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# **Evaluation of the Quality of Preschool Education: A Comparative Analysis of Practices in the Republic of Uzbekistan and Internationally**

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#### Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of international and Uzbekistani practices in assessing the quality of preschool education at the organizational level. Various concepts and perspectives on evaluating the quality of early childhood education are examined. It is demonstrated that the category of quality varies depending on 1) the goals of preschool education as defined at the national education system level and local levels; 2) the positions of different stakeholders involved in the preschool education system; and 3) the different levels at which preschool education programs are implemented in the country. The most common and popular assessment tools for 1) the developmental conditions of children in preschool educational organizations and 2) the educational outcomes of children (developmental progress) were analyzed. It was shown that there are two groups of preschool education objectives that define the educational process as either developmental or system-oriented. The latest experience in evaluating the quality of preschool education in the Republic of Uzbekistan was analyzed. The main focus of the analysis was on the quality assessment model, developed and tested from 2011 to 2013. It was shown that this model generally does not meet the requirements of contemporary Uzbekistani legislation and relies mainly on formal characteristics, necessitating significant modifications.

**Keywords**: Preschool Education, Quality Assessment, Comparative Analysis, Educational Outcomes, Developmental Conditions, Uzbekistan.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In contemporary Uzbekistani preschool education, an active process of restructuring the entire system is underway. At the heart of this process is the development of mechanisms that ensure the quality of preschool education; the content and definition of the quality category significantly influence the goal-setting within the preschool education system. The task of assessing the quality of education in general, and early childhood education in particular, is one of the priority tasks both in the international context and for the national education system. The new Federal State Educational Standard for Preschool Education (FGOS DO) declares the development of the child as the primary goal of education at this stage. Therefore, it is crucial to develop mechanisms for quality assessment in accordance with FGOS, where the evaluation should serve not so much as a control measure but as a means of designing developmental education and as a tool for the professional development of educators.

Quality assessment is important not only in the

management context, where it forms the basis for designing high-quality preschool education; it is also linked to the main goals and objectives of the entire preschool education system in the country. The content invested in the concept of quality education influences the system's target orientations, priority setting, and the basis of funding. Thus, defining the quality of preschool education and developing mechanisms and procedures for its assessment are becoming increasingly relevant and in demand within Uzbekistan's preschool education system. It is evident that the project of a quality assessment system requires a preliminary analysis of international experience, which should be constructed comparatively and viewed from the perspective of both the opportunities for borrowing and the limitations that inevitably arise when transferring models from one sociocultural context to another.

The systematic education of most developed countries (mainly European countries and the USA) traditionally began at the age of 7-8 years; early

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#### **Review Article**

education was never considered an area for organized state efforts and was a family responsibility. As a result, systematic preschool education has traditionally been absent from the educational systems of most developed countries, which at best provided families with some market of educational services. However, in recent decades, the concept of fragmented educational services, mainly related to child care, has gradually been replaced by an understanding of the role of this period in a child's development and, consequently, the necessity of preschool education as an important part of the national education system.

In Uzbekistan, traditionally, since the 1920s, there has been a state-funded system of mass (though not mandatory) preschool education, which is now being considered in many developed and developing countries. It must be acknowledged that preschool education in the Soviet Union was mainly oriented towards the system's interests rather than the child's interests, necessitating reforms, especially in program content and in the interaction between educators and children. Nonetheless, the undeniable advantage of preschool education was its systematic nature and its actual accessibility, based on state funding. At the same time, international experience is very useful for the traditional system, as it creates reflection opportunities for and, consequently, development. Modern trends worldwide, associated with increased state attention to early education, create favorable opportunities for the creation and promotion of innovative mechanisms for children's preschool education and for the exchange of experiences in such transformations among interested countries.

Analysis of Uzbekistani and International Practices in Quality Assessment of Preschool Education, Including Analysis of Existing Evaluation Tools in Terms of Their Applicability to the Preschool Education System of Uzbekistan

# **1.1 The Problem of Quality Assessment in Preschool Education: International Context**

In recent years, the topic of quality assessment in preschool education has firmly taken the lead in the international discussion on issues related to this level of education. It can be confidently concluded that one of the catalysts for this discussion was the now-famous longitudinal study on the effectiveness of the international preschool education program "High/Scope" on the life outcomes of its participants, which effectively demonstrated the critical importance of early childhood education for the long-term prospects of individuals' lives. Since the study involved children from highly disadvantaged social groups, its results were so convincing and impressive that they prompted policymakers in many countries to make pivotal decisions about transforming disparate and variably organized preschool services into a systematic preschool education framework. The results of this study are presented in Figure 1.



Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment Initially Setting Investment to be Equal Across all Ages

Fig1. Indicators of Return on Investment in Human Capital in Education

Graph: Return on Investment in Human Capital (assuming the same amount of funds was invested at all ages).

- Y-axis: Rate of Return on Investment in Human Capital
- > X-axis: Age: Preschool, School, Post-school
- Zones of Intervention on the Curve:
  - ✓ Preschool Programs
  - ✓ School Education
  - ✓ Professional Training
- Line r on the graph: Level of Opportunity Cost when Investing Funds

The graph shows that the earlier educational programs begin to invest in human capital, the better the individual performs throughout life. Even after 40 years, the impact of preschool programs on a child can be seen in their professional development, career, family situation, and other significant aspects of their personal and professional life. These various impacts are expressed in specific figures of return on investment and even in further profits if investments were made in early childhood, with the earlier investments yielding a higher rate of return expressed in the subsequent development of human capital. At the same time, the graph suggests that it is easy to miss the optimal window for investing in human capital: the last chance to recover the invested funds and gain at least a small profit appears from investments in the education of first-grade children. If investment starts later, it becomes less and less profitable. It is understood that these are average values across the population; individual cases vary as usual.

Following this study, many countries, including those with high GDPs, have engaged in discussions and made decisions about systematic investment in the preschool education system, resulting in what can now be observed worldwide as a kind of "preschool boom." It should be noted that until now, with a few exceptions, early childhood education was not an area of state effort; typically, the organization of various educational forms, usually non-governmental, was the best case scenario. However, with the adoption of such decisions, the question arose: how much do these results depend on the type and quality of the intervention conducted? Is it enough to simply engage with children at a certain age to achieve improved outcomes throughout their lives, or are there special programs (such as "High/Scope" and possibly others) that can lead to such significant results? Or, perhaps, it is possible to identify (formulate) a set of characteristics that, when implemented in programs, could lead to the desired outcomes? Thus, the problem of the quality of preschool programs has emerged.

In contemporary literature, various classifications discuss different notions of preschool education quality. However, it is generally accepted to consider the different areas where the concept of preschool education quality is applied. In the simplest case, quality can be related either to educational policy, implemented at various levels, or to the educational process (educational environment) realized at the level of a specific educational institution, which can take different forms in different countries. Typically, this refers to some preschool educational organization (kindergarten, preschool, childcare group, etc.).

Both levels of preschool education quality policy level and organizational level—exhibit a significantly greater diversity of tasks, practices, forms of implementation, and notions of values and goals compared to general or higher education. This diversity creates unique challenges in developing a unified quality assessment system, given the multitude of programs, forms, and technologies, each of which may be equally valid due to the diversity of childhood. In such cases, the focus is usually on dialogue. Due to the specific nature of early childhood education, the most successful quality assessment involves a complex system utilizing multiple procedures and tools. These tools and procedures are employed by various stakeholders involved in the process and serve different, complementary purposes.

These tasks are not only distributed across the aforementioned levels—policy level and preschool institution level—but usually coexist at a single level. For example, the level of a preschool organization, which is our primary interest, may concern the preschool itself, its founders, parents, civil society organizations, and regional and even federal education management systems. These stakeholders obviously have different positions within the preschool education system, and each position should be considered. This approach necessitates dialogue between different positions, usually leading to the creation of a comprehensive tool that includes the use of specific tools at the preschool organization level.

Another feature of preschool education in various countries affecting the understanding of quality is the diversity of organizational models, which is much more pronounced than at the school level or, even more so, at the professional education level. Early childhood

education often involves non-state forms, in which states have recently been directly involved, negotiating and constantly changing models of cooperation, financial, and resource participation in exchange for rules governing these non-state forms. The type of agreement, which varies from country to country and depends on the adopted education model, as well as the nature of the preschool form (program), is crucial in determining quality.

The following distinguished: forms are education provided in a kindergarten or nursery (centerbased), home-based group, family-based, community-based. Additionally, the form of ownership of the educational service provider-whether private, nonstate, or public-is also important. It is also critical to understand how educational activities are regulated at the level of each form, specifically the extent to which national standards (if they exist), national educational programs, or developmental guidelines, which act as standards in a variable situation, are mandatory for different providers in a particular country.

Furthermore, some authors highlight specific parameters characterizing the early childhood education system: any education system is proposed to be analyzed as the result of the intersection of non-formal, informal, and formal approaches. All these features of the preschool system, which multiply its variability compared to other compulsory education levels, significantly influence the definition of quality in preschool education and make the preschool education systems in different countries highly diverse.

Our goal is not to provide a detailed description of all existing models of early childhood educational services, which would be impractical, but to highlight the main parameters that these models form.

## 1.2. Goals and Objectives of Preschool Education: Two Approaches to Early Childhood Education (Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Models)

The authors aimed to assess international experiences in terms of their applicability to the preschool education system in the Republic of Uzbekistan, with particular emphasis on the conditions introduced by the State Educational Standard for Preschool Education (SES PE). It was also crucial to consider recent changes related to preschool education in Uzbek legislation. Consequently, the primary focus was on analyzing the practices of various countries in assessing the quality of preschool education at the level of preschool institutions, which, for simplicity and in alignment with the regulatory terminology of Uzbekistan, we define as preschool educational organizations (PEOs).

An analysis of existing approaches, procedures, and tools used in preschool education in different countries reveals two main areas of application (objects) for quality assessment at the level of preschool organizations. These two objects can be described as:

- 1. Educational process (educational environment, educational activities, educational conditions, interactions, etc.)
- 2. Children's educational outcomes (child development dynamics, individual child development, various types of child activities, etc.)

Thus, the approaches defining what constitutes quality in preschool education, the procedures, and the tools used in these assessments can be grouped into two clusters. Each cluster is determined by the type of object targeted by the assessment procedure: the first cluster includes methods and procedures for assessing the educational environment with all its variations, while the second cluster includes methods and procedures for assessing children's outcomes, which may also encompass various specific objects.

Importantly, each tool used for quality assessment is based on a specific understanding of quality in general and preschool education quality in particular. This understanding is linked to the goals of preschool education, as discussed earlier. Consequently, the objectives of preschool education presented in international practice, giving rise to two corresponding approaches, can also be divided into two groups: the first approach is oriented towards the system, and the second towards child development. The system-oriented approach is often defined as one focusing solely on preparing children for school, whereas the developmental model is oriented towards the age-appropriate and individual capabilities of children. These two approaches are conventionally categorized in the literature as the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian models of education, and this distinction is particularly significant for preschool education compared to other levels of education. John Bennett compares the functioning of these two systems in preschool education as follows (see Table 1):

#### NATURE OF PROCEDURES AND TOOLS USED IN DIFFERENT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION MODELS

Given that it is impossible to describe national

models in a way that represents all possible combinations of trends, it becomes evident that the most effective way to evaluate the applicability of international practices in Uzbekistan is by analyzing the procedures and tools for assessing preschool education quality that are most popular and widespread across different models. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the tools for assessing the educational environment, including all interpretations of this term, as well as the tools for assessing educational outcomes (the dynamics of individual child development).

### **1.3.** Assessing the Quality of Child Development Conditions (Educational Environment and Interaction): International Use of ECERS Scales (USA, UK)

Among the tools and procedures for evaluating the conditions of early childhood education, the ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) methodology is a recognized leader in most countries. ECERS represents a comprehensive set of scales, with various author teams contributing to their development. For this analysis, we focus on two of the most recent and contemporary versions: ECERS-R and ECERS-E.

The ECERS-R (Revised Edition) was developed by Thelma Harms, Director of Curriculum Development, Richard M. Clifford, Senior Expert, and Debbie Cryer, Expert and Director of the Child Care Program at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill . The ECERS-E (Extension) is a newer scale that includes additional assessment areas and scales supplementing the ECERS-R. The authors of ECERS-E are Kathy Silva, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, and Brenda Taggart.

The set of ECERS scales includes the following instruments:

- **ITERS-R**: Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, designed for evaluating group programs for children from birth to 2.5 years.
- ECERS-R: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, developed for evaluating programs for children from 2.5 to 5 years.
- **SACERS**: School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale, designed for evaluating group programs for school children aged 5-12 years.
- FCCERS-R: Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale, developed for evaluating family programs offered in private child care settings for children from birth to school age.

#### Validity, Reliability, and Accuracy

The scales are validated tools with high reliability and accuracy. The overall agreement percentage across all indicators is 86.1%, with component-level agreement at 48% for exact agreement and 71% for agreement within one point. Below (see Table 2) are the reliability data for each of the sub-scales included in ECERS-R.

Scale	Inter-Rater Reliability	Internal Consistency
Space and Furnishings	0.76	
Personal Care Routines	0.72	
Language-Reasoning	0.83	
Activities	0.88	
Interaction	0.86	
Program Structure	0.77	
Parents and Staff	0.71	
Overall	0.92	

 Table 1: Interclass Correlation for ECERS-R Subscales

Given that these scales are based on observation, such characteristics appear highly reliable. A common drawback of the observation method is insufficient reliability and, consequently, the validity of the method, which usually hinders the dissemination and translation of the methodology to other expert groups. The ECERS scales have achieved widespread use; it is impossible to list all the countries where it is legally used. It is known that besides the USA and Canada, this scale is used to varying degrees in almost all European and Asian

countries. In Germany, England, Sweden, and Denmark, the ECERS-R scale has undergone standardization, maintaining high reliability. The high reliability is the primary reason for the widespread adoption of this methodology for assessing the educational environment and interaction within a preschool group.

#### **ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE**

The assessment procedure is based on structured observation, relying on evaluation sheets containing indicators for each component. ECERS is an expert methodology, although recently the authors have suggested its use in organizational self-analysis, implying a broader range of observers. This expansion in function has led to increased formalization of the criteria on which the scale is based, as well as the explanations provided. Formally, no special training has ever been required for the use of this scale; it has always been merely recommended.

Initially, the ECERS scales aimed to assess the educational environment in a narrow sense, evaluating the physical and spatial environment of a preschool group. This was sufficient until early childhood education gained worldwide popularity, bringing educational content into it. The ECERS-R scale was the first to include some subscales evaluating interaction within the preschool group; these sub-scales are presented in Table 2.

#### STRUCTURE OF ECERS SCALES

The scale includes sub-scales, components, and indicators. Each indicator is rated as "yes," "no," or "not applicable" if specified in the indicator. The component is rated from 1 (insufficient) to 7 (excellent). The rating is based on observations and explanations provided for most indicators within the component. Based on the ratings for indicators, components, and sub-scales, profiles can be constructed. The profile on the page allows for a graphical representation of ratings for all components and sub-scales. It can be used to compare strengths and weaknesses and identify components and sub-scales for improvement. An example evaluation sheet is provided in Appendix A. Examples of indicators and explanations are provided in Appendix B.

#### **ECERS-E SCALE**

The ECERS-E, as noted, represents an "Educational Program Extension" to the ECERS-R scale. The ECERS-E, as the authors write, was not developed to replace ECERS-R but as an extension that expands on some of the questions contained in ECERS-R. It is intended to be used alongside ECERS-R and includes several sub-scales that partially supplement but also overlap with the ECERS-R sub-scales. The ECERS-E assesses the educational program and environment for children aged 3 to 5 years in the following areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Science/Environment
- Diversity (race, gender, individual learning needs)

The indicators in these additional scales assess the quality of the educational program offered, including the evaluation of pedagogical technologies. It becomes evident that the additions made to the main ECERS-R scale quickly became insufficient for assessing the educational process in modern preschools. This reflects the increasing educational content for young children, which is quite unusual for most countries, while Uzbek preschool education traditionally involves substantial educational content for preschoolers. At the same time, analyzing the content of the ECERS-E scale leads to the conclusion that the authors generally orient themselves toward the age of young children and set barriers for ageinappropriate pedagogical teaching technologies.

# Advantages, Disadvantages, and Risks of Using ECERS Scales

It is essential to note that in addition to high reliability and validity, the scales exhibit a very high quality of instrument development from the perspective of supporting the humanistic pedagogy of early childhood development. All sub-scales, components, and indicators are based on the regularities of child development in early childhood, while also considering the need for education at this age. For the Uzbek context, this experience is very useful, as the State Standard for Early Childhood Education introduced five educational areas that almost entirely coincide with the list of sub-scales and components in these instruments. The focus on assessing conditions within the preschool group, both the educational environment and adult-child interaction, fully aligns with the fact that the State Standard for Early Childhood Education emphasizes requirements for the conditions for implementing the main educational program in preschool.

However, it should be noted that despite the authors' assurances that the assessment procedure takes no more than 2-3 hours per preschool institution, practical experience shows otherwise. Typically, conducting the assessment procedure within a group requires 5-6 hours to several days, depending on the expert's qualification in using this scale. Additionally, analyzing the indicators

and explanations reveals their excessive complexity and detail, which in practice results in setting too rigid benchmarks, unjustifiably constraining the actual educational practice of preschools and posing a risk of narrowing and tightening it to the detriment of an individual approach to each child. Detailed indicators (e.g., the number of objects and materials, their placement, the number of repetitions of a specific event, etc.) often make expert evaluation within a group extremely challenging, rendering it unnecessarily cumbersome. The overall number of components also complicates the completion of evaluation sheets, which are too voluminous to be easily handled, while the observation process is disrupted if it is necessary to fill out the sheets. Since there are numerous specific indicator points, it is difficult for the observer, especially an inexperienced one, to remember them all, so using auxiliary tools (such as notebooks) may lead to significant content loss.

Thus, while the ECERS tool remains an intriguing instrument, particularly concerning international comparative studies due to its undisputed leadership in the number of countries where it is applied, the aforementioned disadvantages make it less suitable for regular use as a quality assessment tool in the Uzbek early childhood education system. Moreover, despite the conformity of this scale to the State Standard for Early Childhood Education in terms of principles and general approaches, there is also a risk of narrowing the Uzbek educational practice. Although the ECERS authors base their approach on highly progressive and continuously developing concepts of early childhood education practice, these concepts still significantly lag behind the Uzbek tradition of comprehensive early childhood education. It is critically important to preserve and promote this tradition while significantly altering the type of adult-child interaction based on the age-appropriate principle of early childhood education

#### Summary of Associations between Indicators of Quality and Gains in Children's Development during the Pre-K Year (Mashburn et al., 2008)

Gains in Children's Development During the Pre-K Year in	Quality Indicators			
	Infrastructure and Design Quality	ECERS-R Total	Emotional Support	Instructional Support
Receptive Language	No association	No association	No association	$\checkmark$
Expressive Language	No association	V	No association	V
Rhyming	No association	No association	No association	$\checkmark$
Letter Naming	No association	No association	No association	$\checkmark$
Math Skills	No association	No association	No association	$\checkmark$
Social Competence	No association	No association	$\checkmark$	No association
Behavior Problems	No association	No association	V	No association

Fig 2. Comparison Between ECERS-R and CLASS Indicators for Emotional and Instructional Support Sub-Scales

#### 1.4. Methodology for Assessing Teacher-Child Interaction in Preschool Groups: CLASS (USA)

In addition to the renowned ECERS scales, there are numerous other tools globally based on structured

observation of processes occurring in early childhood education organizations (ECEOs), often referred to as the educational (developmental) environment, including interactions within preschool groups. One of the most well-known methodologies is the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System). This methodology was

developed by Robert Pianta and his colleagues.

Recently, the CLASS methodology has been gaining increasing popularity worldwide. While it has not yet reached the same level of recognition as ECERS, its demand is evident. The methodology is built on observation based on strictly defined rules for adult-child interactions or adults with groups of children, and this interaction is tracked throughout the day within a preschool group (class).

CLASS serves as an expert observation tool; unlike ECERS, it is not intended for use by untrained observers. However, since the CLASS organization offers training to all interested parties, the methodology can be utilized in the process of internal quality assessment in ECEOs provided that such training is completed.

#### **SUB-SCALES OF CLASS**

The methodology includes three sub-scales, each aimed at assessing an important parameter of interaction evaluation. These sub-scales are formulated in terms of teacher actions, allowing for a realistic assessment of group interaction. The sub-scales are as follows:

- Emotional Support
- Classroom Organization (including methods of establishing discipline)
- **Instructional Support** (methods of task-setting, question formulation, providing feedback to children)

This scale assesses interaction as an equally (if not more) important condition for child development compared to the educational environment in a narrow sense. Here, both non-instructional and instructional interactions are evaluated, as the focus is on ways to support children by setting various tasks, including educational ones. In this regard, the CLASS scale aligns closely with the ideology, principles, and specific requirements of the State Standard for Early Childhood Education of Uzbekistan, emphasizing the evaluation of teacher-child interactions as a key condition for development at this age, rather than a direct assessment of children's outcomes.

#### **APPLICATION AND RELEVANCE**

The CLASS scale has been extensively described in Uzbek literature. A particularly interesting table in a certain article compares comprehensive quality indicators from ECERS-R with interaction indicators from the CLASS methodology. It is evident that the ECERS-R indicators were used as a standard in this comparison, as ECERS-R is widely used in the USA as a normative tool for assessing the quality of preschool education, despite significant differences in normative foundations across different states.

In summary, while ECERS focuses on the educational environment, CLASS emphasizes the importance of the quality of interactions between teachers and children, making it a valuable tool for understanding and improving early childhood education. The combination of both methodologies provides a comprehensive picture of the quality of early childhood education, covering both environmental and interactional aspects essential for child development.

### ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CLASS AND ECERS-R INDICATORS

The data reveals a strong association between the indicators of the CLASS methodology and the comprehensive scale of ECERS-R when considering the combined evaluation of the two CLASS sub-scales. This finding supports the assertion that the quality of interaction within the "teacher-child" dynamic is as crucial as the overall indicators of the educational environment.

**Figure 3** provides compelling insights into the practices of American educators when interacting with children, evaluated across three parameters: Emotional Support, Instructional Support, and Classroom Management. The results depicted in the figure align with findings from existing research on teacher-child interactions (e.g., [33; 34; 35]).

- Emotional Support: CLASS assesses how teachers create a supportive and nurturing emotional climate, which is crucial for children's social and emotional development.
- **Instructional Support**: CLASS evaluates the effectiveness of teachers' feedback and guidance in enhancing children's learning experiences.
- Classroom Management: This parameter examines the strategies used by teachers to establish and maintain discipline within the classroom setting.

These results underscore the significant role of teacher interactions in shaping the quality of early childhood education. They align with prior research that highlights the importance of these interactions for effective educational outcomes.

In summary, the strong correlation between the CLASS and ECERS-R indicators emphasizes the critical role of teacher-child interactions and suggests that these interactions are integral to understanding and improving the quality of early childhood education.



Fig 3. Quality of American Educators' Actions in Interacting with Children (Based on CLASS Methodology Research Data)

# **1.5.** Assessment of Children's Outcomes as an Indicator of Preschool Education Quality

#### 1.5. Direct and Indirect (Indirect) Assessment

Given the nuances of the international situation in preschool education, including shifts in policy across numerous countries (see Section 1.1 of this text), a significant number of tools for assessing children's outcomes have emerged. This proliferation of assessment tools can be attributed to many countries' lack of experience in early childhood education, leading to a mechanical adoption of assessment approaches from higher levels of the education system. However, some educational institutions have made considerable progress and are beginning to reflect on the unique aspects of preschool education. Consequently, tools for assessing children's outcomes (including various interpretations of child development and assessments of children's activities) can be classified into two categories:

- 1. Direct Assessment Tools, including testing.
- 2. **Indirect Assessment Tools** (including evaluations based on expert judgments or observations).

Despite differences in assessment methods, it is important to note that the majority of quality assessments for child development aim to relate outcomes to the goal of preparing children for school. This significant issue, sometimes manifesting as an explicit or implicit focus on evaluating child development, deserves separate discussion. However, it is worth noting that, despite the apparent naturalness of such a focus, it often distorts the goals of preschool education by reducing early childhood to a preparatory phase for school. While the distinction between the methods in the first and second categories does not resolve this issue, it can make the assessment process and its subsequent conclusions somewhat more humane.

The first category encompasses a large number of achievement tests, control procedures, and diagnostic methodologies, including those designed to assess indicators that, according to their creators, reflect development (such as various tools for measuring literacy and reading skills, e.g., [36]). These indicators may be compiled into scales or may consist of disparate data. In any case, there are always doubts about whether the information obtained pertains to the real development of a specific parameter and whether it holds distinguishing or prognostic value. The developmental characteristics of a child before the onset of systematic school instruction make it challenging to predict future abilities based on the development of a particular skill. Furthermore, questions of appropriateness, validity, reliability, and accuracy of results frequently arise even in the context of play.

These issues pose significant barriers to using the results of these procedures as indicators of preschool education quality. However, in some cases (typically as part of a battery of methods and in the hands of a

specialist), they may be used for internal assessment within a group, primarily as a professional tool for educators. External evaluations, especially those linked to regulatory or managerial contexts, generally do not rely on these data. In some states in the United States, for example, there is a practice of transferring child development assessment data (sometimes in the form of portfolios) to the child's future teacher upon their transition to school. It is important to note that, even when using developmental data in various levels of management practice, confidentiality rules always apply, and laws protecting personal information are often enforced.

#### THE EDI METHODOLOGY (CANADA)

In contrast, indirect (or indirect) assessment procedures generally provide certain information about child development, though there are specific features that warrant discussion. Let us examine these features using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) as an example. Developed by Canadian researchers and initially implemented in Canada's preschool education system, the EDI has gained significant popularity and widespread adoption globally.

EDI is an indirect assessment methodology for evaluating the status of children aged 3 to 5 years. The assessment is based on teacher observations within a group of children and is conducted using indicators aligned with specific constructs distributed across developmental domains. Essentially, the tool is a questionnaire completed by teachers, evaluating children's readiness for school across five key developmental domains:

- Physical health and well-being
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive development
- Communication skills and general knowledge

Additionally, there are two supplementary methods for assessing special skills and issues, typically concerning children with special needs. The questionnaire is intended for use at the group level and is not designed to provide a comprehensive picture of an individual child. Thus, it involves observing the group of children and subsequently completing a questionnaire based on this observation, which reflects each child's development as it manifests within the group.

In summary, the EDI methodology offers

somewhat superficial but occasionally significant information when viewed as an intra-group tool. According to the authors, the methodology does not provide in-depth information. Examples from the EDI methodology are provided in Appendix G. These examples highlight that the methodology is indeed useful for teachers as it, firstly, teaches them to observe and operationalize important information and, secondly, draws the teacher's attention to this important information. From our perspective, it cannot reliably indicate the quality of education within a group. However, if children's skills are regularly measured and no progress is observed, this could warrant further investigation into the quality of the educational process within the group.

### **1.6 International Comparative Study of Early** Childhood Education Systems: Early Childhood Education Study (ECES)

In recent years, the international educational community has increasingly recognized the need for a comparative cross-country study at the preschool education level, similar to existing studies at other educational levels (such as PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS). This recognition stems from the growing importance placed on early childhood education in many countries and the subsequent changes in national educational systems. The primary motivation appears to be the exchange of experiences between countries, understanding which models are based on effective policies, identifying which services provided in Early Childhood Development (ECD) are most valued by society, examining educational and social issues and their potential solutions within ECD systems, and exploring the economic models employed in different countries for this level of education.

Thus, ECES is a project dedicated to comparative cross-country research on the development of preschool-aged children.

# **OBJECTIVES AND GOALS OF THE PROJECT:**

The project aims to investigate, describe, and perform comparative analyses of systems providing education services to young children (from birth to school entry age) across various countries.

**Expected Outcomes of the Project:** Typically, crosscountry studies that employ methodologies assessing the quality of educational outcomes conclude with rankings of countries based on the success of children in specific

age groups in solving test tasks. Alongside these results, international studies also examine so-called "contextual" indicators, which provide substantial amounts of important information about secondary (environmental) conditions under which children receive education. These indicators include perspectives from parents and educators on issues of interest to researchers, as well as the presence of a home library for children. The term "contextual" clearly refers to secondary information considered and analyzed when examining the reasons behind varying levels of student success in a country.

However, in the ECES study, constructing assessments based on testing children is particularly problematic. Previous analyses have highlighted numerous risks associated with such a methodology for measuring the quality of preschool education. Many countries strongly oppose this approach. Consequently, contextual factors from previous studies have become central to the ECES project. Thus, the focus of the research is on aspects related to national policies for building preschool education systems, with direct (or indirect) testing of children considered as an additional option for interested countries.

Moreover, at this stage, the organizers of the study do not plan to construct a ranking of countries. The considerable variation in preschool education systems between countries complicates this possibility. For instance, the age at which systematic (school-based) education begins varies from 4 to 8 years, presenting a significant difference in terms of child development, which complicates comparisons of educational goals, methods, and particularly outcomes. Nevertheless, common objectives in preschool education do exist, allowing for the identification of common parameters across models and their subsequent comparison. Therefore, the current approach involves analyzing different models based on selected parameters.

The project is managed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), a research organization based in Germany, with support from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). IEA is responsible for developing and conducting PIRLS, TIMSS, TALIS, and other cross-country comparative studies, in which Uzbekistan participates. The IEA also initiated the PISA study.

The project commenced in the winter of 2013. Initially, a traditional two-phase approach was planned: 1) developing the concept and tools (including country pilot testing) and 2) conducting the study. The developed concept intended to investigate the specifics of preschool education systems, including surveys of preschool educators, as central objects of research, supplemented by data on children's outcomes. However, as noted earlier, the specifics of preschool education necessitated adjustments:

- Some countries raised significant concerns about the feasibility of assessing educational outcomes for preschool-aged children.
- Attempts to create a unified tool for assessing children's outcomes highlighted the need for extended development.

As a result, it was decided in 2014 to initiate the first phase of ECES (including a pilot phase for tool testing), which focuses on examining policies and strategies in preschool education systems in various countries. This phase employs the "Policy Questionnaire" for data collection.

The pilot phase occurred in winter-spring 2014. Countries participating in the pilot (and funding both the pilot and first phases) included New Zealand, the United States, Poland, Italy, France, Thailand, Chile, the Czech Republic, Estonia, and South Korea. Five of these countries tested the questionnaire within their preschool education systems. Based on the pilot results, the questionnaire was revised.

Feedback from participating countries indicates that the questionnaire provides a comprehensive view of the model in each country and includes information that has proven useful within the country itself. Based on the results from using the policy questionnaire, the organizers will present a list and description of preschool education models in different countries and (presumably) analyze the effectiveness of these models in relation to the objectives facing the systems.

# ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY QUALITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

The Policy and Strategy Questionnaire for Early Childhood Education (ECE) encompasses five sections:

1. **Public Policy (Strategy):** The purpose of this section is to provide information on the goals and objectives of the existing ECE system, the distribution of responsibilities across different levels, the share of GDP allocated per child, the legal status of the ECE system, policies regarding parental involvement (including

support for various family categories), and key changes in the ECE system.

- 2. Organization of Service Delivery: This section aims to provide information on the implementation of ECE policies. It includes details on the types of service providers for different age groups, the existence of variable funding models (including the involvement of funds), issues related to continuity, and the relationship between the ECE system and primary education.
- 3. Accessibility of Early Childhood Education: The goal here is to provide information on the proportion of children covered by the ECE system, the accessibility of ECE services, existing barriers, and strategies to overcome them. It also covers the participation of various categories of children, including those with special needs, socio-cultural differences, parental fees, and early intervention programs.
- 4. Quality Issues: This section aims to provide information on the regulatory framework for organizing the educational environment, staff training and professional development, group sizes and the "teacher-child" ratio, health and safety, educational standards or general directions, quality assessment systems, accreditation, inspection, reporting, and so forth.
- 5. **Expectations Regarding Educational Outcomes:** The purpose of this section is to provide information on whether educational outcomes are recorded for different age groups and, if so, how these outcomes are used in policy formulation and practice within the ECE system.

The questionnaire is completed by a designated researcher through the analysis of documentation and interviews with experts at various levels.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of international and Russian practices in evaluating the quality of early childhood education reveals the following opportunities and limitations for the application of models, tools, and procedures within the Russian early childhood education (ECE) system:

1. **Quality Assessment Alignment:** The assessment of early childhood education quality is contingent upon the specific goals set for the

system. This implies that the quality assessment system in Russia should be structured in accordance with the objectives of early childhood education as outlined in the Federal State Educational Standard for Early Childhood Education (FSES ECE).

- 2. **Multi-level Assessment Systems:** As demonstrated by the experience of various countries, the quality assessment system in Russia can be multi-level and involve multiple stakeholders in early childhood education. Developing such a system can be a lengthy and continuously evolving process. However, analysis shows that the most effective systems are those that focus primarily on the level of early childhood education institutions (ECEIs), where the educational process actually occurs.
- 3. **Development-oriented Approach:** The analysis indicates that the most widely accepted and unquestionably effective approach is one where quality assessment is fundamental to the development of early childhood education institutions. Therefore, the primary objective of quality assessment is to facilitate improvements and support the development of ECEIs.
- 4. Beyond Formal Indicators: Quality assessment at the ECEI level cannot be conducted solely based on formal indicators, as the FSES ECE emphasizes the psychological and pedagogical conditions for child development, many of which are not described by formal characteristics. However, assessing the activities of early childhood organizations based on the requirements of FSES ECE is feasible through direct expert evaluation, as practiced in virtually all countries examined.
- 5. **Types of Tools and Procedures:** The analysis reveals that two types of tools and procedures are used worldwide:

**A) Tools Focused on Assessing Developmental Conditions:** These tools are oriented towards evaluating the conditions of child development within ECEIs.

**B)** Tools Focused on Assessing Child Outcomes (**Development**): These tools are oriented towards evaluating children's developmental results.

#### **EFFECTIVENESS OF APPROACHES:**

Comparative analysis of various tools from both categories demonstrates that the approach focused on assessing developmental conditions aligns with the principles and requirements of FSES ECE and the Russian early childhood education practice. The approach oriented towards using testing and other direct assessment methods for child development, on the other hand, proves to be inadequate for evaluating the quality of preschool activities. This type of assessment is poorly formalized, difficult to standardize, and requires individualized procedures. Typically, it is employed in countries with newly established early childhood education systems without established traditions, which does not align with the situation in Russia. Conversely, analyzing the developmental conditions within ECEIs can contribute to the advancement of the early childhood education system in Russia by allowing control over factors that can be directly influenced by the ECEIs, namely, the psychological and pedagogical conditions. Additionally, in research not tied to normative contexts, such as regular child development studies or pedagogical diagnostics within preschool groups, indirect (observational) assessments of children's educational outcomes can be applied. Methods of indirect assessment (such as EDI) used in pedagogical diagnostics can serve as a form of training for educators, enhancing their observational skills. Direct assessment of child development in accordance with FSES ECE should be carried out only by specialists with parental informed consent and cannot serve as the basis for evaluating the quality of early childhood education.

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