

The Level of Teaching Knowledge Preschool Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract

A quality teaching model includes elements such as teaching knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This study seeks to discover the level of teaching knowledge of preschool teachers. The methodology of the study is a qualitative methods using case study. The instruments used were interviews and document analysis while the respondents who received excellent teaching awards were identified using purposive sampling. The two excellent preschool teachers were interviewed. Results of the study found that the knowledge of the teachers was found to increase through their experience and adopted various methods of teaching to help the children understand the learning. An appropriate teaching method was used to capture and retain the children's attention as well as improve their ranking and achievement. Overall, preschool teachers are aware that the method of teaching plays an important role in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: level of teaching, knowledge, preschool teacher

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Introduction

The entire country depends on the effectiveness of a teacher to perform their duties. Teachers have a high status in society and the modern world until the teaching profession which involves the quality of teaching process is brought to a more challenging level. Teachers are faced with various demands alongside current progression and needs. They play a dominant role in realizing the inspiration of religion, race, and country, which is contained in the nation's education philosophy besides being responsible for their students. The results of Higher Education Leadership Academy (2011) found that only 50% of lessons are delivered effectively even though there are excellent teachers in the Malaysian education system. This means that teaching passively in the form of lecturing results in the delivery of lessons that does not fully involve the students (Hussin, 2014).

Knowledge is an important aspect in preparing teachers to educate the students to solve problems. Before a teacher begins a class, the teacher should have the knowledge and understanding of the subject matter prior to teaching so that the students can learn well. Teachers are not exempt from facing problems such as lack of knowledge or confidence in terms of inner self-belief and self-concept. The lack of knowledge and understanding can cause ineffective knowledge transfer. It is important for the knowledge of a teacher's pedagogy to be parallel with the subject being taught so that there will not be confusion in the children during the process of teaching and learning. Children would not identify the mistakes that teachers make in the teaching and learning process because they do not know how to differentiate right and wrong. They only accept fully what has been taught by the teacher. Therefore, teachers have a very important responsibility to have mastery of their subject matter and need to apply known and useful knowledge in teaching children.

The Quality of Preschool Teachers in Malaysia

Teachers need to be alert towards their pedagogical needs by preparing themselves with relevant knowledge and skills appropriate to the needs of the students (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2017). Preschool teachers are, therefore, given early exposure to the use of the National Preschool Curriculum Standard (acronym in the Malay language: KSPK)

(Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2017). This exposure is being given by the Preschool Officer at the Malaysia Ministry of Education and at the State Education Office and also by the Preschool Officer at the Malaysia Ministry of Education widely. They are exposed to the pattern of assessment considered suited for preschool children were also exposed to them. Also, they are taking through the mastery of the curriculum content so that the assessment would be appropriate to the students' capabilities. The knowledge of preschool teachers must be versed and further improved.

According to Reynolds (1992), the model of teaching proposed involves knowledge and skill through three levels in the framework of teaching, otherwise known as the stages of teaching. This stage of teaching involves the pre-active, interactive, and post-active stages. It is based on the teaching framework that teachers' teaching methods were found to be closely correlated between the three domains and knowledge and teaching skill (Reynolds, 1992). According to Shulman (1986), when teachers are planning and teaching, they need to adapt between knowledge and skill through the interaction with the students. Teachers need to re-evaluate their teaching outcomes and documentation that was taught as the last thing in the teaching process in class. Thus, there is a need for new teachers' knowledge and skills to be improved to produce effective teaching practices.

Based on the Malaysia Teacher's Standard, a standard evaluation to efficient professionalism that teachers need to achieve covers three main aspects (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2009). The three aspects are: (1) the practice of professional teaching values, (2) knowledge and understanding, and (3) teaching skills. This professional value of practice was drafted based on the teaching culture at the Teacher's Institute of Study. Knowledge and understanding refer to the teachers' mastery of teaching knowledge that can enhance their professionalism when performing their duties effectively and efficiently. Additionally, teaching skills refer to the ability of the teacher in the teaching process whether in academics or co-curriculum.

Shulman (1986) identified a missing piece of the pedagogical teaching practice, which is the teacher's knowledge of what needs to be taught and the relationship between knowledge and teaching that will benefit students. Grossman (1992) stated that in today's education context, this pedagogical practice is often linked to routine or the teacher's tendencies through the teaching skills used to deliver specific knowledge in a field. The overall

knowledge and pedagogical skills are connected through the process of teaching and learning as the required educational procedure (Hotaman, 2010).

There are ten standards that are the focus to the development of a teacher's profession (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2011). However, the focus to the teacher's development involves pedagogical practices such as the aspects of curriculum, teaching, and assessment. This standard is drafted to ensure each teacher can equip themselves with knowledge and skills according to the standard required.

Knowledge refers to known and possessed information from experience, learning, and observation through the senses. From a professional standpoint, teachers should have diverse and deep knowledge to help students in their learning and enable them to understand the subject (Eggen & Kauchak, 2012). According to Masnan (2014), knowledge of contents covers the knowledge of teachers about the basics or content that needs to be taught to fulfil the needs of the students in terms of knowledge, skills, and values.

Method

This study focused on pedagogical practice based on the knowledge of teaching inventory. The methodology used is a qualitative method. The case study was used to obtain data from interviews and document analysis. The two preschool teachers (PT1 and PT2) who received excellent teaching awards were identified involving around Selangor and Perak were the respondents of the study. The respondents of the study were identified using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen because the respondents were preschool teachers who have teaching experience of ten years. The two teachers who were interviewed were excellent teachers, which is accredited by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

The Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a structured interviews and document analysis. To identify the preschool teachers' knowledge, a set of structured interview questions

contained open and closed questions used to interview two excellent preschool teachers who conduct one of teaching and learning activities in classroom. The document analysis was conducted to preschool teachers to analyse the knowledge of teaching and learning planning through the daily teaching plan (lesson plan).

Results

The data was obtained from structured interviews and document analysis to identify the level of teaching knowledge of preschool teachers. Through the structured interviews on the teaching knowledge of preschool teachers found that the teachers' knowledge increases when their teaching experience increases. The teachers' knowledge increases alongside their teaching experience.

The interview results found that the teaching experience in preschools help Preschool Teacher 1 (PT1) find appropriate methods in early childhood teaching and learning:

“However, my experience at the preschool is enough for me to aa ... find more appropriate methods in the field of early childhood education.” (PT1)

On the other hand, Preschool Teacher 2 (PT2) stated that the field was an added value to his profession as a preschool teacher:

“So, err ... if my experience after 10 years, being a teacher changes a lot hahaha. It means more knowledge.” (PT2)

PT1 and PT2 have experience teaching children at the preschool for more than 10 years. PT1 and PT2 have differences in specialization or field that they enjoy. However, the specialization or main field that they enjoy are under the same branch, which is art and aesthetics:

“Emm ... if considering my specialization, because we have taken all subjects, we need to master all subjects, but I prefer aa... crafts and lab exploring because I like watching the kids get something not just from what the teacher gives, but something he got from his own discovery.” (PT1)

PT1 believes that through handcraft activities and lab exploration, children can learn from their own discoveries:

“For me, I lean more to creativity. I like something that is different, but err ... can give an effect or impact, so I like to use hands-on approach because err children are easily attracted to something that is tangible.” (PT2)

On the contrary, PT2 believes that activities that require the children’s creativity may give an impact to them due to the use of Teaching Aids (acronym in the Malay language: ABM) that seem to increase their interest:

“Now, our resources are mainly from the internet, books and the easiest is through early childhood education blogs inside and outside of the country. We do not just need to focus on KSPK. KSPK provides the guideline only.” (PT1)

“Truthfully, it has already been my practice to widen my er ... scope. I mean in terms of knowledge, so I explore the internet a lot. I will explore many preschool approaches that are practiced in advanced countries.” (PT2)

When asked regarding teaching preparation, PT1 and PT2 admitted that they often refer to the internet. This is good practice in today’s world that is continuously progressing where children are becoming more IT savvy. PT1 stated that KSPK only acts as a guide for preschool teachers. The materials or activities that need to be taught can be drawn from many sources, especially the internet. PT2, on the other hand, stated that the internet is used to refer to preschool activities that are conducted in modern countries. This prevents the children in the country from being left behind with the advancements in academics.

Besides the questionnaire and interview, the research results also showed the result of the document analysis towards the Teaching and Learning (T&L) and Lesson Plan (LP) of preschool teachers. The followings are the analysis results of the researcher towards PT1 and PT2 in the aspect of T&L planning knowledge.

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Table 1. *Knowledge of PT1 Teaching and Learning Plan*

No	Item	Score					Notes
		0	1	2	3	4	
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1.	Preparing Teaching Record Files on Daily Lesson Plan (T&L)				/		PT1 prepared a T&L that is very interesting and neat for the children.
2.	Prepare and Display the Yearly Lesson Plan (RPT)				/		
3.	Prepare the Weekly Lesson Plan (RPM)				/		RPT and RPM were prepared in an orderly manner and are easy to understand.
4.	Prepare a Complete T&L, Including the Current ABM				/		
5.	Write the Learning Outcomes Suited with the Teaching and Learning Activity			/			However, the lesson reflections were not as parallel to T&L's content.
TOTAL :		$\frac{18}{20} \times 25\% = 22.5\%$					

Table 2. *Knowledge of PT2 Teaching and Learning Plan*

No.	Item	Score					Notes
		0	1	2	3	4	
1.	Preparing Teaching Record Files on Daily Lesson Plan				/		PT2 prepared a T&L that is good and simple. The elements of creativity are less prominent.
2.	Prepare and Display the Yearly Lesson Plan		/				
3.	Prepare the Weekly Lesson Plan		/				
4.	Prepare a Complete T&L, Including the Current ABM				/		PT2 prepared RPT and RPM. However, this is not shown to the researcher.
5.	Write the Learning Outcomes Suited with the Teaching and Learning Activity			/			The learning results are suited to T&L.
TOTAL :		$\frac{15}{20} \times 25\% = 15\%$					

Discussion

Through a structured interview conducted with two preschool teachers, the knowledge of the teachers was found to increase through their experience. For PT1, his knowledge

increased when searching for more suitable methods for early childhood education. Meanwhile, PT2 gained a lot of knowledge regarding modern approaches applied outside and inside the country and can apply those approaches according to the suitability and ability of the children. Children who receive motivation from teachers will often become more interested and, therefore, help the process of achieving the lesson's objective (Lubis, Hassan, & Hamzah, 2017).

In terms of the teachers' knowledge towards the approach they use in T&L, for PT1, he prefers to use craft and lab exploration so that the children can achieve self-discovery. PT2 alternatively preferred creativity and using hands-on approaches to attract the interest of the children. In terms of their teaching preparation, the teachers preferred to use IT facilities, especially the internet to obtain information and new knowledge. This can ensure children are not left behind from advances in education. On top of that, from the document analysis, the T&L prepared by PT1 was interesting, neat, orderly, and easy to understand. However, the learning outcomes were not parallel to T&L. The learning outcomes of PT2 were parallel to T&L and PT2 prepared a simple T&L, but lacks the element of creativity. Therefore, it is important for teachers to equip themselves with knowledge and be prepared to conduct new learning techniques that are appropriate and effective. Preschool teachers need to master all knowledge and skills suited to the development of children (Hamdan, Ghafar, & Li, 2010).

Besides choosing an appropriate teaching method, the use of teaching method is very important in teaching. Preschool teachers believe that the success of teaching and learning is dependent on the wisdom of the teacher in using the teaching method. According to Masnan and Radzi (2015), the learning outcome that involves the students' content must be exact and suitable with the student's development. The expectation to achieve a good learning outcome can achieve the needs of T&L students overall.

Overall, the knowledge of preschool teachers towards teaching is that the choice and use of teaching method are important to help the children understand the lesson's contents to meet the learning needs of the children, to meet the need to learn in groups, to capture and retain the attention of the children, and to increase the children's achievement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, preschool teachers in Malaysia always need to increase to enhance their teaching knowledge in preschool. Based on the study's results, the teaching knowledge of preschool teachers encompasses diversifying teaching methods to help children understand the contents of the lesson. Due to this, it is important for a teacher to choose suitable methods for certain topics. The use of the wrong method can confuse students from understanding the contents of the lesson. Besides that, an appropriate teaching method can also capture and retain the children's attention while increasing their academic achievements.

Limitations

This study only involves two excellent preschool teachers as the respondents. Therefore, it is recommended for a more widespread study to be conducted using a larger sample size and including other aspects as variables to provide a better picture regarding the knowledge of teaching among excellent preschool teachers.

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