

Competence Of Preservice Preschool Teachers At Teacher Education Institute Of Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the level of competency of preserviced teachers at the Institute of Teacher Education. The competencies include teaching, management, communication, professional development, and care and protection of children. This study is based on quantitative design that uses a Likert Scale. The number of respondent involves is 223 people. For the purpose of identifying competencies, data were analyzed using SPSS Ver.21. The results showed that pre-service preschool teachers at the Institute of Teacher Education has statistically significant competencies in attending their teaching training program at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: *Teaching, Management, Communication, Professional Development, Care and protection of children.*

Introduction

The National Preschool Standard Curriculum (NPSC) , which contains various strands were designed solely to meet the demands of preschool education in this country (KPM. 2010).

The contents of National Preschool Standard Curriculum to be delivered to students of preschool need an appropriate training and paid attention by the Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia as a teacher training institution in the country. It is designed to produce preschool teachers who are trained and to send them to teach in national preschool. Any effort in training teachers according to the content in curriculum of preschool education in order to allow the preschool teachers to obtain training in accordance with the requirements of NPSC.

NPSC required preschool teachers who are highly skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced in teaching and learning to provide knowledge and experience in 4 aspects (reading, writing, thinking, and reasoning) to students of preschools. This is consistent with the fact that Rafel Haji Mahar (2001) has pointed out that the effectiveness of teaching and learning in preschool depends on the implementation which involved teachers who really understand, appreciate and able to carry out the teaching and learning as intended.

To ensure that the students are really competent, teachers in the profession of preschool education, the study should be conducted to obtain information competencies that must be acquired whe attending at Teacher Educatio Institute of Malaysia. The problem of quality inconsistency in training that required teachers to implement NPCS would not arise in preschool. This is a big challenge to preschool lecturers at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia in playing the role of institutions for addressing the issue of teachers who are not competent in teaching. Preschool lecturers regarded as the person responsible for producing pre-school teachers who are competent in delivering teaching and learning as envisaged in NPSC content (MOE, 2010).

Various statements expressed about the competence of teaching that involves not only teachers but also students of preschool education courses at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia. Competence as described by Rothwell (2002) is a feature that predisposed individuals toward certain behaviors and skills to achieve exemplary performance. Furthermore, Tobias Ley and Albert Dietrich (2003) stated that the skills and competencies that are used in the organization is to reveal the characteristics of an individual in order to utilize their expertise effectively and smoothly.

As a center of training, Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia should always be alert to the quality of the training needs of pre-school education in the country. National Preschool Curriculum Standard should be explore and fully understood by the lecturers so that the quality of training can be outlined as a guide during the training for trainers in their studies at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia. The challenges involved in preschool education should not be ignored, but should be considered and addressed urgently in order to achieve the objectives of NPCS.

Background

The study was conducted on the role of preschool teachers and the problems become issues of implementation in the pre-school curriculum should be seen as the cause of the shortage of current competences in teacher training at the Institute of Teacher Education. Therefore, the competences of teacher trainees during their teaching practical responsible channeling skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and reasoning (4M) to preschoolers is to be studied. The findings, which enable a comprehensive and detail guidelines can be develop to guide teacher training in a more concrete at the Institute of Teacher Education. The findings could also provide new input that can help strengthen the quality of preschool education in this country.

Excellence in preschool education depends on teachers. Pre-school teachers should be given adequate training before they undertake the responsibility of nurturing and guiding students. Preschool teachers need to acquire knowledge and skills in aspects of child development and teaching approaches in line with the objective requirements of preschool education that emphasizes holistic development, providing basic skills and foster positive attitudes of pupils.

According to Fullan (2000), teachers are the heart of educational change and teachers are also the most significant agent. They have a role as a change agent to change the objectives of the National Preschool Curriculum Standard (DSS). In the aspect of learning Soerjono and Day (2001) asserts that teachers have an important influence on what is learned by students. Teachers also build knowledge and skills of the curriculum because they are the main decision makers in the classroom. Gaudelius and Speirs (2002) also stated that teachers be responsible for implementing the curriculum effectively. Teachers are the most important agents because they directly contribute and develop the skills of students 4M. Therefore, studies teacher competence is especially relevant to the research objectives. This is because the results may reflect the competencies possessed by trainees in providing professional teachers in preschool.

Lihana (2005) found that preschool teachers' pedagogical practices are alarming. He found that teachers are still not properly appreciated and practiced the concept of Appropriate Practice Development (ABP) although it was clearly enshrined in the National Preschool Curriculum. He concluded that misconceptions and preconceptions hinder the effectiveness of teacher practice pedagogical approaches suitable for the early stages of childhood. Preschool teachers also faced some problems with the available knowledge about the real role and task them. The minimum emphasis on pedagogy and practical demonstration lead to weak understanding on the terms of

child development. Rohaty (2003) concluded that they are facing problems of lack of knowledge of the practical aspects which can interfere with the planning and management of preschool and children's learning process.

These issues explain the many constraints and concern for achieving national preschool education as enshrined in the National Preschool Curriculum Standard (MOE, 2010). Teacher quality is the foundation for the success of the country's desire to obtain a quality education and realizing the aspirations of the National Education Philosophy which is to produce a balanced and harmonious in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual and physical (Abu Bakr Ibrahim, 2002). Preschool education has an identity as an important channel for children's development in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains in an integrated manner. Pre-school education is also very significant to challenge pre-school educational goals. This is because pre-school education is the cornerstone of basic education that demands competencies needed by teachers as taught in the classroom lectures. These competencies should be realized when undergoing training in preschool teaching to meet the aspirations of the National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KSPK, 2010).

Problem competence of preschool teachers in IPG is alarming. Thus, the concern is that prompted the researcher to identify the competency of trainees at the Institute of Teacher Education. The study of patterns of competence of trainees at the Institute of Teacher Education include aspects such as teaching, management, communication, professional development and the care and protection of children.

Statement Of Problem

The main challenge faced by the Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia is to produce pre-school teachers who are competent to deliver the pre-school education. The education system in Malaysia today is to provide quality education services and consequently to generate a competent output workforce in accordance with the requirements of national development.

This scenario requires us to look at the system of the Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia that provides training of teachers to teach in preschools. Among the things that need to be addressed is the mastery of professional competence in preschool education. Therefore, this study aims to identify the competency of students at The Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia.

Study Objectives

The objective of this study was to identify the competences of the students in Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia in teaching, management, communication, professional development, and the care and protection of children.

Study Questions

Are students at The Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia have competence in teaching, management, communication, professional development, and the care and protection of children.

Research Interests

This study adds to the general knowledge by showing on how competences play an important role in determining the success of students at The Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia and execution of excellence in preschool education implementation. Therefore, the results of this study are expected later to help from the

entire organization of education policy makers (Ministry of Education) to the extent that policy implementers that are teachers in preschool.

This finding is also considered important to the development of teaching professionalism among lecturers and students at The Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia.

Literature Review

Teaching Competency

Teaching competence involves the ability to provide an integrated curriculum that meets the needs of individual children, assessing behavior, and learning activities. Copple and Bredekamp (2006) stated that the professional educators of early childhood are hoped to plan learning activities based on the individual needs of each child. A teacher needs to be familiar with the activities of child development and guiding children through the experience of daily life (Bredekamp, 1995).

Jacobs and Crowley (2007) states that creating an attractive place for children to play, to learn, and to grow is one of the primary responsibilities of all parties. Curriculum design requires flexibility to adapt to the diverse needs and interests of the children. Providing an appropriate age curriculum based on ability and curiosity of children are necessary in the classroom of early childhood education or preschool.

Management Competency

Management competence refers to the ability of teachers to engage students. McKeachie and Svinick (2006) stated that teachers who are able to use the technique of "iced breaking" tend to start with a good class. Ability to effectively manage the classroom activities are more important than the content of subject for the first few weeks. When children can familiarize and engage themselves in classroom activities, they can learn more effectively. Kaca (1997) stated that the important approach to a cooperative classroom management is to create a clear classroom rule and reasonable guidelines.

He also stated that teachers must have the competent management in order to plan activities for children and parents, held a meeting with the parents, and organize conferences. In addition, teachers need to provide information and resources to gain parental support for the development of each child. Professional teachers need to create guidelines and to communicate with families in order to support their children's learning.

Communication Competency

Communication competence includes skills to communicate with children, families, friends and communities. Wright, Stegelin and Hartle (2007) stated that building positive relationships with families is associated with children's educational outcomes. Teachers who have good communication skills are able to identify structural and socio-economic conditions of families of children. Effective communication skills and a good relationship with parents is an important element in influencing the development and learning of children. Effective communication skills and good relationships with parents affect the quality of the preschool program. Teachers and parents who work together will benefit the children (Puckett and Diffily, 2003). Therefore, teachers need to build a relationship of communication with parents through meetings, exchanging e-mail and print materials on children's performance.

Development of Professional Competency

A professional educator needs to develop, to improve, to learn, to inquiry, and to make a research (Brooke, 1994). He said that a professional competence development involves self-development, attend any new knowledge and research, and create a reflection on how the experience of teaching should be checked and fixed in the practice of teaching.

Early childhood educators always need to improve their professional development through early childhood programs, in house training, or attend workshops and seminars. Barich (2007) emphasized that professionalism must be customary for teachers with more experience and practice of those who have a willingness to evolve and change.

Education increases reflective thinking which reflects the achievements to help educators assess the teaching process. In addition, facilitate the development of self-reflective thinking related to professional competence, which in turn increases the qualities of teaching in the future.

Care and protection Children Competency

Feeney, Christensen, and Moravick (2005), stated that the most important tasks of professional teachers of early childhood education have is to ensure the safety and health of children, which is also the most important aspect to parents and the community in general. Children must have a safe and healthy environment for protecting them from harm and provide needs to maintain a good health.

Maria Montessori was credited for saying that the main role of the teacher is to provide an environment for children. Moreover, Bloom (2005) emphasized that the teacher is responsible to the curriculum, supervision, communication with parents, and provide a safe learning environment and progressive for children, be responsible and required an extensive professional knowledge base. He also stated that children have a safe learning environment also showed the better development of cognitive and social skills.

Method Of Study

This study is based on quantitative design. In this study, a questionnaire using Likert scale was used to identify the competencies of students during training at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia. This method is one of the most widely used methods for research in education. The sample was selected from the population of students who are currently enrolled at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia and have ever done practicum in school before. Number of respondents involved in this study was 223 people. Respondents involved in this study consist of those who came from the same educational backgrounds and program throughout Malaysia.

Assessment Instrument

Researcher used a Likert scale assessment that based on the concept of preschool teacher professional competence in order to identify the five elements of competencies namely teaching, management, communication, professional development, and the care and protection of childhood. The researcher used a Likert scale assessment because it can help to get information directly from the respondents to be assessed. In addition, this type of instrument is suitable to address the quantitative questions to be assessed.

Nana (2007) and Moleong (2002) stated that questionnaires are a tool used to obtain direct information from the respondents, and also a form of descriptive studies. Babbie (1995) also described that an instrument that uses a Likert scale is useful to determine the extent to which a particular respondent attitudes and perspectives. Likert scale is a flexible, easy to analyze and have the Capacity to encompass many answers (Adam and Schvaneveldt, 1991).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out to identify the competence of students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia. In that case, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 pack. According to Zikmund (2003) SPSS was widely used and accepted as a technique for analyzing quantitative data. All respondents were asked to give feedback through "Likert scale" with "5" indicates strongly agree and "1" indicates strongly disagree.

Mean scores collected was group into three categories that based on the real mean scores to distinguish levels namely (a) 1:00 to 2:33 (lower level), (b) 2.34-3.65 (average level), and (c) 3.66-5.00 (high level) which will be used to interpret the data for identifying the level of competency that students acquired at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia.

Findings

Descriptive statistical results showed that the overall composite mean for the five categories within the competence of the students have at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia is 4.37 (SD = 0.45), which is located at the high level category. They feel that they have the necessary competence to become a preschool teacher. Competence in communication category has the highest mean of 4.43 and SD = 0.68. However, the competence in teaching category had the lowest scores of 4.33 and SD = 0.49. This analysis is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 : Descriptive Competency Statistics Aquired By Students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia

Competency	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Teaching	233	4.33	0.49
Management	233	4.42	0.66
Communication	233	4.43	0.68
Professional Development	233	4.34	0.47
Protection and Care of Children	233	4.39	0.49
Composite		4.37	0.45

Table 1.2: Descriptive Teaching Competency Aquired By Students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia

Teaching Competency	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Designing learning activities based on the abilities and interests of children.	233	4.27	0.64
Forming meaningful work in play activities.	233	4.34	0.61

Observing and documenting the behavior of children.	233	4.23	0.71
Improve teaching after making an assessment of the children.	233	4.41	0.59
Helping children to build a self-confidence	233	4.41	0.62
Use of space and materials effectively to implement children's learning activities.	233	4.39	0.44
Guiding children's learning.	233	4.40	0.63
Composite		4.33	0.49

Management Competency

The results show that the combined overall mean score for management category is 4.42 (SD = 0.80), which categorized at a high level. Respondents assumed they have a very good competence in the management category. Helping children to deal and building relationships with peers (M = 4.37, SD = 0.60) had the highest mean score and stood at a high level. However, elements of designing activities that involve parents (M = 4.07, SD = 0.81) had the lowest mean score which was still showing in the category of high level of competence. The findings of the analysis in this category can be summarized in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Descriptive Management Competency Acquired By Students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia

Management Competency	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Understand each child's achievements.	233	4.22	0.69
Helping children build a team work.	233	4.34	0.64
Cultivate an attitude of respect for individual differences.	233	4.36	0.60
Helping children to deal and to build a relationship with peers.	233	4.37	0.60
Plan activities that involve parents.	233	4.07	0.81
Composite		4.42	0.80

Communication Competency

The result of study showed a combined overall mean score for communication competence is 4.43 (SD = 0.68) which categorized at high level category. Respondents assumed that they have very good communication competence. Building relationships of affection and trust with the children (M = 4.43, SD = 0.68) had the highest mean scores and fell on high competence level. However, facilitate negotiations (M = 4.07, SD = 0.70) had the lowest score which still shows in the category of high level competence. The communication competence can be summarized by Table 1.4.

Table 1.4: Descriptive Communication Competency Acquired By Students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia

Communication Competency	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Facilitating negotiations.	233	4.07	0.70
Interacting with the child in a positive way.	233	4.47	0.57
Building relationships of affection and trust with the children.	233	4.56	0.55
Being a good listener to the children.	233	4.51	0.60
Fostering communication honestly with the family.	233	4.34	0.67
Supporting and cooperating with the colleagues.	233	4.46	0.63
Sharing information with friends in the class about professional practices.	233	4.41	0.60
Composite		4.43	0.68

Professional Development Competency

The decision of the study showed the overall mean score composite for professional development is 4:34 (SD = 0:47) which is at a high level of competency categories. Feedback from respondents indicated that their competence in professional development is very good.

Active attend classes (M = 4.53, SD = 0.58) had the highest score of mean and falls into the category of high level. However, ask for help from public sources (M = 4.00, SD = 0.78) had the lowest score which still showed the high level in this category. The results of professional development acquired by students were summarized in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Descriptive Professional Development Competency Acquired By Students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia

Professional Development Competency	N	Min	Sisihan Piawai (SD)
Helping families / parents understand child development.	233	4.37	0.66
Respect the difference of teaching approaches.	233	4.40	0.60
Requested help from public sources.	233	4.00	0.78
Receive a new professional knowledge about the Care and Early Childhood Education.	233	4.38	0.68
Actively attend classes.	233	4.53	0.58
Composites		4.34	0.47

Protection and Care of Children Competency

The results showed an overall composite score for the protection and care of children is 4:39 (SD = 0.49), which falls on the highest level. Feedback from respondents indicated that their competencies in protection and care of children are very good. Elements of maintaining a clean environment (M = 4:58, SD = 0.55) had the highest mean score and fell into the category of a high level. However, performing first aid (M = 4.01, SD = 0.89) had the lowest mean score and still demonstrate a high level of competence in the categories in this category. Information competency about findings protection and care of children can be summarized in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6: Descriptive Protection and Care of Children Competency Acquired By Students at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia

Protection and Care of Children Competency	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Make a reflection of educational practice.	233	4.32	0.67
Perform first aids.	233	4.01	0.89
Maintain a safe learning environment.	233	4.54	0.56
Assess mental development.	233	4.32	0.65
Maintaining a clean environment.	233	4.58	0.55
Foster positive personal ethics among children.	233	4.54	0.57
Composites		4.39	0.49

Discussion

The results of this study can provide input to Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia on how future teachers must master the skills to enable them to interact effectively with both parents and their children. The results of this study found that preschool pre-service teachers at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia have shown very high mean scores in the categories of communication competence. Pre-service teachers' experience with preschool pupils during practicum period affects their communication competence. Therefore, teaching practice or practicum is very important aspect in training pre-service teachers to master or to acquire communication skills.

Parties who are responsible for designing teacher training programs at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia may need to take into account the findings of this study. This is because it is an opportunity to prospective teachers to acquire competencies in communication skills. Therefore, this aspect can be developed in the course of pre-school education program in the early stages of their preparation to become a preschool teacher. According Stegeline & Hartle (2007), building a positive relationship with families can affect the development of children's learning which has supported a research conducted by Bennett (2007) and Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005).

Among the interesting findings in this study are category management competencies which showed the lowest mean score. Management competency is a crucial skill that pre-service teachers need to know in order them to design and to implement structural activities preschool pupils. Therefore, Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia may consider offering more courses related to a classroom management. This is in line with the fact Svinick (2006) and Gultekin (2006) have emphasized in the various strategies of classroom management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are mean statistically significant for the competence of pre-service teachers at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia. Pre-service teachers at Teacher Education Institute of Malaysia assumed that they have the necessary competences to carry out responsibilities as educators of preschool programs. However, they considered that deficiencies in teaching competencies were caused by a shortage of teaching experience. The experience together with preschool students during practicum can influence their communication skills acquired.

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