

Preschool Education System in Egypt and the United States of America (A Comparative Study)

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Abstract The main objective of this study was to compare and shed the light on the different issues of preschool education system and the preparation of preschool teachers in Egypt and the United States of America in order that Egypt could improve its preschool education system according to its progress, challenges, objectives and teachers' preparation. The study discussed that preschool education means educating young children before primary school in a formal setting, such as preschools, nursery schools or kindergarten environments. As known that children of today are the leaders and future policy makers of tomorrow so any shortcomings in their care and education would affect negatively their nations' future. preschools are the first institutions established for educating and taking care of young children aged from 3-6 years old. Moreover, preschool teachers have a great influence on creating the children's psychological and educational attitudes, they provide them with reading and writing skills and help them to be ready for later learning and formal education. Therefore; it is necessary to have highly qualified teachers in educational, psychological and academic fields needed in this sensitive stage. The study followed the comparative and descriptive research method, and it concluded with some recommendations to explore alternative ways for improving the Egyptian preschool education system.

Keywords: preschool education, kindergarten system, teacher's preparation

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1. Introduction

Childhood is one of the most important stages of human development. Evidence proves that a person's life success, health and emotional wellbeing have their roots in early childhood. In this stage the first seeds of the individual's personality are developing as well as the child's habits and attitudes, also their inclinations and abilities grow [1].

Preschool education is the general term for educating young children some activities that can take place in formal settings; such as nursery or kindergarten schools, in non-formal childcare settings, or at home between parents and children. It is meant to provide children with the foundations of later learning and formal education, but it is also concerned with development of a broad range of social skills that will help children in the transition to schooling [2].

Preschool education plays a significant role in introducing basics of learning skills, which are vital for their subsequent formal education at all levels. There is evidence that preschool education has positive effects on educational attainment [3,4]. Children who joined preschool education have the following advantages: less likely to repeat classes; less likely to drop out of school; and are less likely to be assigned to special need classes.

Preschool education leads to higher achievement scores and higher completion rate in subsequent years of education [5].

Numerous studies have found that the education levels of preschool teachers and specialized training in early childhood education predict teaching quality and children's learning and development [6]. Studies have found teacher education to be related to the quality of preschool education and the development of children in preschool classrooms. Both general education and specific preparation in early childhood education have been found to predict teaching quality [7].

Public schools in France required teachers to have the equivalent of a master's degree [8]. Better-educated teachers have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with children, provide richer language and cognitive experiences, and are less authoritarian, punitive and detached. The result is better social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development for the preschool children [7].

2. The Conceptual Framework and Method

The study follows the comparative and descriptive research method in order to get a wide understanding of

the status of preschool education system and preschool teacher's preparation in Egypt and USA. The paper focused on reviewing the literature related to preschool education system, and analyzing relevant national and regional researches and studies to improve the Egyptian preschool system.

3. Preschool Education System in Egypt

The Egyptian preschool education system is mainly composed of kindergartens and nurseries. Kindergartens are formal programs with educational curricula designed to prepare children for school; nurseries are primarily designed for childcare for younger children, and are widely varying in quality. Kindergartens are pre-primary classes for children aged (4-6) years. Nurseries are tailored for younger children (aged 2-4). Nurseries and kindergartens are under the supervision of several ministries, including the Ministry of Social Affairs & the Ministry of Education (MOE) [9].

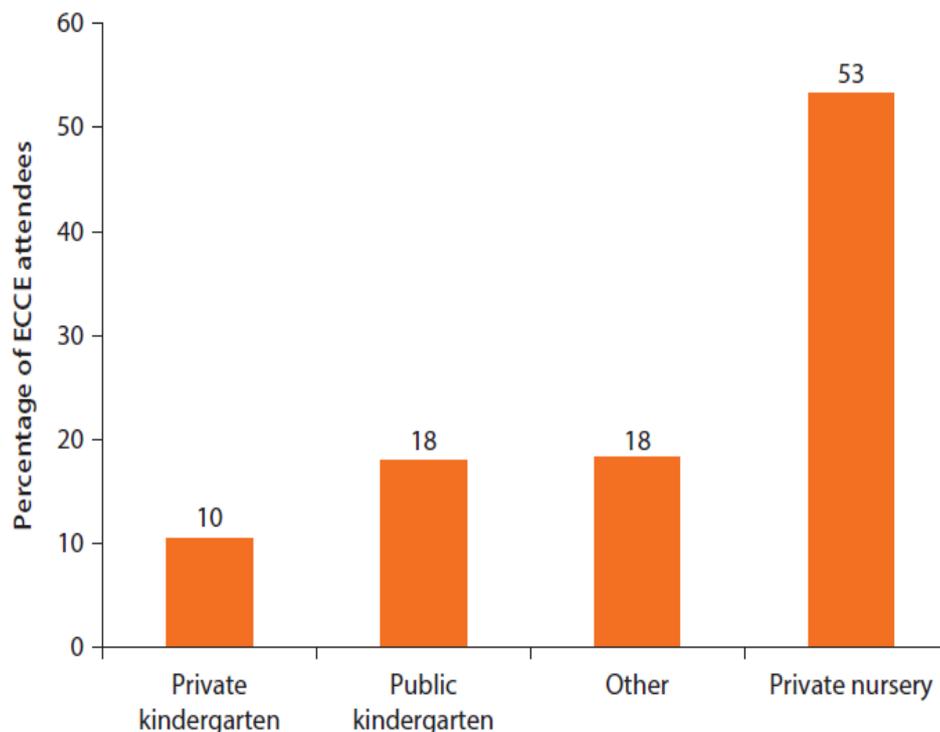
About half of kindergarten (KG) enrollment in Egypt is in private schools (see Figure 1); most programs in the private sector are developed and managed by Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious schools in the Al-Azhar system, workplace childcare centers, non formal-childcare in organizations and private homes. About two-thirds of nursery services are provided by NGOs, with the balance covered by an active private sector. There are no estimates of the numbers of children in these settings [3].

The government of Egypt has plans to expand access to kindergartens. Since a high percentage of early childhood

care and education (ECCE) improves educational outcomes, decreases dropout and repetition, and increases educational achievement and test scores. A recent study by Krafft [10] showed that ECCE decreased dropout to such an extent that youth who attended ECCE attained more than an additional year of schooling. Children were also less likely to repeat a year, half as likely in primary, and only two-thirds as likely in preparatory. Students who attended ECCE had two point higher test scores (out of 100) on their primary and preparatory exams. Students could expect increased adult wages as a result of their additional education, such that the benefits of extending ECCE to additional children exceed their costs; expanding ECCE would be a good investment for Egypt [11].

Preschools in Egypt are not typically publically-provided [10]. They are often linked to school type. Preschool attendance is more common in urban areas, 62% of students that live in urban areas went to preschool while only 32% of their rural counterparts did so. Consistently, metropolitan regions are the regions where preschool is most prevalent, with over 70% of students having gone to preschool. In rural Upper Egypt, students are least likely to have gone to preschool (20 %). There is also a strong wealth effect where chances that the richest have gone to preschool are more than three times of that of the poorest. 20% of the poorest attended preschool whereas 74% of the richest did so [4].

Preschools in Egypt 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 (41%) and Al-Azhar schools (37%) [4].



Source: World Bank calculations based on Egypt DHS 2008.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education.

Figure 1.

3.1. The Progress of Preschool Education System in Egypt

In 1917, the Association of the Greek Family established the first nursery in Alexandria called Dar Mana for young children [12]. In 1918, the Ministry of Education established the first public kindergarten school in Alexandria, and it was specifically for boys. It was not a free kindergarten and required fees, so it's available for children of the more affluent. In 1919, the kindergarten of Al- Dobarah Palace was established for girls in Garden City, Cairo. The Ministry of Education has put a specific plan in this kindergarten in 1922 [13].

In April 1928, Law No. (22), concerning the education in kindergartens, was passed and including the following: kindergartens are considered private schools with fees, they don't accept any child whose age is less than five, and in these schools the study of the subjects is in Arabic (Law No. (22), [14]). In 1950, Law No. (90) made education in kindergartens free and this resulted in an increased demand for building more kindergarten schools. In addition, decree No. (9180) was issued that the Ministry of Education was responsible for supervising the state of education in kindergarten, after making it free [15].

In April 1987, the Conference of the Kindergarten Teachers recommended that it is necessary to pay attention to the kindergarten children and to care for them. Kindergarten was not a phase of training, instruction, memorization, homework and holding examinations. On the contrary, the Conference emphasized playing and practicing activities as the initial point of the child's education [16]. In 1989, the Ministerial Decree No. (13) was issued to focus on the establishment of a new administration called The Public Management of Kindergarten, and the Director-General would be responsible for this Administration [17].

In 1998, the Ministerial Decree No. (21) was issued to form the Training Center for Kindergarten to achieve certain goals: the training of the kindergarten teachers; holding training courses for promotion to higher posts in the same field; disseminating of public awareness about the methods of raising pre-school children by issuing newsletters and holding seminars for those interested in this field; organizing training programs for fathers and mothers; providing an educational journal for pre-school children; and preparing film segments to present stories for children [18].

The preschool education total network (including governmental schools, private schools and Islamic institutes) consists of 49,640 educational institutions hosting 18,482,872 students [9].

As for the development of kindergarten schools, there has been an increase in enrollment. Children are both males and females and from different social and economic levels. The following table shows the quantitative evolution of the number of kindergartens and the number of children enrolled during the academic years (07/2008 - 16/2017) [19].

Table 1. Preschool Education (09/2010 - 16/2017)

Item	09/2010	11/2012	13/2014	15/2016	16/2017
No. of schools	8 212	8 928	10 227	11 064	11 250
No. of classes	24 237	25 723	32 459	33 963	35 105
No. of students	727 835	874 730	1 110 318	1 219 995	1 244 052

Source: Ministry of Education.

3.2. Challenges of Preschool Education in Egypt

The government of Egypt has led a remarkable expansion in quantity and quality of preschool education programs in recent years. Previously, KG programs were available in the private sector only for wealthier children. The government has also achieved improvements in KG teacher qualifications, class size, and curriculum development [2].

While Egypt has made substantial progress in educational development as a whole and in preschool education in particular, it faces several important challenges to attain the ambitious educational goals it has set for the future. Foremost among the challenges are the following: (i) 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; (ii) 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; (iii) 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; and (iv) the need to increase efficiency in the use of resources [2].

There are a number of challenges faced by preschool education: (i) shortage of funds which has impact on quality; (ii) shortage of qualified teachers; (iii) no capacity to accept all eligible children; (iv) private preschools is not affordable for most of people [5].

Although the government efforts to expand children's admission to preschool institutions, poor children in Egypt still face many barriers to Early Childhood Education enrollment [2]:

There is a strong correlation between gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and gross enrollment in ECE in Egypt - the poorest governorates in Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt have the lowest ECE enrollment rates;

Disadvantaged children may enter school late due to health and nutrition problems;

Poor children have alarmingly high under-five mortality rates, are less likely to receive immunizations than wealthier children, and are likely to be suffering from under nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies;

Fees and household costs for ECE are too high for the poor, as ECE fees are higher than other levels of schooling, and uniforms and other supplies may be unaffordable;

There are disparities between ECE enrollment rates for girls and boys; rates are slightly lower for girls, but differences may be greater in some areas of the country;

Poor children are less likely to have the support of a literate parent - they may be handicapped in both adequately valuing education and getting needed educational support at home.

3.3. The Objectives of Preschool Education in Egypt

The preschool institutions in Egypt are established mainly to: (i) educate the preschool/kindergarten children through the use of self-learning, and to provide them with

opportunities to use their self activities, discovery, research, and experimenting as essential foundations in the process of learning and education; (ii) develop the child's thinking and to help them acquire the principles of the cognitive organization to adapt to the ever-changing society [20].

The objectives of preschool education do not mean filling the minds of children with information, but providing them with opportunities to feel the innocence of childhood, to identify the features of the surrounding world, to interact positively with their peers, as well as to enjoy and play. Thus, it is preferable in this age to have the child learn the values and principles in the form of stories and fun, not intense curriculum [21].

The main goal of preschool education is to help children to develop their general intelligence and promote their capabilities and capacities. Preschool education has become important for predicting the mental growth and discovering the child's talents and abilities. Generally, children who attend kindergartens and receive preschool education are more successful in academic levels than their peers who did not receive such education; they also participate in fewer deviant behaviors and are more obedient to the law than their peers who did not attend preschool education [22]. UNESCO [3] has set a major objective for preschool education, which is summarized in achieving the comprehensive development of children and preparing them for school.

As for Ministry of Education in Egypt, The objectives within an Egyptian Kindergartens include the following [23]:

Minimizing the effect of local environments on education and consequently increasing children's learning abilities.

Helping pre-school children to achieve comprehensive and integrated development in cognitive, physical, psychomotor, affective, social, ethical and religious aspects taking into account the individual differences among learners.

Developing children's linguistic, math, artistic skills through individual and group activities as well as developing children's ability to think, create and imagine.

Developing children's energies and potentialities, in addition; helping them to get used to discipline.

To achieve the objectives of preschool education in Egypt, teachers currently rely on a collection of 23 books, authorized by the MOE, that cover a series of topics: general teacher guides; a selection of guides on personality development, child behavior development, and music education; subject guides for the promotion skills in language, art, math, storytelling, and writing. The remaining ten are workbooks for KG children, five each for KG1 and KG2 [2].

3.4. Preschool Education Teachers in Egypt

The preschool teachers should be highly qualified in professional (educational), academic and cultural fields as he/she is the person capable of instilling the best possible growth of the child [24]. Students' admission to colleges and departments of kindergarten is organized by the Office of Coordination and depends on student grades obtained in the general secondary examination [25]. During kindergarten student/teachers' preparation in colleges, they

study courses in three fields: academic, educational and cultural [26]:

Academic Courses such as: an introduction to kindergarten, legislation and children's organizations, the socialization of the child and its needs, the child's artistic expression, the child's musical expression, the child's kinetic expression, children's literature, stories and tales of children, preparing the children for reading and writing, management of kindergartens, musical instruments of the child, children's library and museum, kindergarten teacher, programs for pre-school children, and children's theatre.

Educational Courses such as: introduction to educational and psychological sciences, psychological growth, field training, psychology of play, basic skills in physical education and sports, basic skills in musical education, basic skills in arts education, curriculum activities in kindergartens, the cognitive and mental and growth, the child's Psychology, the methods of child-rearing, the history of child-rearing, an entrance to educational technology in kindergartens, learning psychology, production of teaching aids, philosophical and social foundations of education, developing the scientific and environmental concepts, developing the mathematical concepts, developing the social and moral concepts, developing the concepts of language, psychological counseling, individual differences and evaluation, psychology of exceptional children, comparative education, environmental education, developing the innovation and communication skills, mental health, seminar, and learning difficulties, and

Cultural Courses such as: readings in English, Arabic Language and Literature, computers, the English Language, first aids, and information systems & computers.

Faculties of Education are in the process of developing pre-service training for non-specialized KG teachers, for instance; Faculty of Education, Cairo University, provides Professional Diploma Programs for developing early childhood teachers' skills. It also provides programs in early childhood education: preparation of nursery school/kindergarten teachers, and preparation of kindergarten teachers of language or international schools [27].

University faculties are also developing in-service packages; neither of these new efforts is presently coordinated with MOE in-service training. New applicants for public KG teacher positions are required to have at least a bachelor's degree with specialization in education and early childhood development [3].

4. Preschool Education System in the United States of America (USA)

The United States has a great interest in preschool education because of the importance of this stage in the formation of the child's personality. It is a fact that what children learn during the first years of their life contributes to the formation of their views about themselves and the world. This later affects their success or failure in school, work and personal lives. This interest was the beginning for establishing nurseries and kindergartens all over the United States [28].

Pre-school (also called Pre-K or Pre-Kindergarten) refers to the first formal academic classroom-based learning environment that a child attends in US. It begins around the age of three in order to prepare for the more didactic and academically intensive kindergarten, the traditional "first" class that school children participate in. Pre-schools differentiate themselves by equally focusing on harvesting a child's social physical, emotional and cognitive development. They commonly follow a set of organization-created teaching standards in shaping curriculum and instructional activities/goals. Some pre-school programs have adopted specialized methods of teaching, such as Montessori [29].

Pre-school is not required. On the other hand, it acts as a way to prepare children to better success in a kindergarten. Pre-school programs usually offer two- or three-hour sessions per day, a few days per week. Children learn the alphabet, colors, and other elementary basics. Pre-school programs are not free: they have to be financed by the family. Meals, depending on the school, may be provided by the family or by the school. Transportation to and from the program is generally the responsibility of parents, although some pre-school programs might make busing available to families for a fee [29].

In U.S.A, children enter formal schooling around age five. It starts from kindergarten, prior to 1st grade, through secondary graduation 12th Grade [29]. Thus, kindergarten is part of the US public education system, it's part of free compulsory education in some states, stretching from the age of four to the age of six.

The American kindergarten philosophy emphasizes the importance of playing at this stage and children need to spend more time in playing and dialoguing with each other and with adults. Therefore, kindergartens should be a place for enjoyment, research and exploration, and not just solely academic school duties [30]. In the United States, the kindergarten teacher is responsible for planning programs for play and allowing children the opportunity to participate in the planning of these programs, as well as providing sufficient time for them to research, exploration and experimentation [31].

The American philosophy of kindergartens focuses on taking into account individual differences among children, encouraging them to work according to their abilities and interests, and providing them with environments that stimulate the children's curiosity. An active learning environment is one in which children are encouraged to explore and interact with the environment to make meaning and knowledge through their experiences, social interactions and negotiations with others. A well-organized environment is (1) responsive to children and their changing needs, interests and abilities, (2) one that invites experiences, interactions, risk taking, discovery, connections to nature, conversations, play and collaboration, (3) one that has a sense of place and purpose for resources, materials and experiences, (4) consistent and predictable, (5) well resourced and well maintained, (6) interesting and engaging (absorbs children in complex, deep learning). Children are able to play in small to medium sized groups, without unnecessary interruption. plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature ... invite children to open-ended interactions,

spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature [32]. This develops the concept of children's self-reliance, and strong relationships.

Young children are the major focus of the kindergarten program. Each child brings unique experiences, expectations, emotions, attitudes, and abilities to the classroom. It is essential that the individual characteristics of each child be accepted and understood. The kindergarten environment should provide opportunities for experimentation, exploration, challenge, and interaction. An atmosphere of understanding and compassion should surround the kindergarten child in this most important school experience [33].

The kindergartens' mission is to promote young children physically and healthy, to enhance their ability in play and work, and to prepare them for the study through a flexible curriculum emphasizing the child's experiences at work and play, enjoyment of music, dance, gross motor, science and listening to stories. In addition, the child's language increases and speech habits improve. Also, in this stage, the child begins to read and recognize numbers [34].

4.1. The Progress of Preschool Education System in USA

Friedrich Froebel who was born in Germany in 1782, established a school in Blankenburg, Germany in 1837. His school later became known as kindergarten. The term kindergarten emerged because he described children as plants and teachers as gardeners. *kind* means child and *garten* means garden. The teachers were called to educate the children from the earliest years through their own experiences. In his school, Froebel emphasized play, which started with simple activities and later progressed to more complex games. He felt that children should learn through play. He described ten gifts (playthings) that were given to the children to help them grow and develop [35].

Carl Schurz and his wife Margaretha Meyer immigrated from Germany to Watertown, Wisconsin. Mrs. Schurz had studied in Germany under Froebel and opened the first German kindergarten in USA in 1855 in her home. She put into practice the methods learned in Germany teaching her children and their cousins in German, so the children joining this kindergarten were German-speaking. Five years later in 1860, Mrs. Elizabeth Peabody opened the first English-speaking kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1873, the expansion of kindergarten began as the first kindergarten opened in St. Louis under the direction of Susan Blow and William T. Harris for children of working parents. It is based on Froebel's observations of mother child interactions. The kindergarten was child-centered and kindergarteners were in charge of the spiritual, physical and moral development of the child [35].

By the 1900s, the kindergarten movement had become very progressive. Free kindergartens were popular, and by 1914 every major city in the United States had established public kindergartens. As the curriculum began to change, subject areas were introduced. Nature study, home and community life, literature, music and art were at the core. By 1920, kindergarten became integrated into the public schools, the unification between the kindergarten and first grade programs was seen in many schools as the first

grade curriculum moved down and the kindergarten curriculum moved up. The age range of the kindergarten was also limited from 3-7 year olds to 4-5 year olds. Reading, arithmetic and writing became the focus that parents were pushing for. On the other hand; some parents felt that curriculum should be concentrated on the children's nature and less on the process of learning. These two views were called the “**Hurry-Hurry-Hurry and Don't Push Me**” theories of education. The kindergarten school day included reading, writing, speaking, listening, arithmetic, science, social studies, art, music and physical education. The subjects were not formal but integrated throughout the day in various activities. Class size became limited too as it was found to affect the quality of education. The average kindergarten class contained anywhere from 18 to 30 students and each kindergarten session lasted two and a half hours. By 1980s, the publication of **A Nation at Risk** caused society to put education first on the agenda of the federal government. Public support began to increase for compulsory and tax supported kindergarten in the public schools. Thus, enrollment of all five year olds had risen to 96%, and every state had public kindergartens [35].

Nowadays, the kindergarten curriculum is a full-day cognitive based program that includes more reading and writing. Also, technology is used in the classroom and in the curriculum. Kindergarten is seen as a place to learn, develop and to get ready for school. Moreover, **parental involvement** is an aspect of the US preschool education system. ‘Parent power’ is welcomed and encouraged through local Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) attached to every school. PTAs meet regularly and concern themselves with many aspects of a school's affairs including the curriculum, facilities, school hours & after-school activities and programs. Parents are

encouraged to attend meetings and show an interest in the school and their children's education. It's also a good way for newcomers to make friends. Schools organize parent days, ‘back to school’ nights and parent-teacher conferences, where parents can meet teachers and examine their child's school timetable [29].

Individual Responsibility has an important place in the American value system. This value is taught to children from a young age. For example, beginning from kindergarten, each year students are given a handbook that outlines the details of the school's policies and procedures, and the consequences for violating them. The handbook is designed to help parents and students understand the district's guidelines for acceptable behavior. Both parents and students are expected to read it and sign a form attesting they are aware of their rights and responsibilities [29].

In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that "Preprimary programs" are groups or classes that are organized to provide educational experiences for children and include kindergarten, preschool, and nursery school programs. Enrollment data for 5-year-olds include only those students in preprimary programs and do not include those enrolled in primary programs as shown in Figure 2 [36].

Kindergarten is a preschool educational approach traditionally based on playing, singing, practical activities such as drawing, and social interaction as part of the transition from home to school. The first such institutions were created in the late 18th century to serve children whose parents both worked out of home. As of 2015, about 3.64 million children were enrolled in public kindergartens in the United States, and another 428,000 in private ones. In 2016, around 8.76 million children were enrolled in nursery or kindergarten programs in US [37].

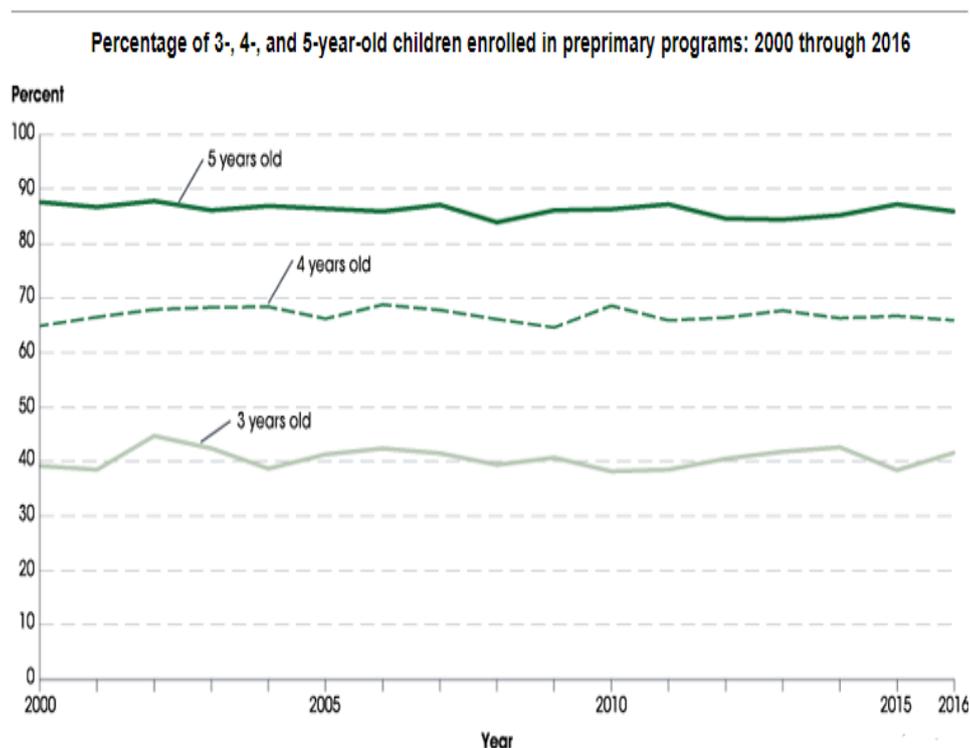


Figure 2. Percentage of 3-5-year-old children enrolled in preprimary programs (NCES) (Source: the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Website: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cfa.asp)

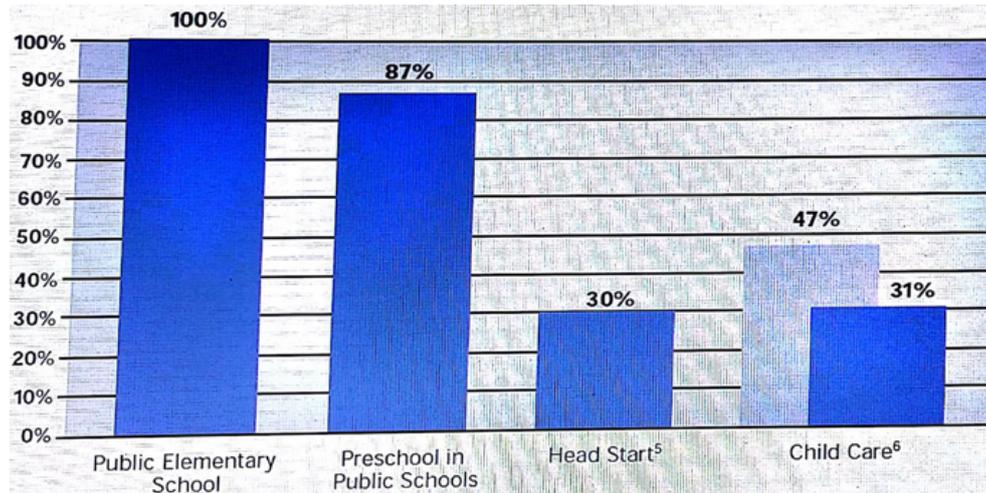


Figure 3. Percentage of Teachers with BA Degrees [6]

4.2. Challenges of Preschool Education System in USA

In USA, fewer than half of all early education teachers hold a four-year degree, and many have no college education. In most states, a high school diploma is all a person needs to teach in a licensed child care center. As a result, many preschool teachers are not adequately prepared to be educationally effective [6].

On the other hand; Whitebook, Marcy [38] explores the benefits of preschool classrooms when teachers have bachelor's degrees and specialized training in early childhood education. His findings proved the following: (1) teachers with four-year degrees in early childhood education rated higher in positive interaction with children than those without these credentials, and were less detached, less authoritarian and less punitive; (2) children who had teachers with a bachelor's or associate's in early childhood education demonstrated stronger receptive vocabularies than those with teachers holding only a high school diploma; (3) the best teachers who are going to prepare young children academically and socially, thus requiring pre-K teachers to have bachelor's degrees in specialized training in early childhood development; (4) retaining the greatest number of teachers with bachelor's degrees or more was the strongest predictor of whether a center maintained a high level of quality over time. His study strongly showed the importance of not simply more education, but specifically how the requirement of a bachelor's degree with specialized early childhood training can be parlayed into securing high quality center based preschool programs [38].

In his study, Whitebook showed the minimum post-secondary degree requirements for preschool teachers, by States as follows: Bachelor with courses or certification in early childhood, professional training or ongoing development in child care, 2-year vocational child care course or 6 credits in early childhood education, 12 credits in topics related to early childhood education or child development, 24 credits in early childhood education and 16 credits more in general education, or Head Start Requirements. Moreover, Whitebook, [38] assured that teachers with a B.A. or more advanced degree in early childhood education were the most effective, sensitive, responsive and constructive overall. In addition, children

whose teachers had at least a B.A. in early childhood education engaged in more creative activities, had higher frequencies of language play and positive management, and engaged in the most language activity than children in all other classrooms.

4.3. The Objectives of Preschool Education System in USA

The National Education Goals Panel has set the national objective of kindergarten in USA as follows: preparing children for primary schools [39]. Also, the Kindergarten (1) should provide a safe supportive environment that promotes positive self-esteem; and helps children acquire and maintain the skills and attitudes necessary for personal success, (2) has to develop independent, confident learners who discover the excitement and challenge of learning in their school experience and throughout their lives [33].

In kindergarten, children build social and academic skills. They work to gain a sense of community and to cooperate with and respect others. They will study music, health, physical education and nutrition. There will also be a time for children to share their special weekend experiences. Choice activities (art, dramatic play, work jobs and manipulative) are planned to instill a sense of independence, pride, dignity, self-worth and self-esteem.

Kindergarten programs based on the definition of literacy which includes talking, listening, visual literacies such as viewing and drawing, and critical thinking, not just reading and writing. In addition, the literacies of technology (e.g. computer games and activities, internet searching, faxes, emails), popular culture (e.g. movies, theatre, arts), functional literacy (e.g. road maps, timetables), ecological literacy (especially for Indigenous groups) and literacies other than English are relevant to the lives of young children today. This means that literacy aims to provide young children with the foundation they need for a successful transition to the literacy learning. literacy is constructed by individuals and groups as part of everyday life. Speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing and drawing, for instance, are social practices that occur in a range of daily situations. Children learn what can be said or written, how it can be said or written, through a myriad of experiences in a wide range of contexts [40].

Mathematics in preschool education is approached as a foundation that will help children learn about the world around them and to adapt to this world. Mathematics is a human activity and therefore it must constitute a human value, must be close to reality of fact, be close to children and have a relationship with society. Today, the use of mathematical technology in kindergarten education is a standard. For preschool children, educational digital activities often focus on readiness skills for the kindergarten, including reading (letter recognition, letter formation, correlation of sounds and letters, simple spelling), mathematics (recognition of numbers, formation of numbers, counting, grouping), thinking and reasoning skills, perceptual skills, daily life skills (hygiene), social skills, creativity and self-expression; as well as the understanding of concepts such as family relations, emotions and professions [41]. In kindergarten, children should practice the simple skills for solving math problems by hand, and have the ability to spell words correctly and even to write by hand, other than using technological tools regularly which make their skills atrophy [42].

Teachers and parents work together for the children's development and education. This will prepare them to be self-confident and prepare them for the future. Saint Vincent [43] discussed the objectives of kindergarten as follows:

Build, promote and provide opportunities to develop positive self-esteem, pride, loyalty and accountability.

Develop consistent and positive work habits.

Provide experiences that will develop and enhance critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Provide experiences that will strengthen and enhance the ability to communicate and interact with others.

Prepare each child for elementary school, focusing on both academic readiness and social expectations.

Promote a positive home/school connection through parent and teacher interactions and by encouraging parent involvement. Parents share their child's growth and concerns so that teaching staff can be supportive. Parents support classroom and agency meetings. Also, they participate in special events and field trip experiences.

Children participate in work-jobs, cooking projects, art, computer activities, and cultural enrichment activities.

4.4. Preschool Education Teachers in USA

In America, Preschool programs operated by public schools employ the best-educated teachers. Nearly 90% of preschool teachers in public school programs have at least a four-year college degree. Typically they have degrees that require specialized preparation in early childhood education. Most early childhood teachers in public schools have a teaching credential or license that has requirements beyond completing a bachelor's degree, such as taking additional courses in teaching methods, having had supervised teaching experiences, and passing a test of teaching knowledge and skills [6].

The preparation of the kindergarten teachers has been accomplished at the university level where students can receive bachelors, masters or doctors' degrees in early childhood education. Teachers with BA, MA or PhD (regardless of the specific major) were more responsive,

encouraging and inspiring when communicating with young children. However, teacher education with more early childhood education and care (ECEC) content is essential to produce high-quality teaching skills. This idea is supported by other empirical evidence, which demonstrate that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and actual implementation of developmentally appropriate practice are positively correlated with ECEC education and early childhood coursework [44].

Most U.S. universities have established specialized departments for the early stages in kindergartens and elementary schools. A survey conducted on high school students in the United States showed that approximately 82.9% of the students have a strong desire to work in kindergarten settings and they wish to form close friendships with their colleagues and the individuals within the schools, and to form good social relationships with parents of the kindergarten children [45].

Kindergarten teachers are typically prepared in the Colleges of education at a university. After obtaining the General Certificate of Secondary Education, the student undertakes a four-year course of study and then is granted a bachelor's degree in education. State requirements regarding ECE teachers with bachelor's degrees and specialized certification, licensure, or endorsements of pre-K teachers. There is a trend to increase the percentage of ECE teachers with bachelor's degrees and ECE credentials. In US, it normally takes between four to five years to complete the bachelor's degree [46].

Teacher Education Programs, such as Early Childhood Education, prepare students to work in kindergarten schools and to deal with young children. In these programs, students should complete a number of credit hours in academic, educational and cultural courses. After completing the total hours of coursework and other requirements, they will have the Bachelor of Science in Education with an Early Childhood Education specialization. In US, each university has its own requirements for preparing preschool teachers, but there are common requirements for students' admission such as to [47]:

- Complete the senior secondary schools or equivalent diploma certified by the state Board of Education; Have academic records and personal reports written by the counselor at the student's high school and have passed the achievement and aptitude tests;
- Assess the students' emotional stability and their professional and physical state, and evaluate the student through personal interviews and faculty feedback;
- Submit all forms required by the SC Dept. of Social Services (DSS) which includes: medical evidence of a negative TB test, complete a DSS letter of non-conviction, complete a health assessment with related medical forms, and be cleared by a SLED (SC Law Enforcement Div.) criminal background check performed by the department.
- Here are the Admission Requirements of **York Technical College** Early Childhood Programs: 65 credit hours to complete degree or 5 semesters full-time, but may attend part-time. Some ECD courses are online. All courses are offered both day or evening. Courses meet one time a week. Courses may have a lab as well.

- The Admission Steps of York Technical College Early Childhood Programs:

Step1: Complete and submit the York Technical College application online.

Step2: Apply for Financial Aid.

Step3: Submit an official, final high school transcript. (High school transcripts are required for determining eligibility for State scholarship and grant assistance and for admission to most Health and Human Services programs).

Step 4: Have official transcripts of any previous college credit earned sent to the College if evaluation of transfer credit is desired.

Step 5: Take the Compass placement test.

Step 6: An acceptance letter will be mailed to you. Steps to advising, registration, and orientation will be included with your letter.

First-time Freshmen: (never attended any college before) Attend an Orientation and Registration Session to schedule classes.

- **Former YTC and transfer students:** Your program advisor will assist you with course planning and scheduling.
- **Enrollment Services** is here to assist you with Admissions, Financial Aid, Records and Registration questions.
- **Students who love children,** have patience, compassion, mature judgment, good organizational skills, and a sense of humor would enjoy a career in early childhood development.

The preparation of preschool teachers has been different from one state to another, resulting in the existence of two systems: the integrated system and the sequential system. Generally, a student/ teacher studies three kinds of courses, which are educational & professional, academic, and cultural [48]:

- Educational & Professional Courses such as: fresh year seminar, general education courses, general psychology, teaching strategies, studies in American education policy, educational technology, special education, educational psychology, parental and community involvement in child's education, thematic teaching, the content of early childhood mathematics, teaching in a multicultural society, the content of mathematics in elementary education, teaching methods of social studies, early childhood seminar, teaching methods of science, and practicum.
- Academic Courses such as: experience in the field of child's education, children's literature, child psychology, the child's education, language & literacy and assessment of the child's performance.
- Cultural Courses such as: principles of public health, oral communication, English Literature, English composition, and mathematics 1 and 2.

5. The American Preschool Education System versus the Egyptian One

Both Egypt and US have a great interest in establishing preschools for young children, especially the children whose parents are working out. The United States has

been the forerunner in establishing preschools occurring in the middle of the nineteenth century when the first U.S kindergarten was established in the state of Wisconsin in 1856. Whereas, in Egypt, the first kindergarten was established in the twentieth century in Alexandria in 1918 and it was for boys only.

There are similarities between Egypt and US in kindergarten philosophy, both countries emphasize that the kindergarten is the first regular institution the child deals with outside the family environment. Moreover, kindergartens help children not to feel a sudden move from home to school. Education in preschools is considered an investment in human capital, it's a national security and the investment in education is an investment in manpower, which can contribute to a nation's economic development.

In Egypt, there has been some confusion in determining the philosophy of preschools and this might be due to the fact that some preschools were established specifically to serve as childcare for working parents. Most preschools have not planned programs including work, play, education and practicing different activities. The kindergarten curriculum is to teach children reading, writing and arithmetic despite the issuance of the Ministry of Education, Decision No. (65) on 23 / 3 / 2000, that indicates it is strictly prohibited to force children to write or to give domestic duties because it would be incompatible with the nature of the stage of growth experienced by the kindergarten children [49].

5.1. Objectives

Both Egypt and US realize the importance of the preprimary stage, as the research has proved that children attending preschools:

- are making significant progress in education, understanding, reading and writing.
- are more able to form good social relationships with others.
- their intelligence is increasing rapidly, and they are less leakage in education.
- most of whom attend high schools and graduate successfully, and they have positive attitudes for academic subjects.
- have high positions, and enjoy independence & self-sufficiency.

In spite of the importance of the preschool stage, not all the Egyptian children aged from (4-6) were enrolled in preschools. About 60% of the children were enrolled in preschools, whereas 40% of the Egyptian children in the same age have been deprived of the educational services and care in preschools. In US, about 90% of the American children aged 4-6 years were enrolled in preprimary schools in 1996, and it is expected that the preschool institutions make full absorption of all preschool children.

Both Egypt and US have similar objectives of preschools but in Egypt, the main objective of preschool education is to teach children reading, writing and arithmetic at early ages because it is thought that this goal is the way to prepare children for primary schools. Whereas, in US, the preschool program has specific steps including: a specific time for playing and practicing-oriented educational activities, another time for singing,

drawing, painting, dancing, musical performance, and cultivating gardens, a third time for teaching reading and writing, ... and so on.

5.2. Preschool Teacher's Preparation

There is a similarity between Egypt and US in preparing preschool teachers at the university level. The differences are included in the following points. The United States has built colleges for preparing preschool teachers. In Egypt, the first college of Early Childhood Education (ECE) was established in Cairo in 1988. In US, the first college for (ECE) was established in Massachusetts in 1839.

In Egypt, the preparation of preschool teachers is at the university level, it continues four years (8 semesters). But in US, the preparation takes four years in most university colleges, and sometimes five years or four semesters diploma.

In US, distance learning programs can be used in preparing preschool teachers. These programs are introduced through specific sites on the Internet, where there are schedules showing the courses, credit hours, content, requirements, and dates of examinations. This is an effective program offering educational opportunities for students/teachers who are unable to attend on campus. This form of technology-based education includes 60% theoretical curriculum while the remaining 40% belongs to the internship part, the experiential training of the student/teacher in child-care centers or kindergarten schools [50].

On the other hand, this distance education format in preparing the Egyptian preschool teachers isn't available. Therefore, the student/teacher must attend their classes daily.

In Egypt, some of preschool teachers have obtained the certificates of secondary schools or of middle schools and a few of them have completed the university studies [21]. Whereas in US, preschool teachers not only have a bachelor's degree, but may also have got a master or doctoral degree in early childhood education, Coffman and Lopez, 2003 argued "teacher professional preparation is a crucial component of high quality care. Well-educated teachers with specialized training in early childhood education possess the knowledge and skills to have a positive impact on child outcomes".

Better-educated teachers benefit children, parents and society. Teachers with at least a four-year college degree consistently provide the high quality teaching and learning experiences that are crucial for young children's school success. Such teachers display characteristics conducive to young children's development, including warmth, enthusiasm for learning activities, clear communications, and encouragement of sharing and cooperation among children. They provide richer language and cognitive experiences for children. The overall result is better child cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social development. Parents also benefit from better-educated teachers. Teachers communicate with parents, engage them in their children's learning and link them to family support services. Finally, society benefits when well-educated teachers work with young children who develop social and emotional competence, schools and communities avoid

the high costs of remedial and special education services [51]).

In addition, it is necessary for preschool teachers to have a **teaching license** to work with young children aged (3-6) after passing a state test which varies from one state to another. For instance, a licensed preschool teacher in Massachusetts must fulfill certain responsibilities to maintain this license and upgrade it when possible. **Initial License** is valid for five years. During that time, a preschool teacher is expected to complete the following requirements that will allow him/ her to upgrade the license to a Professional License [52]:

- Teach for three years (minimum).
- Complete a Teacher Induction Program during the first year of teaching.
- Complete 50 hours of mentoring in addition to the Teacher Induction Program.
- Complete **one** of the following options:
 - An approved content-based seminar/program sponsored by a school district consisting of at least 50 contact hours.
 - A Master's Degree in content area or in Education.
 - If a teacher already holds a master's degree, complete a 12 credit academic program with at least 9 credits appropriate to Early Childhood.
 - Become a Master Teacher by being certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
 - Complete a State Performance Assessment Program (if available).

5.3. Admission

Both Egypt and the United States agree that students should obtain a certificate of completion of high school or its equivalent for admitting to Department of Early Childhood Education, in addition to passing some tests and personal interviews. In Egypt, after obtaining the certificate of completion of secondary school, the Office of Coordination distributes the students to different colleges; according to their total grades in secondary schools without taking into account their attitudes or desires [25].

In the United States, the requirements of admission in colleges of education, Early Childhood Education Department, differ from one state to another, it is necessary for the students to pass the achievement tests and attitudes tests prepared by each college. Both Egypt and the United States agree that the preparation of the kindergarten teachers should follow an integrated system. This system involves the study of academic, professional & educational, and cultural courses. According to this system, the student/ teacher has a four-year degree (B.A.). In Egypt, the preschool teachers' preparation follows an integrated system. Whereas, in US, the preschool teachers could be prepared either through an integrated or a sequential system.

5.4. Plans of the Study

Both Egypt and US have similar plans of study for preparing preschool teachers. The programs of study consist of similar courses such as: children's literature,

child psychology, general psychology, educational technology, educational foundations, teaching methods of mathematics and science, practicum, foreign languages and computer. Credit hours for some similar courses in both countries differ. For example, Egyptian colleges require four credit hours for the children's literature course, while American colleges require three hours. As for the practicum or field training in Egypt, it requires eight hours weekly; however, in America, it requires between 12 or 13 hours weekly, and it may continue to take a whole semester or a whole year in some colleges.

In Egypt, all courses for preparing preschool teachers are **obligatory**, not optional, and all students should study them at the same time. Also, the students have no freedom to choose between the courses they want to study, as it is the case in America. Both Egypt and US agree that programs for preparing preschool teachers should include three aspects of preparations: academic, educational & professional, and general cultural preparation. But the ratio of each component differs in each country. The United States aligns with contemporary global trends, which stresses the need to intensify educational subjects and increase academic and cultural courses in the process of preparing preschool teachers.

6. Recommendations

Despite the great efforts that were made by Ministry of Education in the field of preschool education and preschool teacher's preparation, Egypt is still below the required level in terms of enrolling all young children aged 3-6 in preschool institutions, and in terms of improving preschool teacher's preparation to achieve the Egyptian Vision of 2030, so there are some recommendations which may help:

First; as for the Egyptian Preschool Education System:

- a. Expanding the numbers of preschool institutions all over the Egyptian governorates (urban, rural, and nomadic areas).
- b. Encouraging the preschool children to play and work according their abilities and interests.
- c. Helping young children to increase their curiosity, self- reliance, and strong relationships through playing with elements from nature such as: sand, rocks, mud, water, trees, ... and so on.
- d. Activating the role of parents with preschool teachers to show an interest in the school and their children's education. This may promote a positive home/ school connection.
- e. Providing preschool settings with **handbooks** involving the individual responsibility of preschool children and their parents so as to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- f. Participating preschool children in projects and computer- based activities.

Second; as for the Egyptian Preschool Teacher's Preparation:

- a. Checking the students/ teachers' emotional stability, their professional and physical state.
- b. Providing a health assessment with related medical forms.

- c. making online applications, placement test, advising, registration and orientation available in colleges.
- d. Students should have a program advisor to assist them with course planning and scheduling.
- e. Early childhood education courses should be offered day or evening, optional and obligatory. Also, they should be available in summer.
- f. Preschool teachers' preparation should follow two systems: the integrated and the sequential. In addition that it may include distance learning programs.
- g. Preschool teachers have to get a bachelor's degree (a four- year degree) at least, or they have to get a master or doctoral degree in preschool education.
- h. In order to work with young children in preschools, teachers should have a teaching license.

7. Conclusion

There is a strong trend in preschools both in Egypt and US. The number of these institutions increases consistently over time and both countries follow a special philosophy of education in this stage. This philosophy differs from one society to another according to the nature of societies and their political, economic and social circumstances. The importance and objectives of the preschool stage are clear in both countries, the preschool teacher's preparation in both countries has been predominantly at the university level. The differences between Egypt and US in the preschool teacher's preparation are due to the following:

- The United States is a developed country. It has a considerable degree of progress and urbanization in the area of science and education, while Egypt is a developing country. It has suffered a number of crises affecting the political, economic and social systems that are closely related to education, making it suffer weaknesses and shortcomings from the preschool to higher education and university levels.
- The application of a decentralized system of education in the United States has resulted in education diversities and differences from state to state, different aspects of preschool teacher's preparation. The centralized system in Egypt requires education to remain at the same pace and uses similar courses and teaching methods. It might be beneficial to focus on the advantages of preschool education system in the United States and prepare a proposal for establishing a great one and improve the Egyptian preschool teacher's preparation accordance with the conditions of Egyptian society and potentials.

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