger children, precautions should be taken during both administration and interpretation to ensure accuracy.

Principle 4: Value parents:

Principle 6 emphasizes the importance of valuing parents as both providers and recipients of assessment information. It suggests that parents play a crucial role in understanding their child's development and learning, and assessment methods should ensure that parents receive meaningful insights into their child's progress and achievement in school. Ultimately, parents should be considered essential partners in their child's education.

5. Results of study:

Children who complete early childhood should ideally be progressing positively in physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development to fully capitalize on future educational and health opportunities, ultimately contributing positively to society. Key indicators include being in good health, having secure attachments, effective communication skills, and readiness for primary school. Unfortunately, disadvantaged children often face barriers to achieving these milestones due to various factors like inadequate access to basic needs, healthcare, nutrition, low parental education, and limited childcare and preschool options.

So , Studying the efficacy of early childhood education typically involves analyzing various factors such as cognitive development, social skills, academic performance, and long-term outcomes. Results can vary based on methodologies, interventions, and follow-up periods. Some common findings include improved school readiness, higher



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academic achievement, and better socioemotional skills among children who participate in quality early childhood education programs.

Our Research on the efficacy of early childhood education yields positive results, showing that participation in quality programs can lead to long-term benefits such as improved academic achievement, increased graduation rates, and better socioemotional development. Additionally, studies frequently highlight the importance of early intervention and the significant impact it can have on narrowing achievement gaps and promoting equity in education.

6. Conclusion:

Supporting the early development of children is both a responsible and prudent choice. Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential, regardless of their circumstances. While parents play a primary role in child-rearing, governments also play a crucial part in ensuring access to quality healthcare and nutrition for expectant mothers and young children. By promoting programs that offer parenting information, supporting caregivers, and investing in services like home visits and daycare centers, governments contribute to creating a nurturing environment for children from infancy onwards.

Investing in young children is not only morally right but also strategically beneficial. In the short term, early childhood development investments result in significant cost savings and efficiency improvements in healthcare and education. Children who receive these services are more likely to be healthy, prepared for primary school, stay in school longer, and achieve better academic outcomes. In the long term, these investments produce socially well-adjusted and productive individuals.

Evaluating early childhood development is essential for understanding how well children are progressing and how effective ECD programs are in supporting their growth. By employing a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, evaluators can gather comprehensive data that informs best practices, enhances program quality, and supports policy development, ultimately ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive during these critical early years.

Recommendations:

- ☐ Conduct longitudinal studies to track the progress of children over time. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of early childhood education policies on individuals and society
- ☐ Gather feedback from various stakeholders, including parents, educators, policymakers, and community members, to understand their perspectives on the effectiveness of early childhood education policies.



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- ☐ Allow for flexibility and adaptability in policy implementation to accommodate diverse needs and changing circumstances within communities
- ☐ Continuously monitor and evaluate early childhood education policies, incorporating feedback and making adjustments as needed to enhance their efficacy and address emerging challenges.

Recommendations for enhancing Early childhood programs:

- ☐ Implement curricula that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and aligned with learning standards.
- ☐ Emphasize play-based and experiential learning methods that support holistic development.
- ☐ Require early childhood educators to have specialized training and credentials in early childhood education.
- ☐ Provide continuous professional development opportunities focused on the latest research and best practices in ECE.
- ☐ Create safe, clean, and stimulating learning environments that promote exploration and discovery.
- ☐ Implement positive behavior support strategies to create a nurturing and inclusive classroom environment.
- ☐ Offer programs to educate parents about child development and effective parenting practices
- ☐ Foster open communication between educators and families through regular updates, meetings, and collaborative activities.
- ☐ Integrate health, nutrition, and social-emotional support into ECE programs to address all aspects of child development.
- ☐ Provide access to mental health services for children and families to support emotional well-being.



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- ☐ Conduct regular developmental screenings to identify and address any delays or issues early.
- ☐ Implement continuous improvement processes based on regular program evaluations and feedback.
- ☐ Incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and materials into the curriculum.
- ☐ Conduct public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of early childhood education and garner community and political support.
- ☐ Engage stakeholders, including parents, educators, policymakers, and community leaders, in discussions about improving ECE.

Improving early childhood education requires a multifaceted approach that addresses access, quality, inclusivity, and comprehensive development. By implementing these recommendations, we can create a more equitable and effective early childhood education system that supports the growth and development of all children, laying a strong foundation for their future success.

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