

Teacher Competence in The Implementation of National Preschool Curriculum

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Abstract

Teacher's knowledge, skills and attitudes are important aspects of competence in the implementation of curriculum. These three aspects are interrelated with each other to ensure that the implementation of the curriculum achieves the intention of the NPSC (Revision 2017). The implementation of the national preschool curriculum (NPC) in this context is based on the National Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum (NPSC) (Revised 2017). This concept paper provides reviews on the competence of teachers, and the challenges of implementing NPC among preschool teachers. The results of the survey found that teachers' knowledge and skills about NPC were still at a moderate level. In addition, teachers were also found to be less skilled in the implementation of their special curriculum from the aspect of teaching and learning strategies (TnL). However, from the aspect of attitude, preschool teachers have a positive attitude towards the curriculum implemented. There were three main challenges faced by preschool teachers in the implementation of the preschool curriculum, namely the lack of training related to curriculum exposure, lack of knowledge and skills regarding the curriculum, and lack of experience in the field of early childhood education. In this concept paper, the researcher also put forward some suggestions related to the competence of preschool teachers in the implementation of the NPC to improve the quality of this curriculum implementation.

Keywords: National Preschool Curriculum, Competencies, National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum (Revised 2017), Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes.

Introduction

The role of teachers in the implementation of curriculum is crucial to achieve the goals of the curriculum outlined by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE). Teachers are the core implementers in determining the standard, quality and effectiveness of teaching in the classroom. Teachers need to equip themselves with various knowledge, skills and values that meet the needs in the education field to produce students who are ready to face challenges

in the future. According to Siraj and Ibrahim (2012) teachers are responsible for instilling interest as well as identifying, developing and improving students' abilities in addition to playing the main role of implementing the curriculum for a subject.

In the context of education, teacher competence is vital and should be given attention as they are the backbone of the education system. Competent teachers are the determinants and driving forces for student success. Competence is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that a person needs to carry out responsibilities and tasks perfectly (Ibrahim et al., 2015). Competent teachers have high knowledge and pedagogical skills as well as have a positive attitude in delivering effective knowledge to students. Professionalism and positive self-discipline become the main axis to a culture of excellence in a teacher's career (Zamri, 2014).

In general, the preschool curriculum in Malaysia has been coordinated by the MOE, and private educational institutions that run preschool education programs are required to use the National Preschool Curriculum (NPC). Starting from 1 January 2003, the MOE has established the use of NPC for all government, government-aided, non-government, and private kindergartens. Concurrently, private kindergartens are given the option of using an additional curriculum with the approval of the Chief Registrar, MOE.

Curriculum transformation has been implemented until the formulation of the NPSC Revision 2017 (Curriculum Development Division, 2017) to produce comparable preschool quality according to international standards. The main focus of the preschool curriculum is to produce individuals who are balanced with creative, critical and innovative thinking. From the aspect of student development, the curriculum also intends to produce students who are able to face challenges, solve problems, desire to learn and prepare for the subsequent learning.

Preschool teachers are the implementers of NPC, and are the core in determining the future of preschool students. Based on the initial report of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025), it focuses on the direction of preschool children through a planned curriculum. According to Ali and Mahamod (2015), the curriculum based on content standards in NPSC requires professional teachers in teaching to meet the needs and desires of students. Therefore, this concept paper provides reviews on the competence of teachers in the implementation of NPC from the aspects of preschool teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Knowledge of Preschool Teachers in the Implementation of NPC

According to Cummiskey (2007), knowledge about curriculum implementation will clarify the role of teachers in terms of planning, implementation and evaluation. Teachers should have in-depth knowledge of their field, be able to translate knowledge in TnL, make changes proactively and consistently, and master pedagogy and educational technology.

Based on a study by Masnan et al (2019), preschool teachers should have sufficient knowledge and constantly add new knowledge to strengthen TnL. The knowledge includes a variety of teaching methods to assist children understand the content of the lesson. The finding of a study by Munawir (2021) found that teachers' knowledge in understanding teaching content and planning activities can make TnL sessions more planned and structured to facilitate children's understanding.

In the implementation of NPC, teachers' knowledge of play activities among children is essential as children can explore and learn about their environment. The teacher's role in providing a suitable environment for play activities can influence the level of children's development. Abdul Rashid and Mohamed (2021) conducted a study on the teachers'

knowledge of play therapy activities in Pahang which was at high level. This indicated that teachers have good knowledge in play activities in the context of preschool education.

Socio-emotion is part of the components available in the NPC that needs to be mastered by preschool teachers. This component aims to develop a positive self-concept and self-confidence among preschool students. To ensure that the objective of this component is achieved, teachers need to translate the knowledge in this component to the appropriate TnL. The findings of Suziyanis's (2021) study showed that preschool teachers knowledge level regarding socio-emotional development was at a moderate level, and required more input.

Knowledge related to technology nowadays needs to be mastered by preschool teachers. Fun TnL can be realized with the aid of effective information and communication technology (ICT). In Yahaya and Mohamed's (2019) study, it was found that the level of knowledge of preschool teachers in integrating information technology in the classroom was at a high level. The reason was since the preschool teachers have knowledge about software and the use of ICT-related tools. According to Jain et al (2018) teachers have no detailed knowledge and comprehension on the curriculum content and teaching technology nowadays which is a requirement for them to integrate technology in learning.

In addition, the professional qualification of teachers in the field of early childhood has a relationship with their competence in the implementation of NPC. According to the findings of (Masnan & Ahmad, 2015), novice preschool teachers with the Bachelor's Degree from the Teacher Education Institute (IPG) have demonstrated effective teaching skills in terms of time management, activity selection and planning despite their experience was less than two years. This statement is supported by Nair and Md Yassin's (2017) that government and private preschool teachers with higher qualification in Early Childhood Education (ECE) have a better comprehension of the ECE training quality, NPSC content and TnL sessions compared to preschool teachers with lower ECE qualifications. It is clear that the services of trained and specialized teachers related to early childhood development are the main factors determining the success of the ECE program (Yahya Don, et al., 2015). Therefore, the knowledge factor has an impact in the implementation of NPC.

Skills of Preschool Teachers in the Implementation of NPC

The Curriculum Development Division (2008) conducted a study on the National Preschool Curriculum Implementation on 3634 preschool classes using questionnaires, interviews and observations. It was reported that teachers were positive towards the teaching approach as proposed in the curriculum. However, a great number of teachers still did not implement the recommended teaching approach due to lack of skills. Based on the results of the study, a few preschool teachers could not understand the content standards of NPSC. Due to poor knowledge and understanding of NPSC content standards, teachers will face difficulties in implementing quality TnL (Jadira, 2016). According to Abdul Halim (2014), failure of teachers in mastering pedagogical skills will cause problems to students to master the teacher's teaching topics. Therefore, preschool teachers are suggested to attend workshops, specific training to improve their knowledge and skills in the curriculum so that the content standards can be mastered and thus can apply them in the classroom.

According to the research findings of Abdul Sani and Yunus (2018), preschool teachers need to plan the activities to be carried out in advance to clearly showcase their goals. This statement is also supported by Maidin and Abu Bakar (2020) that the obligation of preschool teachers to use teaching techniques in TnL can improve students' basic knowledge of

mathematics and all development aspects. Therefore, teachers need to possess appropriate skills to plan effective learning strategies to give a positive impact on students.

Attitude of Preschool Teachers in the Implementation of NPC

Abdul Rahman and Noor (2018) explained that preschool teachers with positive attitude towards the NPC will accept the changes and improvements made by the NPC in the curriculum review. Meanwhile, Jamian and Ismail's (2013) revealed that teachers with a positive attitude towards the curriculum are confident in teaching and can implement effective TnL for students. This is supported by Abu and Eu's (2014) that a positive attitude among preschool teachers can produce excellent and insightful actions. In fact, the attitude of teachers who acknowledge the diversity of students will cause students to be actively involved in the TnL process until the objective is achieved, as reported by (Hamzah and Mohamad, 2019). Therefore, the attitude and readiness of preschool teachers is essential in conducting an effective TnL and decisive to ensure the success of the NPC implementation.

Issues of National Preschool Curriculum Implementation

This section reviews the issues that occur among preschool teachers for the implementation of NPC. Among the challenges and issues faced by preschool teachers are lack of knowledge and skills regarding the curriculum, lack of experience in the field of early childhood education, and lack of training related to exposure to the NPC.

Issues of Teacher Knowledge and Skills in the Implementation of National Preschool Curriculum

In-depth knowledge and skills of teachers regarding the curriculum can encourage better TnL quality to achieve learning objectives, fun and have a positive impact on children. The implementation of NPC requires the knowledge and skills of teachers from the aspect of curriculum content and teaching approach in assisting the TnL process in the classroom (Ahmad et al., 2016). Quality teaching of a teacher is to possess pedagogical knowledge, especially in their field of specialization (Jadira, 2019). Therefore, the knowledge in implementing effective NPC is crucial and needs to be mastered by all preschool teachers. In addition to curriculum knowledge, knowledge related to student characteristics is also essential to aid teachers select teaching approaches and TnL techniques that suit student's needs (Zamri, 2014). In a study on the competence of early childhood education teachers, Hassan (2019) stated that competent ECE teachers need to possess creativity in the preparation and use of children's learning materials in the classroom.

The implementation of NPC depends on teachers' knowledge, skills and experience in planning TnL sessions, including the 4M skills (Reading, Writing, Counting and Reasoning) for children (Yong et al., 2015). In addition, Isa (2015) explained that a professional teacher is able to master the knowledge and skills in the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. This statement is supported by Masnan et al (2019) that knowledge is the main indicator in preparing teachers to educate and guide students during TnL sessions. Meanwhile, Muhammad (2017) stated that before the TnL process takes place, teachers must ensure that they are equipped with pedagogical knowledge and skills so that the knowledge can be delivered seamlessly. According to Chee (2017), preschool teachers could not implement TnL as intended by NPSC Revised (2017) due to their obscure in mastering the content of the curriculum. Concurrently, foreign studies also found that teachers have not implemented TnL well due to lack of knowledge in the field they teach in particular (Ghani &

Nor, 2020). There are a few teachers who are less prepared or have less information and knowledge related to the implementation of NPC, causing them to be insensitive and consider it trivial or unimportant.

With the lack of knowledge and skills of teachers related to curriculum content and class management will cause them to fail in identifying student problems (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Quality teaching includes teaching content delivered by the teacher in an organized and systematic manner. It has an impact through appealing learning, which children will continue to focus on their learning. Weaknesses from the aspect of teacher's knowledge and pedagogical skills are the main causes of ineffective teaching delivery. Teachers need to possess pedagogical knowledge to implement NPC to promote efficiency of the TnL process.

Issues of Teachers' Professional Qualification and Experience in the Implementation of National Preschool Curriculum

In general, teachers with higher academic qualifications can provide better quality education services. According to the Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment (2017), the qualifications for kindergarten teachers in public or private kindergartens must at least have a Master's or Bachelor's degree. However, in the context of early childhood education in Malaysia, the MOE only set Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education as the minimum qualification for teachers in preschools or kindergartens starting on 1 April 2016 and effective in 2020 (MOE, 2018). This minimum qualification policy is also an initiative to increase the professionalism of kindergarten teachers, especially from the private sector (Masnan et al., 2017). Thus, professional qualifications are crucial to guarantee the quality of early childhood education in preschool.

Findings from a study by Manning et al. (2017) revealed that higher professional qualifications of teachers can provide quality education and the best child care. A study conducted in Tanzania found that teachers faced difficulties in teaching children as they have no professional qualifications in the field of ECE (Mligo, 2018). This is also in agreement with Sharif and Masnan (2020) that teachers' professional qualifications have a significant impact on their knowledge of NPSC (Revised 2017). It is explicit that the services of trained teachers with specialized qualifications related to early childhood education are Nair and Yassin (2017) also agreed that the higher the teacher's professional qualification, the better their knowledge and skill competence in TnL.

Experience is gained practically in the real world encompassing the external and internal environment of the individual (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009). According to (Rice, 2010), work productivity is expected to constantly increase through experience, knowledge, and skills. Therefore, the teacher's experience is beneficial in the implementation of curriculum and will affect student development. A study conducted by Sofiah and Jasmi (2016) found that courses, experience, and in-depth interest in children contribute to a wide knowledge of preschool student development. A study by Tour (2017) conducted in Florida found that teachers' experience of more than 18 years had implications for the implementation of the curriculum in kindergarten. This demonstrated that the higher the experience of a teacher, the more knowledge, and skills in the implementation of TnL. Therefore, the teacher's teaching experience in preschool is one of the important factors that assist in improving the knowledge and skills of teachers for effective curriculum implementation.

Issue of Lack of Training in the Implementation of National Preschool Curriculum

Specialized training for teachers is a key factor in determining the quality of teachers and their teaching. Teachers with complete teaching training can apply the skills and knowledge they possessed in the classroom (Johari et al., 2009). Continuous training needs to be given to teachers as a refresher in the implementation of the curriculum. In the implementation of the NPC, training and pedagogical strengthening courses of TnL are essential for preschool teachers regardless of education levels. Preschool teachers require a series of continuous training and guidance to ensure that teachers' understanding and skills for the implementation of the NPSC Revised 2017 can be improved.

Based on the findings from Tan and Rao (2017), the Singapore government strongly encourages and provides allocations for new kindergarten teachers to undergo training to improve their skills, knowledge, and qualifications. As a result, since 2006, kindergarten teachers in Singapore had at least Diploma level and have attended courses and training related to the curriculum to strengthen classroom TnL. Therefore, teachers need to continue learning by attending various courses, workshops, and seminars to strengthen their knowledge (Tognazzo et al., 2017). Thus, academic qualifications and training can assist teachers to be more competent in their career and then be able to convey knowledge to students effectively.

Recommendations

Based on the issues and challenges in implementing the NPC curriculum in preschools, there are several recommendations for improvement based on previous studies. The purpose is to provide insights to teachers and the parties concerned to realize the implementation of NPC in preschools.

Organizing Courses and Workshops related to National Preschool Standard Curriculum

The ministry needs to organize internal courses and workshops associated with NPC curriculum to improve the skills of preschool teachers. These workshops and courses should be practical so that teachers have the opportunity to gain real experience in planning and implementing NPC. Kamarudin (2022) also suggested that NPC-related courses including six pillars of the curriculum should be implemented in detail. According to M. Hassan (2015), the school also needs to play a role in organizing programs that can provide exposure to teachers on more effective and interesting teaching techniques to be applied in the classroom.

Continuous Monitoring

In curriculum management, monitoring is important to view the effectiveness of its implementation. The TnL monitoring process emphasizes the achievement of teaching goals and is implemented by administrators as supervisors (Curriculum Development Division, 2017). For the preschool curriculum implementation, the administrator should execute continuous monitoring of the teacher pedagogy implementation based on the NPC. This statement is supported by Said and Mohamad (2009) that monitoring by headmaster can assist teachers improve professionalism and quality of effective teaching. Concurrently, headmaster can observe more closely the actual activities in the classroom so that existing weaknesses can be improved and good practices can be strengthened. Indirectly, administrators also understand the content and intentions of the curriculum and findings from monitoring should be shared with teachers to improve their TnL process. The monitoring findings will be able to improve teachers' knowledge regarding TnL as well as ensure that the

formal curriculum can be implemented in the classroom. Teacher motivation can also be enhanced from the supervision process with responses given to teachers. The supervision process can assist school administrators to assess teacher competence in terms of skills, knowledge, and attitude (Fook & Sidhu, 2010)

Multilateral Support and Cooperation

Support and cooperation of various parties is crucial in ensuring that the implementation of the NPC is seamless and has a positive impact on preschool children. Parents and community should be directly involved as a support system for the implementation of this curriculum.

Conclusion

Overall, this concept paper discusses the competence of preschool teachers in the implementation of NPC from the aspects of knowledge, skills and values; issues and challenges faced; and suggestions in improving quality of NPC implementation. It is expected that the information related to preschool education in Malaysia disseminated in this concept paper will be utilized as input to relevant stakeholders and implementers. Preschool teachers are also expected to improve their competence in implementing NPC to produce balanced human capital from physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects. Therefore, continuous efforts need to be intensified by all parties to ensure the quality of preschool education will be outstanding in the future.

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