Early Years Intervention

Background
The summary below presents the research evidence on early years intervention in the Arab World context.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of early years intervention on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on early years intervention in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of early years interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World
Early years or early childhood interventions are approaches that provide young children with kindergarten experiences necessary to construct their views on self and other. Through play narratives performed by a group of preschool children in Saudi Arabia, Khoja (2020) discovered the significant role that early years interventions play in shaping children’s understanding of their social and occupational roles. ECE provides young children with daily experiences through which they undertake different ways of being a boy or girl and are engaged in different roles. ECE programs are also platforms where young children learn about educational values related to cognitive, personal, family, citizen, social and religious. These values were mostly integrated in the Arabic books, then in the Maths books and lastly in the English books (Al-Enezi, 2019).

That is why curriculum designers must ensure the alignment of the learning objectives related to the educational values with the content of the books in order
to ensure a balanced development of child’s educational values. Teachers are recommended to link these values with child’s experiences.

ECE programs also prepare young children for the school. International research that includes meta-analyses on American early childhood education (ECE) indicates that formal early years programs are associated with better academic outcomes. In the Arab world, there is considerably less research on the topic, but ECE programs have been found to improve children’s school readiness, especially among disadvantaged children. ECE programs were found to be effective in improving children social skills particularly the underprivileged ones. Providing educational video games through iPads for a random sample (n=56) of underprivileged kindergarten females in Saudi Arabia increased their social skills and behaviors. Al Saud (2017) found out that the use of technology for young children strengthened their self-esteem and enhanced their ability to make friends and communicate easily with them. In Sudan, the introduction of ICT in kindergartens improved the cognitive development of young children. Through the computerized curriculum, teachers were able to deliver the instruction in various ways to satisfy their leaners styles. Hence, children in the experimental group were able to understand new information with low time than their peers in the control group. Data collected from parents questionnaires showed that the use of technology in kindergarten allowed parents to follow up on their children learning (Drar, Kommers & Mohammed, 2019).

Furthermore, using technology in kindergarten level significantly improved children mathematical skills. In Kuwait, AlFadly and Abu Loum (2019) developed a computerized educational program aimed to nurture young children’s thinking skills in Math. In an experimental study design, 25 children who learned math through the Tadrisi education program showed greater scores than their peers in the control group (n=25). Tadrisi educational program is an approach to teach math using online games and competitions that children can access inside and outside the classroom. Findings of this study suggest that not only children’s mathematical skills improved but also their independency and problem-solving skills.
ECE programs are beneficial for preparing young children to better acquire a second language as early as possible. In Oman for instance, hundreds of early childhood education programs that offer bilingual education systems were recently initiated. Parents of young children reported to be very knowledgeable and interested in their young children’s EFL learning and strongly believe that effective EFL acquisition will help their children throughout their life in almost all contexts, from higher learning to career (Tekin, 2015). Despite the significant role that kindergarten plays in developing children linguistic skills, in Kuwait, kindergarten teachers are practicing the language readiness skills with a medium to low degree. A random sample of seven teachers who were teaching first and second level of kindergarten from seven governmental kindergartens were not clear about their role in practicing the language readiness with young children. That is why, Al Shammari and Olaimat (2019) recommended policy makers to design professional development aimed to prepare teachers with the most recent teaching strategies for practicing language skills with young children. Similarly, in Jordan, Yaseen (2019) found out that the professional development programs for training teachers for the early grade reading and math project are weak and suggested for professional development programs to be based on the needs of teachers, taking into account their qualifications, experience and working conditions.

Furthermore, the teacher-child interactions and the emotional and instructional support provided to children in the EC centers provided an important context for their development and learning. The emotional support is reflected when teachers secured a consistent and positive environment in the classroom and prevented and redirected misbehavior. Whereas the instructional support is measured through the teacher’s use of instructional strategies, discussions and activities that maximize children’s engagement and ability to learn and stimulate their creative and reasoning skills. Observing these interactions in 60 kindergarten classrooms in the United Arab Emirates showed that they are directly associated with children’s pre-academic skills (letter and number knowledge) and behavioral regulation and emotional wellbeing (Von Suchodoletz, Barza & Larsen, 2020). Furthermore, quality of these interactions was also associated with teachers’ years of experience. That is why, findings of this study place emphasis on the professional development for novice teachers in particular to strengthen their ability to engage children in high
quality instructional interactions. Despite the practical implications of this study, the cross-sectional design limits conclusions regarding long-term effects of teacher–child interactions on child wellbeing and development.
Summary paragraph:
Evidence of early years interventions showed a positive impact on young children cognitive and social skills. Studies in Jordan, UAE, Oman, Sudan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia reported that ECE programs are approaches that provide young children with kindergarten experiences necessary to construct their views on self and others.

However, researchers have highlighted the necessity for teachers to participate in professional development that would provide them with the most recent teaching approaches to maximize children’s engagement and ability to learn and stimulate their creative and reasoning skills.

To date, research in early years intervention is limited in this region despite the reported benefits. More research is needed in this area, including longitudinal and experimental to examine the impact of ECE programs on young children academic and non-academic skills.
References


Search Terms
Pre-school; kindergarten; early childhood education; effective; benefits; early years; head start; early development; tools of the mind; abecedarian.

Databases searched
Academic search complete
ERIC (EBSCO)
Education Source
Google scholar
ProQuest Central
ProQuest Dissertations
Web of Science