



Preparatory Education In Algeria - Reality And Challenges

Fridgat Abdelkamel, University of El Oued – Hamma Lakhdar (Algeria),
yasine25@gmail.com

Mezaini Djilali, University Djilali Bounaama khemis miliana(Algeria), d.mezaini@univ-dbk.m.dz

Khemmad Mohammed, University of El Oued – Hamma Lakhdar (Algeria), khemmad-mohammed@univ-eloued.dz

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Abstract:

The importance of preparatory education is underscored by the specialty of early childhood, which is characterized by extreme weakness on the one hand and the enormous potential for growth on the other. This specificity necessitated the allocation of appropriate care and stimulation for the children of this stage in order to enable them to achieve strong growth, and this is based on specialized programs of preparatory education. In this context, many studies indicate that preparatory education drives the progress of society because it contributes to the achievement of academic and professional success for generations.

key words: Education ; preparatory ; preparatory education.

Introduction:

Early childhood is considered one of the most important stages of individual development due to its rapid growth in various aspects of the child, in addition to the fact that the largest percentage of growth occurs in it. The psychologist (Bloom) confirmed through his studies that he conducted on the child at this stage that 50% of mental growth occurs between birth and 4 years, and 30% of mental growth occurs between (4 - 8 years) of the child's life. (Borsas, 2009)

This stage is also considered the basis on which all the components of the individual's personality are formed. For this reason, interest in this stage has been great since ancient times, and this interest has increased more and more, with the increase in studies on this stage. .

Because the results of studies by educational, psychological and sociological scientists have proven that child development is controlled by genetic and environmental factors, meaning that the child inherits some components of his personality from his family and acquires others from his social environment, and since the acquired aspect of a person is what can be intervened in and controlled, and given the great importance of the environment in the physical, mental, emotional and social development of the child, many Western educators such as: Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori, and others, have worked to provide the appropriate space for the child's development, after they studied and identified the nature and needs of the child, and these educators had a great influence and a strong motivation for many countries, whether developed or developing, to care about child education, especially in its early stages, and this interest appeared in the establishment of institutions to receive them and provide all the necessary conditions for their natural growth. (Borsas, 2003).

Algeria followed the example of these countries and cared about the early childhood stage, where it provided what it called preparatory education for children who are under school age, and Algeria's interest in this stage was also evident in The ministerial decrees that were issued, where we find that the ministerial order issued on April 16, 1976, stated that: "Preparatory education is an education dedicated to children who have not reached the age of compulsory admission to school, and it also allows children to develop all their potential, and provides them with opportunities in school and life" (National Curriculum Committee, 2004). Thus, Algeria has determined through this order the age of children who join this type of education as well as its purpose. The importance of preparatory education is highlighted by the specificity of the early childhood stage, which is characterized by extreme weakness on the one hand and the enormous potential for growth on the other hand. This specificity necessitated the allocation of appropriate care and activation for children at this stage in order to enable them to achieve strong growth, and this is based on specialized preparatory education programs. Knowing that growth is rapid at this stage in terms of various aspects of the personality, which allows children to learn quickly and gain experience, especially if they are provided with an exciting environment and their curiosity is directed towards knowledge and discovery. That is why we find that preparatory education institutions aim primarily to provide the appropriate pedagogical conditions to enable children to achieve the maximum possible growth in various aspects of personality. (Bosna, Bouchina, 2013)

The results of comparative research have shown that children who benefited from preparatory education services grow and develop faster in terms of quantity and quality than others, especially in terms of mental abilities, communication, interaction with others, and emotional balance. Based on these facts, the Ministry of National Education has been interested in building a special curriculum for this stage in order to provide the conditions for qualitative care for early childhood in various spaces specialized in preparatory education. This curriculum has been implemented since 2004 and has been generalized in most primary schools nationwide. (Medour, 2013)

Accordingly, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- What is meant by preparatory education?
- What are preparatory education institutions?
- What are the functions and objectives of preparatory education?
- What are the most important challenges facing preparatory education in Algeria?

1Definition of preparatory education:

Preparatory education is the specialized education directed at children who have not yet reached the compulsory age to enter school. (Al-Hatah, 2008)

It is a stage of education and upbringing that includes children whose ages range between (4-5 years), in which different concepts and skills are developed to achieve comprehensive and integrated development for each child, taking into account individual differences in linguistic abilities and readiness and developmental and behavioral levels. (Aoun, Shaalal, 2010)

It is the pre-school stage for all children between the ages of 5-6 years who have not reached the compulsory schooling age. They are special classes in their curriculum, methods and supervision that prepare the child socially, psychologically and cognitively for positive schooling. They have recently been attached to the primary school years and spaces have been allocated for them within schools. (Zarda, 2012)

The definition of preparatory education in Algeria came in the Official Gazette, Order No. 35-76 issued on April 16, 1976 AD, and the text of the definition came in Article 19 as follows: "Preparatory education is education dedicated to children who have not reached the compulsory school admission age." (Borsas, 2009)

According to the National Education Guidance Law dated January 23, 2008, which confirmed that preparatory education is "the last stage of pre-school education that prepares children between the ages of 5 and 6 years so that they can join in the first year of primary education, and the process dedicated to children who have not reached the age of compulsory admission to primary school and allows them to develop all their potential and provides them with all opportunities for success in school and life. (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

2- A historical overview of preparatory education:

If learning is the main focus of all education, then the latter constitutes a reflection of the philosophy of each nation and an embodiment of its spiritual and material principles. The philosophy of education, in turn, is what directly reflects the history and civilization of the nation to which it belongs, and the educational system expresses the cultural ambition of this nation and its hopes.

Based on this principle, addressing the development of the subject of preparatory education falls within the context of the human cultural heritage with its intellectual and institutional reference, as the history of educational thought shows that:

-Plato (427-348 BC) was among the first to realize the importance of preparatory education, as he says: "As long as the young generation is well-educated and continues to be so, the ship of its state is lucky in a good voyage".

- Among Muslims, learning and education occupied a high position, and the message was associated with reading and seeking knowledge. The Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." This educational thought enriched many thinkers and philosophers, including Ibn Sina, Al-Qabisi, Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun. This thought translates the continuity of Arab-Islamic thought through Greek thought to modern Western thought. - Among Westerners, educational thought included the contributions of Comenius, Busta Luzi, Rousseau, Froehl, Claparède, and Montessori, whose idea revolved around respecting the child's independence and developing his personality. If thinkers focused their attention on knowing the nature of the child and his needs, societies worked to establish institutions to take care of him, including Algerian society, in which institutions for receiving children spread, as follows:

3-Preparatory education institutions:

-Kuttabs: The kuttabs carried out the task of teaching and memorizing the Holy Quran to children and teaching the principles of reading and writing and rules of conduct. In addition to the task of learning, the kuttabs enable the child to develop the social aspect of his personality through communication with others. As for its institutional structure, it consists of one or two furnished rooms open to each other, which include a number of girls and boys whose ages range between 4-5 years and above. (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

-Quranic school: The Quranic school is a school in which learning levels vary, in which the principles of reading and writing are taught, the teaching and memorization of the Holy Quran, and the teaching of other Islamic sciences that help in understanding the meanings of Quranic words and the spirit of Sharia. It has emerged strongly in the past few years as a space interested in the category of children under school age, and this model is represented in

sections affiliated with mosques that are established and managed by the Ministry in charge of religious affairs. (Al-Ayeb, 2005)

-Nursery: It is a social educational institution that specializes in health and nutritional care. It is closer in nature to the home than the school, and work in it is based on activity, play, health and social care.

-Kindergarten: It is a social educational institution that specializes in providing appropriate educational conditions and a suitable atmosphere and awakening and developing the child's abilities.

-Preparatory section: It is the section that accepts children between the ages of 4-6 years in rooms that differ from others in their equipment and pedagogical means. It is also the institutional place in which the teacher looks at the child as if he is still a child and not a student. It is thus a continuation of family education in preparation for schooling in the next stage, thus acquiring the principles of reading, writing and arithmetic.

4-Development of preparatory education in Algeria:

Pre-school education in Algeria has witnessed several developments over different historical stages, each with its own characteristics and influential factors that we can summarize as follows:

-Before independence: Pre-school education appeared in Algeria before the colonial era and was embodied especially in Quranic schools, kuttabs and zawiyas. These institutions spread across major cities and villages, receiving children between 4-5-6 years old for two years or more during which they memorized some Quranic surahs and learned the alphabet, reading and writing.

However, these institutions were unofficial and did not follow a studied program, revised according to the characteristics of early childhood, and were not assigned to trained teachers. Indoctrination methods prevailed in them and they were devoid of childhood interests such as play and freedom. This is despite the great role they played, which is psychological and cognitive preparation for the school stage, but they were not devoid of advantages and positives, the most important of which are:

- Developing the child's linguistic wealth and refining oral ability.
- Accustoming him to memorization and activating memory.
- Training him on order, discipline, obedience and loyalty to the school and its sheikh.
- Adapting to the group and participating with others.

In addition to this, French colonialism established, since 1905, special schools for preparatory education for the children of the elderly and a few lucky Algerians, in addition to early childhood shelters that were supervised by "white" fathers and sisters with the support of the colonial authority. The Association of Muslim Scholars played an effective role in proposing an alternative and confronting the colonial plan. (Zarda, 2012)

-After independence: After independence, Algeria found itself in a phase of comprehensive reconstruction of the educational system to accommodate the largest possible number of students and unify public education, where schools were nationalized and Quranic education was integrated into the public system, and what remained of the preparatory educational institutions were taken care of by other professional and social sectors until the issuance of the April 16, 1976 order, which defined the legal framework, tasks and objectives of preparatory education. As for the pedagogical aspect, an educational guidance document was issued in 1984,

emphasizing the importance of preparatory education, followed by a reference educational document for preparatory education in 1990, defining the objectives of the activities, the child's profile, the proposed program and how to organize the physical space of the preparatory section. After that, a methodological document came in 1996, represented by the "Methodological Guide for School Education." The concept of this stage has evolved from the concept of education to the concept of upbringing, as official organizational and pedagogical documents stipulated that children aged 4-5 years benefit from preparatory education that qualifies them to enter the first year of basic education previously and to make up for and address deficiencies, while the recent preparatory education curriculum stipulated the focus on the educational aspect to develop the child's personality before the cognitive aspect. (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

In the 2003-2004 school year, the implementation of the educational reform announced in the aforementioned ministerial meeting began. These structural reforms are considered among the most important changes resulting from this reform, as the reforms decided to move, with regard to the organization of compulsory education (06-16 years), from the basic education system consisting of three stages, each stage having three years, to the application of the global system, i.e. 05 years in primary education and 4 years in middle education.

This change led to the gain of a section in all schools that were designated for the first and second stages (06 years), which became designated for primary education (05 years). Based on this data, the Ministry of Education took a decision to transform these sections into sections dedicated to providing preparatory education for those aged five. It is worth noting that the actual implementation of this decision was in 2008, because the process of transitioning from the basic education system for the first two stages to primary education took five years, because the change process was year by year and not all at once, in order to avoid any disruption in the progress of the batches of the old system. Therefore, immediately after the end of the remnants of the previous education system, i.e. basic education, in the 2008/2009 academic year, a large number of children aged five were received in these sections to continue preparatory education, and this step is considered an actual beginning for the process of generalizing preparatory education. (Bosna, Bouchina, 2013)

5 -Preparatory education curriculum:

The curriculum is considered an educational project that defines the goals, aims, objectives of the educational action, the means, activities and situations used to achieve those goals and the methods for evaluating the results of this educational action.

In view of the importance of preparatory education, the Supreme Council for National Education decided that "it is necessary to pay special attention to the curriculum of these preparatory sections in terms of construction and preparation, and accordingly their curricula must be developed in accordance with international standards by adopting various learning activities and adapting them in line with the specificities of Algerian society, provided that this is undertaken by specialists who work to embody the features of the new strategy for basic education." The preparatory education curriculum differs from other primary school curricula, as it is based on free activity and play. This is due to the age group that the child is characterized by, which is dominated by activity and movement. This is what the curriculum must take into account by keeping pace with the child's abilities and working to develop his perceptions, senses and talents, as well as developing his thinking methods. This curriculum aims to achieve the process of interaction between children and the members surrounding him, whether teachers or students. It also gives the opportunity to confront their behavioral problems, especially with regard to discipline. It also seeks to achieve emotional balance for the child, in addition to being characterized by flexibility in the time periods for each activity, which allows

it to be modified and changed according to the conditions that the children are in within the section. From here, I emphasized that the curriculum helps to arouse appropriate emotions to the appropriate extent in natural situations, which helps children acquire the tendencies and directions necessary to build character. Within this speech, it is clear to us that the curriculum is an important process in preparing the child to join primary school, due to its effectiveness during the preparatory stage and the services it provides to the child, helping him develop all his aspects. Mental, cognitive, social, emotional, sensory and motor skills, which help him adapt quickly when entering the first year of primary education. (Karboush, Hajail, 2018)

According to Ministerial Circular No. 2305 regarding the establishment of the preparatory education curriculum, we summarize it as follows:

- Considering preparatory education a stage of the educational ladder, with a duration of one year, covering the age group of children between five and six years.

- Starting to expand preparatory education departments according to the locally available capabilities in terms of supervision and structures, starting from the school year 2006-2005.

- Putting the preparatory education curriculum and the accompanying guide into practice in the field in all sectors concerned with preparatory education, both public and private.

- Preparatory education is not a strict formal education system as is the case in the first year of primary education, but rather it is an education that, even if it is structured in directed activities, is dominated by spontaneity, play, freedom, movement and cheerfulness, and is more concerned with the child's effectiveness in the learning process than with the learning outcome.

- Registration in preparatory education classes is open to all children who have reached the age of five within the available spots at the school in question, provided that the number of children registered in the educational group does not exceed 25 children.

- Classes of this type of education are assigned to primary school teachers.

- Involvement of educational practitioners (teachers, nannies) in the approved public and private sectors. The teacher has the freedom to organize the learning space in a manner that is consistent with the learning activities, while the workshop is a place where work is organized and allows the child to communicate to achieve individual or social achievements. It is preferable that the workshop be independent of the class and permanent (green space, spaces)

- Teachers, male and female, should be selected to work at this stage from among those who have the following specifications:

- A- The inclination and readiness to work with children at this critical stage.

- B- The ability to tolerate the activities, movement and questions of young children.

- C- The ability to control activation techniques with children at this stage.

- D- Participation in the training processes specific to preparatory education departments, because it is a task that combines preparing the school environment for the growth of personality and its development in a healthy and sound manner, and building learning that prepares for adaptation to school with ease and simplicity. (Madour et al., 2013)

6-Preparatory education functions and objectives:

Preparatory education is a cultural/social function, as it is a diverse social unit in building the individual's personality through which the child learns how to live and deal with others on a level other than the family level? In it, he learns how to do certain tasks? How to compete with others or cooperate with them? How to form attitudes with them? How to succeed? How to fail?

This function is nothing but means that prepare him to learn how to deal with the outside world. Some children do not easily integrate when they join the preparatory institution, and some problems result from this, which are:

-The child's isolation: When the child joins the preparatory education institution for the first time or when he moves to a new school, he feels that he is an isolated, unknown person, and the children look at him with a look that indicates astonishment and inquiry, and therefore he feels embarrassed and unhappy and wants to escape from the situation, as his position in the middle of the new group makes him feel threatened, and this results in disputes such as quarrels and the exchange of obscene words.

-Different social origins of children: prevent children from integrating with each other due to differences in traditions, customs, wealth and poverty.

-The problem of children who were raised with special education: an education based on extreme protection and care. These children are soft and delicate and cannot compete or respond to aggression or protect themselves. They make excuses and show boredom and dissatisfaction and complain about everything.

-The child's fear of the nanny: This is the result of the father frightening his son that he will send him to the preparatory institution and that if he does not read, the nanny will hit him, so the child becomes complex.

-The incomplete maturity of some organs: such as the urination organs. The child at home is not restricted in relieving himself, while in the preparatory institution he must control and organize them.

The successful educator takes these problems into account and tries to reduce and remove them from the children and help them adapt to the preparatory atmosphere, especially the first year, because with the passage of time, they quickly overcome these problems and adapt to the group to which they belong.

Preparatory education has many objectives, including:

-Working on developing children's personalities through educational play activities.

-Raising their awareness of their physical being, especially by acquiring sensory and motor skills through play.

-Instilling good habits in them by training them in group life.

-Developing their language practice through communication situations arising from the proposed activities and from play.

-Providing them with the first elements of reading, writing and arithmetic through interesting activities and appropriate games.

-Working on completing family education and making up for and treating its shortcomings. (Medour et al., 2013)

*Preparatory education is education intended for children who have not reached the age of compulsory admission to school.

*Preparatory education means various programs directed to this category.

*Preparatory education allows children to develop all their potential, and provides them with opportunities for success in school and life.

The tasks of preparatory education include achieving:

*Social upbringing.

*The child's exploration of his potential and employing it in building his understanding of the world.

*Preparing for schooling.

7 -Preparatory education child:

The preparatory education child is the child between 4-6 years old who still needs great care from those around him despite his tendency to independence and is dominated by curiosity, innovation and analysis. (Ibrahim, 2004)

The preparatory education child goes through one of the most important educational stages, as it is a decisive stage in shaping the foundations of his growth in various aspects: physical, mental, social and emotional. (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

- The child's basic needs:

Needs are the factors, things or aspects that the educator and the curriculum must satisfy in the child so that he grows in a healthy and balanced manner, and focus on the physical, psychological and social aspects. Among these needs, we mention:

-The need for physical and mental growth: Physical growth requires healthy food, warmth, air, sun, movement, rest and play, and this varies from one age to another and from one condition to another (illness, health) and appears in the search for food and in the tendency to explore, learn and love of knowledge.

-The need for freedom of expression: The child feels the need to be free to move and express his tendencies and strengths in different forms and ways of expression such as speech, play, movement, drawing and acting. This freedom should be organized to make him love what he does. - **The need for guidance and counseling:** The child feels that he does not have the ability to learn and solve many problems, so he desires advice and guidance from adults to avoid failure and pain. Freedom alone is a destructive factor. The child cannot be left alone to express himself freely in a society that has its own moral standards, systems and traditions, and he does not have the ability to make the right choice for his direction. Mrs. Montessori drew attention to this, so she gave the child the right to choose whatever he wants from the game, provided that he does not usurp another's game or interfere in his work and does not disturb him. (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

-The need for reassurance and security from both the physical and mental aspects: The child loves taking risks, learning and exploring the environment surrounding him, and this is not available to him unless he is given sufficient freedom and has physical and mental confidence in himself and feels safe from risks such as punishment and falling, and thus he is freed from fear and anxiety, so the educator should not exaggerate and criticize the children's mistakes and provide justice so that they turn to inquiry, understanding and working in an atmosphere of reassurance.

-The need for love and affection: Love is necessary for the child's psychological and moral development and is sensitive to the psychological and even social problems that he suffers from. Love and affection mean what comes from the parents and the educator in terms of care, proper upbringing and reinforcement, and the child needs the educator's affection so that he feels comfortable with her and trusts her.

-The need for success: This requires not putting the child in situations where he repeatedly feels failure and allowing him to enjoy a degree of ecstasy of success from time to time.

-The need for appreciation: Children are eager to be recognized for the roles they play and to be treated as individuals with value.

The child's needs that the educator must know in order to work on achieving them properly and directing them in the right direction. (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

8-Final competencies for preparatory education:

A- Arabic language activities:

-Oral expression activity: Final competency: Interacts and communicates in dialogical, descriptive and narrative situations.

-Reading activity: Final competency: Reads some words.

-Writing activity: Final competency: Masters the principles of writing.

B- Mathematics activity: Final competency: Completes a project by employing mathematical knowledge and problem-solving strategies.

C- Science and technology education activity: Final competency: Completes a project by employing his biological, physical and technological knowledge.

D- Social activities: Islamic and civic education activity: Final competency Coexists and integrates in various social spaces.

E- Physical and rhythmic education activities: Final competency: Uses his physical capabilities in various movement situations.

G- Visual arts activity: Final competency: Employs his creative capabilities in visual productions. (Madour et al., 2013)

9-The child's profile at the end of the preparatory education stage:

The profile falls within the logic of personality development and refers to the set of qualities and characteristics that distinguish the preparatory education child at this age stage, the knowledge of which is necessary for the educator in order to achieve what the curriculum aspires to. This profile is manifested in the following:

***In the sensory/motor field:**

-Carries out activities of comprehensive and precise movements (whole and partial) with coordination, accuracy and flexibility.

-Positions himself in time and place according to his own features.

-Recognizes his physical capabilities and limits (sensory and motor).

***In the social and emotional field:**

-Discovers himself and his individuality.

-Exchanges his feelings and emotions with others.

-Demonstrates his independence through games, activities and daily life inside and outside the classroom.

-Uses appropriate means to respond to his needs, tendencies, desires and interests.

***In the linguistic/communicative field:**

-Speaks and expresses himself correctly.

-Searches and questions the meanings and implications of words.

-Uses useful nominal and verbal sentences, going beyond the use of a word/sentence (says a word and means a sentence.)

***In the mental/cognitive field:**

-Shows his interest and curiosity for the components of the social and physical environment, science and technology.

-Employs his thinking in various fields: (explores, practices, uses information, employs critical judgment and solves problems)

-Employs creative thinking.

-Shows the first building blocks in building concepts: (time, place, amount, quantity, measurement, size, weight, shape, area, color, material, beauty, balance, sound, ...). (National Curriculum Committee, 2004)

10-Challenges of Preparatory Education in Algeria:

Based on the presentation and analysis of the reality of preparatory education in Algeria, we can highlight the following most important challenges facing not only politicians and decision-makers in these countries, but all actors in these societies, because the level of future progress in these countries depends on the level of expansion of this education. The generalization of quality preparatory education is considered one of the basic keys through which it is possible to create the appropriate conditions for future generations to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development in these countries. The following are the most important challenges facing Algeria in this area:

-Adopting a national policy aimed at achieving the gradual generalization of both pre-school education for children aged three and four and preparatory education directed at children aged five, within the framework of a clear timetable.

In parallel with this generalization process, it is important to give due attention to a set of factors to ensure quality, including:

-Providing specialized training for educators in several fields such as pedagogical methods and activation in preparatory education, child psychology... It is worth noting that it is not possible to talk about providing quality preparatory education without the presence of highly qualified educators, in terms of academic, educational, didactic and activation knowledge.

- Providing furniture and educational equipment appropriate to the characteristics of growth at this stage, as it is required that the furniture ensures the physical and psychological comfort of children, and that the equipment enables them to satisfy their tendencies and hobbies in playing and discovery, and that it is lightweight and easy to move and can be easily shaped individually or collectively. In addition to these specifications regarding furniture and equipment, it is assumed that the space in which the children are received is spacious and equipped with various types of games, especially sliding, climbing, jumping and balancing. A multi-functional hall is used for theater and music activities. (Bosna, Bouchina, 2013)

Conclusion:

Considering the position of early childhood care in the developmental process of the child's personality in its various dimensions and fields, which enables him to adapt to the environment and influence it, attention must be paid to the preparatory education stage, starting with the preparation of curricula specific to the preparatory sections and the preparation of training

programs for educators. Providing educational requirements for the benefit of educators working in various spaces (kindergartens - preparatory education sections in primary schools - Quranic education sections - books ...), i.e. all educational institutions targeting children between the ages of four and six, as well as adopting an educational policy open to various public and private sectors, i.e. parties that can contribute to achieving the generalization project while ensuring quality.

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