Early Childhood Education Impact Evaluations for the Middle East and North Africa
Summary of workshop discussions for OMAN
Prepared by: Lauren Pisani and Igor Kheyfets

Participants

1. Dr. Amur Mohammed Amur Alaisir, Director of Preschool Education, Ministry of Education
2. Dr. Thuraya Alhosni, Educational Researcher, Ministry of Education
3. Lauren Pisani, Learning Research Advisor, Save the Children
4. Igor Kheyfets, Senior Economist, World Bank

Policy problems

The delegates from Oman articulated one main problem with advancing early childhood education (ECE) in the country: no government standards or curriculum. The first step needed to make systemic progress would be to agree upon rules and regulations for ECE classrooms and professionals. Until that takes place, it is unlikely that impact evaluations would lead to meaningful changes in ways of working in Oman.

Currently, ECE provision is dominated by private providers. The Ministry of Education has some oversight of private sites, but a lack of standards makes enforcement of any kind of regulations unlikely. The Oman delegation also noted that current estimates of ECE enrollment and coverage rates are not particularly reliable, and that inclusion of children with disabilities is severely lacking.

Summary of evaluation design

For the impact evaluation exercise, the team chose to outline a study that could be used once the Ministry of Education adopts a new ECE curriculum. Broadly, their research question focused on how a new teacher training program would improve the quality of education in preschools in Oman. They focused on how teachers performed in classrooms, children’s learning and development, and how parents engage in preschool education.

They envisioned the assessment being a randomized control trial. They felt that a new teacher-training program would be rolled out gradually and that teachers who registered could be randomized into control and treatment arms. They were interested in incorporating both pre- and post-tests of teacher practices, child development, and parent involvement in school. They recognized that there would be some possibility of contamination between trained and non-trained teachers within the same school but felt that impacts of teacher practices and child learning would be relatively minimal.

In terms of tools for the assessment, the Omani delegation felt that they would need an observation tool for evaluating teaching practices, an assessment of children’s cognitive skills, and questionnaires/focus groups for parents. The specific tools used for the assessment were not decided upon during the workshop.

Relevance to ongoing World Bank operations

At the moment, there is no active Bank engagement in Oman’s education sector. A public expenditure review (PER) delivered in June 2017 focused mainly on the school education sector (grades 1-12). As part of a forthcoming engagement under the multi-sectoral Budget Systems Modernization Program, the Bank has been asked to work with the Ministries of Education and Finance to help them prioritize key recommendations from the PER and assist in developing action plans for their implementation. The only
area of work that may touch on ECE under this engagement would be the development of a new legal and regulatory framework for public-private partnerships (PPPs), which are common in the school sector and can gain additional prominence in the ECE sector. If that comes to pass, an impact evaluation of policies or programs concerning PPPs in ECE may become viable in the medium term.

**Client interest**

The delegates worked well together, and it was a pleasure to work with them. It was just not the right time for them to plan an impact evaluation of ECE policies.

**Next steps**

The Bank team will continue to explore possibilities of working with Oman’s Ministry of Education in the ECE sector under new or existing engagements. Topics of creating a national ECE curriculum and developing a legal and regulatory framework for PPPs, including those in the ECE sector, will be considered.