



EDUCATION VIII. NURSERY SCHOOLS AND KINDERGARTENS

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The beginnings of formalized preschool education in Persia can be traced back to about 1270/1891, when Armenians in Jolfā, near Isfahan, founded a kindergarten, which continues to function today. By 1298/1919 there were a few kindergartens in Tehran and other cities, primarily founded by missionaries and minority groups. They included Margaret Sorūiān's (or Sorūriān's) establishment in Tehran (founded in 1328/1910) and that of Šūšanik Kānzādīān, in Tabrīz, which were open only to Armenians. The first modern kindergarten (*kūdakestān*) for Persian children was established in 1303 Š./1924 in Tabrīz by Jabbār 'Askarzāda, known as Bāgčabān (1302-86=1345 Š./1885-1966), who called it *bāgča-ye atfāl* (children's garden), hence his surname. Although Bāgčabān mentioned in his memoirs (p. 89) that Yūsuf Rīšār (Richard) Mo'addeb-al-Molk, son of a French teacher who had been employed by Nāšer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* II, pp. 44-45), was already operating a kindergarten on Paris street in Tehran in 1342 Š./1923, all that is known about it is that it accepted the children of French residents in Tehran.



Bāgčabān moved to Shiraz in 1928 and opened a kindergarten there. Activities included memorization of poems, stories, and plays, as well as games and exploration of the natural and social environments. Because children's literature (see [CHILDREN vii](#)) in the modern sense was scarce, he himself wrote poems and stories and produced plays based on folk tales. He wrote the verse collection *Zendagī-e kūdakān* and the plays *Pīr o torob*, *Gorg o čūpān*, and *Ḳānom Kazūk* in 1928-29.

In 1931 the Ministry of Education, Endowments, and Fine Arts (Wezārat-e ma'āref o awqāf o šanā'e'-e mostazrafa) issued the first official kindergarten license to Borsāba Hūsepīān (Mošāḥeb, II, p. 2296), and two years later the Supreme Council on Education (Šūrā-ye 'ālī-e ma'āref) ratified the first set of regulations for kindergartens; the age of enrollment was set between four and seven years (Šadīq, p. 455). Kindergarten curricula normally consisted of games, handicrafts, drawing, music, storytelling, field trips, and instruction in the rudiments of reading and writing. Private kindergartens began to spring up in Tehran and other cities, and their number grew rapidly from fifty in 1946-47 to 168 in 1956-57 ([Table 1](#)). In 1955 the Ministry of Education (Wezārat-e farhang) established an independent bureau to supervise kindergartens and to organize classes for training kindergarten teachers. The new regulations lowered the age of admission to three years and required children who lived in non-Persian-speaking areas to enroll at least one year before they were to enter primary school. State operation of kindergartens and teacher training thus began in Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, and Gilān.

In 1961 the Bureau of Kindergartens was dissolved and its functions handed over to the Bureau of Elementary Education. In the same year several private elementary schools that included kindergartens opened throughout Persia. Between 1971 and 1978 four other state organizations were involved in establishing kindergartens and nursery schools: The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Wezārat-e kār o omūr-e ejtemā'ī) established nurseries for children three months to three years old and kindergartens for children three to six years old near factories; the Organization of Iranian Women (Sāzmān-e zanān-e Īrān) founded nurseries and kindergartens in government offices; the Centers for Family Welfare (Marākez-e refāh-e kānavāda), which offered literacy classes, vocational training, and counseling in low-income city areas, also operated kindergartens to help poor working families; and the Welfare Organization (Sāzmān-e behzīstī) established kindergartens in cities and villages. The Ministry of Education had also authorized preparatory classes in



elementary schools, in which children were to be enrolled the year before formal instruction began. These preparatory classes, which came between kindergarten and first grade, were highly informal and did not offer a specific curriculum.

Institutes for the advancement of children were introduced at the secondary level in 1967, with the purpose of training nursery and kindergarten teachers, necessitating production of the first textbooks for such training (see xviii, below). The Office of Curriculum Research and Planning (Daftar-e taḥqīqāt o barnāma-rīzī-e darsī) formulated a comprehensive preschool syllabus and a two-year teacher's-training course. Courses leading to a degree in preschool education were offered by the School of Education at Tehran University. A few provincial institutes, including Madrasa-ye 'ālī-e Šemīrān (established 1972) north of Tehran, which began to enroll students in its graduate preschool-education program in 1975, and Dānešgāh-e tarbiyat-e mo'allem in Tehran (see xix, below) also offered undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs in preschool education. Abū Rayḥān University in Varāmīn offered a few relevant courses. In 1976 the Plan Organization (Sāzmān-e barnāma) turned its attention to expanding preschool education, assigning priority to the establishment of new kindergartens in non-Persian-speaking regions, factory neighborhoods, industrial townships, and areas with high concentrations of illiterate and low-income residents. The expressed goals were to prepare children for entry into elementary school, to promote use of Persian as a national language, to guide children to develop social concerns and a sense of cooperation, to aid families by providing a healthy and enriching educational environment, to acquaint children with their heritage, to direct them in preschool activities and parents in child-rearing techniques, and to foster physical development and emotional growth (Markaz-e barnāma-rīzī, pp. 19-21). By the time of the revolution in 1979 the number of kindergartens, teachers, and pupils had increased dramatically since Baḡčabān's modest beginning in the 1920s, though still falling short of the basic needs of the country (Table 1).

The revolution interrupted the development of preschool education in Persia. The authorities promoted at-home care for small children, and several state-run kindergartens shut down. Centers for teacher training also closed, and private kindergartens had to struggle to continue in operation. Religious supervision and religious lessons were imposed, and short chapters of the Qur'ān were incorporated into the curriculum. This situation was short-lived,



however; religious supervision and teaching have since been moderated. The number of kindergartens has also again increased (Table 1). Families, particularly mothers, had become aware of the advantages of preschool education and recognized the need for specialized care for children aged three to six years. Conferences, lectures, and research findings convinced government officials that preschool programs are necessary (Mojīb et al.). Although the percentage of working women and mothers declined, women in offices, factories, and farms continued to need preschool education for their children, a need that was intensified by the war between Persia and Iraq in 1980-88.

They have continued to function under the supervision of the Ministries of Education and Labor and Social Affairs and the Welfare Organization (Sāzmān-e behzīstī). These bodies operate a number of kindergartens and day-care centers for government employees. The Welfare Organization also issues licenses for day-care centers and kindergartens. Although the numbers of kindergartens, teachers, and pupils have again risen, they still fall short of the essential needs of a country in the grip of rapid population growth. According to the 1986 census, fewer than 2 percent of preschoolers three to six years old were in day-care centers and kindergartens. The percentage of five-year-olds in the preparatory course was higher. Matters have improved since, however. About 14 percent (252,000) completed the preparatory course in 1992. A new educational plan was adopted in 1989 and partially implemented in elementary schools beginning in 1992. If it is fully implemented, all children in the preparatory program, from ages five to seven years, will be enrolled in a foundation (*asās*) course.

Currently only ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī University in Tehran offers an undergraduate degree in preschool education. The establishment in 1992 of Dāneškada-ye behzīstī wa tavānbaḡšī (School for Social Welfare and Rehabilitation), however, promises to provide training for teachers and caregivers in day-care centers and kindergartens and to provide trainees with opportunities for practical experience.

Several books on preschool education have been written or translated since the revolution, and there are now teachers’ guides and primers in mathematics, language skills, and the sciences. Some of them embody the long-term experiences of Persian teachers and principals and are now used as textbooks in teacher’s-training colleges and institutes, for example, *Ketāb-e kār-e morabbī-e kūdak* by Tūrān Mīrhādī (Ḳomārlū; 1359 Š./1980) and



Tajrobahā-ye madrasa-dārī by Ma'šūma Sohrāb (Māfī) and Yaḥyā Māfī (1370 Š./1991). In September 1992 a group of educators and teachers started a project to prepare reference books (*ketāb-e marja'*) for kindergarten teachers; in April 1994 this group organized the Research Center for Preschool Education (Markaz-e pažuhešhā-ye pīš az dabestān). The first reference volume, on the subject of water (*āb*), was published in June 1995. In addition, such institutions as Enteshārāt-e āmūzešī (established 1979), Kadamāt-e āmūzešī-e kūdakān (1982), Šanāye'-e āmūzešī-e omīd (1990), Bā farzandān (1991), and Šarkat-e sargarmīhā-ye āmūzešī (1991) produce posters, educational toys, and intellectual and artistic games for preschool children. The Ministries of Labor and Education and the Welfare Organization also publish newsletters and offer special seminars on preschool education. The independent monthly *Golak*, which features contributions by young writers and poets, has been published since 1990 for children aged three to eight years. Since 1980 *Keyhān-e baččahā* has also been publishing the weekly *Šāparak* (sixteen pages of stories, poems, plays, artwork, and other features) for preschool children and their parents. Anjoman-e pažuhešhā-ye āmūzešī-e pūyā, founded in 1979 by a group of educational specialists, organized several exhibitions, lectures, and seminars on preschool education in 1989 and 1990. Some of the lectures have been published in book form.

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