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How Can the Reggio Emilia Approach Fit in the Saudi Early Childhood Classrooms?

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Abstract

This literature review will examine the possibilities for adapting the Reggio Emilia approach in kindergartens in Saudi Arabia. It will discuss the elements that characterize the early childhood classrooms in Saudi Arabia and why the Reggio Emilia system affords Saudi early childhood classrooms with opportunities not currently available. It will also examine experiences of schools in the United States as they adopted the Reggio Emilia philosophy. These experiences will illustrate how the Reggio Emilia style can benefit children outside Italy, as well as how educators needed to alter it to fit different cultural norms. In recent years, many research studies have shown that the Reggio Emilia method supports learning through questioning, interacting and exploring, which positions the child as a partner in the learning process. Reggio Emilia has these benefits, which would be beneficial to Saudi children, yet little research has been done to examine the possibilities for applying the Reggio Emilia philosophy in Saudi classrooms. Therefore, through an examination of the Reggio Emilia pedagogical principles and a discussion of the unique Saudi social and cultural context, this review will focus on the affordances and constraints in adapting the Reggio Emilia approach in Saudi classrooms.

Keywords: *Reggio Emilia approach, Saudi Arabia, challenges, adaption, culture.*

How Can the Reggio Emilia Approach Fit in the Saudi Early Childhood Classrooms?

After World War II, citizens of Reggio Emilia, a city in Italy, decided to build a school to get the community members together after the war (Wurm, 2005). This school placed great value upon the child, believing s/he had the right to learn and explore. It also highly valued collaboration among society's members as a means for teaching children (New, 2009). According to Hewett (2001), today, there are 22 schools for children ages 3 to 6 in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy that have adopted this unique teaching philosophy.

Reggio Emilia's philosophy emerged from constructing the learning process to include exploring, questioning, and designing projects as a way to teach children. The Reggio Emilia approach is considered to be one of the best educational methods in existence today because it offers children opportunities for cognitive development, ways to express themselves, the choice of activities according to their interest, and opportunities to learn different languages (symbols) for expression such as words, movement, drawing, games, music and/or drama (Ali, n.d.).

Early childhood educators must develop a keen understanding of the Reggio Emilia major principles and educational philosophy before proposing to apply this recipe outside of its birthplace. From Dodd-Nufrio's (2011) experiences, this is in part due to the existing misconception among many pre-service teachers that the Montessori Method and the Reggio Emilia approach are the same because they both emerged in Italy. Very little is known within the educational community about Reggio Emilia's theoretical foundations and major principles.

Many schools around the world currently adapt the Reggio Emilia approach to their cultural context, including ones in South America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America (Wurm, 2005). According to Desouza (1999), after the introduction of this method in the US, many research studies have demonstrated that the programs have

had a positive impact on early childhood education by believing that children can produce culture and knowledge (as cited in Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, p. 237). The present study intends to explore the possibilities of importing the Reggio Emilia approach as currently applied in early childhood institutions in numerous countries into classrooms within Saudi Arabia. Because this method is considered to be more of a culture of learning than a method of teaching, any country can successfully adapt this philosophy and adjust it to its own unique social and cultural contexts. To illustrate this point, the present proposal seeks to examine how to adapt this learning culture to the Saudi classrooms and the possibilities that it offers for Saudi children.

In this paper, the Reggio Emilia method will be unpacked by addressing the major principles of this learning philosophy and how its application may help early childhood institutions overcome the weaknesses that afflict some of these areas of learning. Suggested applications and procedures for implementing this unique and new approach in Saudi early childhood classrooms will be provided, along with an analysis of each suggestion's potential benefits to the country's educational system. Possible difficulties that may be encountered in adapting this vastly new and different learning philosophy will also be explored.

The Possibilities of Introducing the Reggio Emilia Approach to Saudi Arabia

It is effective to adapt the Reggio Emilia approach as a cultural and educational philosophy in any community within its own particular and peculiar cultural identity and experiences. Nevertheless, it is imperative to the method's success that the same pedagogical principles are brought in wherever we adapt this method, to assure uniformity and allow educational systems to "reinvent [them] selves" in ways to adjust these principles according to each country's unique context and needs (Inan, 2009, p. 3).

Ali (n.d.) conducted research that endeavored to fill such a gap in Arabic literature regarding applying the Reggio Emilia method universally. She focused upon children's

acquisition of life concepts in Reggio Emilia's kindergartens, and found a significant difference between the results obtained on the life concepts tests taken by kindergarten children before and after the Reggio Emilia approach had been applied to how they were taught. The results trending in favor of the post-application of the IQ test and the concepts test for the Reggio Emilia approach. Given these findings, she urged that early childhood educators focus current teaching techniques on the application of the more modern approaches, such as the Reggio Emilia method. The critical shortage of such research that relates to the advantages of importing the Reggio Emilia approach to any Arabic country that shares the same religion, culture, and language context with Saudi Arabia argues for an immediate need for more studies such as this one.

According to the self-learning philosophy that is currently used in Saudi kindergartens, children learn through continuous training in skills until they reach a degree of perfection (Ministry of Education, 2006). In addition, children from age 3 to 6 learn things by exploring, discovering, investigating, and becoming exposed to different resources (Alageel, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2006). This orientation coincides with the Reggio Emilia belief regarding the children's active role as a "researcher as they question, hypothesize solutions, predict outcomes, experiment, and reflect on their discoveries" (Staley, 1998, p. 20, as cited in Hewett, 2001, p. 96). Therefore, educators in Saudi Arabia, whom inspired by the Reggio Emilia method, aim to call for replacing the traditional national perspective about the child as a recipient of knowledge, with the belief that children can create and produce knowledge.

According to the Saudi early childhood education philosophy, children need to be guided and directed by their teacher, their positive role model (Ministry of Education, 2006). I propose that this is evidence of the Reggio Emilia approach already having taken root in current Saudi teaching trends by directly articulating the teacher's role in "strengthen[ing] children's learning" (Davilla & Koenig, 1998, p. 24) and being especially able to assist them

in exploring their ideas and creating new meanings for observations they make in life (New, 2009). Critically, the early childhood teacher has an especially sensitive role in understanding each child's unique way of thinking and learning in order to most effectively help her/him become an active constructor of newly-acquired knowledge.

Adapting a new learning approach requires an adjustment process to match the new educational views and ideas that will inevitably be raised by this new philosophy to make it consistent with both the culture of the Saudi society and the objectives of early childhood education in Saudi Arabia (Omair, 2013). However, we do not need to Arabize (translate to Arabic language) the tools and materials that are used for the application of this new approach in the classroom. From this researcher's view, the Reggio Emilia method is considered to be a philosophy more than just a method in the tradition of the Montessori school of thoughts. On the other hand, while newly applying the Reggio Emilia approach, educators can elect to design projects related to national and/or religious events, Saudi customs and traditions, Saudi clothing outfits, plants and animals specifically related to the Saudi environment such as palm, dates, and camels (Omair, 2013), if they find that the children are interested in these topics. Doing so allows positive effects on the adaptation of this new approach even more robust, by making such custom-fitted adjustments suiting Saudi classrooms.

No society or country, regardless of the educational level, exists free-of and immune from facing some potential problems and obstacles on the road to successfully and effectively developing and implementing plans to adapt a brand new teaching and learning method. In this vein, despite its recent spread and development, early Saudi childhood education suffers from some of the same difficulties that hinder missions for its effective acceptance and implementation in other locales (Hejji & Tolba, 2008). It is with this in mind that the present proposal advocates adapting the Reggio Emilia approach and adjusting it to suit the Saudi

social and cultural context to help transcend some of the major problems and weaknesses that have faced the early education system in Saudi Arabia.

The early childhood curriculum in Saudi Arabia is divided into several areas, such as Islamic religion, Arabic language, math, science, art, health, and physical education (Alageel, 2005). These subjects are blended according to themes and units. Badran and Amar (2011) discussed the self-learning curriculum in Saudi Arabia in their work, describing that it includes ten units that are designed and planned in advance, such as: the water unit, sand unit, food unit, hands unit, and health unit. Furthermore, the activities in these units are divided into three levels to suit the children's ages, between 3 and 6, and their individual differences.

In other words, teachers and educators plan all the classroom activities and related curriculum without taking into account the children's interests and/or their right to be a partner in their learning process. This is what many Arab researchers call for, most particularly those whose research interests lie in the development of the education systems in their Arab home countries, with a strong emphasis on the importance of giving the child the freedom to learn and do what she/he yearns to learn, as opposed to what is required of her/him by the adult educators (Alhilali, 2008). In contrast, the Reggio Emilia approach provides numerous opportunities wherein the children and teachers may become "equally involved in the process of the work and the ideas being explored" (Davilla & Susan, 1998, p. 19). In addition, teachers in the Reggio Emilia classrooms design "a context of long-term open-ended projects" according to the children interest and needs (New, 2009, p. 7).

One of the important problems that early Saudi childhood education face is the weakness of teachers' preparation, lack of specialization in early childhood education and teachers low performance levels. Another consistent problem is caused by the educators' continued adherence to their traditional role, in which they are considered to be the only source of power inside the classroom. These issues are problematic because both lead to the

generic lumping together of children, rather than appreciating what makes each child unique. Consequently, there is an observable decrease in their enjoyment during learning experiences (Shreef, 2009; Alageel, 2005).

Importantly, adapting the Reggio Emilia method in the Saudi classroom will require a well-qualified teacher who will play several roles in the classroom (Hewett, 2001). The educators in the Reggio Emilia approach believe that the classroom instructor has an essential role to play as a collaborator with the children and families, a partner in the learning process, a co-learner that learns from and with the children through projects, an observer of what the children are doing and saying, an engager and communicator with children and families, a facilitator during the learning process, a researcher, a documentarian that records the children outcomes, and a reflective practitioner (Hewett, 2001).

Poor cooperation between family members and kindergarten teachers is one of the obstacles that must be overcome in the early childhood institutions in Saudi Arabia, in order to make achieving the goals of the Reggio Emilia method realistic. This hindrance exists in Saudi kindergartens due to the parents' preoccupation with their work and their other life responsibilities (Hejji & Tolba, 2008), which keep them away from playing a more active role in their young child's education, its course and curriculum. According to Albuker (2005), the parents' role is not sufficiently fulfilled by their attending the parents' annual boards.

In contrast, adapting Reggio Emilia approaches to teaching Saudi children will allow all family members the opportunity to participate in their children's school life. According to Wurm (2005), families in Reggio Emilia approach play a "vital" role by engaging in school activities, playing with their children before and after prescribed school time, helping teachers during evening times to prepare parties and activity materials, discussing with the teacher their child's development level as a part of the classroom community, and participating in some of the parenting programs that the schools offer, according to their needs.

In summary, Reggio Emilia offers parents the opportunities to be "inside the story" of their children's learning process by building "high level and relaxed communication" (Wurm, 2005, p. 124) tools between families and teachers. This is in addition to the many educational benefits it has to offer Saudi children, by teaching them in a wholly revised systematic way. Although change is often fraught with difficulties and numerous obstacles, the payoff in terms of how much more effective the Saudi educational system would become under the Reggio Emilia approach will most certainly be well worth any bumps we might encounter along the way to fully adopt this method.

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Importance of teaching Leadership Skills in the Foundation Phase

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Imparting leadership skills is the best gifts that teachers can give learners as it will make them independent, effectively communicative and responsible. Teachers look down this stage because they think it is not necessary to instil leadership skills to the learners. They thought that learners as the candidate are too young to receive these leadership skills. From Childhood to Grade 3 is the best time to inculcate learners how to develop leadership skills. The purpose of the study was to investigate the importance of teaching leadership skills in the Foundation Phase (5 to 9 years). The study was a qualitative research design. A purposive sample of four teachers participated in the study. Interviews were used as a method of generating data from the teachers. Four primary schools were selected in this study. Data was analysed through content analysis as the responses from the participants. The study findings suggested that leadership skills created a direct link between learning and performance of each learner that resulted in an effective learning of practice. The study recommended that teaching learner's leadership skills help learners to gained confidence, enthusiasm, courage, and other skills.

Keywords: *Leadership; Learning environment; Leadership behavior; Leadership development; Young learners.*

Importance of teaching Leadership Skills in the Foundation Phase

Leadership is everyone's responsibility. Leadership skills within Grade R to Grade 3 learners have been and continue to be one of the major issues for debate. Rodd, (2013) states that leadership increasingly is being seen as critical role and responsibility of Foundation Phase teachers, regardless of their initial qualifications-especially as service provision becomes more complex to meet the diverse needs of young children, families and local communities.

Foundation Phase teachers may not distinguish emerging leadership skills qualities easily because some teachers may not have been trained to recognize these skills. Even if teachers do recognize leadership skills or behavior, they may not know how to support it in the classroom setting (Fox, 2012). Leadership skills for children are meant to mould children into ideal leaders; to guide, inspire and help others grow and this is how a strong foundation of leadership can be established (Marian, 2012). All learners have the potential to develop leadership skills. Mullarkey; Recchia; Lee; Shin; Lee, (2005) indicates that it is also documented in the child literature that teachers influence the development of leadership in children by recognizing or ignoring, and encouraging or discouraging child leadership behavior. George, (2011) argued that the missing link in contemporary leadership development is having a safe place where individual learner can share their experience, belief, values, and motivations and gain deeper understanding of who they are as well as learn to confront the barriers that prevent them from identifying with and influencing others.

One may ask question like: what makes leadership such an important skill today? It is the fact that there are many situations nowadays when one has to take up the role of a leader and get some work done. This is especially true for learners, with frequent school subjects and projects, debates, sports, etc. Also, developing leadership skills in the child will make him confident, successful and more independent. Teachers may think that being a leader, and

developing leadership skills is learned because some learners may have a little more confidence in themselves than others. Krenz, (2008) states that it has been proven countless times throughout history that anyone can learn to be a leader.

Understanding leadership skills.

The concept leadership skills according to Ryan, (2010) states that leadership skills are like a muscle, the more you train, the stronger you get. Learners are regularly encourage to build leadership skills so as to assert themselves in schools and also outside in the world. Leadership is vital in the function of classroom as it assist learners get involved and work as team leaders and accountable partners (Chaibi, 2003). As a matter of fact, schools are almost the suitable area for power delegation and power redistribution, as learners are likely to reserve roles in the classroom, and this makes it obvious that there is the possibility of operating and creating leadership in the classroom and teachers use their leadership and authority to support learner's growth (Hassim and Chaibi 2008).

This paper examines the important of teaching leadership skills from 5 to 9 years learners and it address some critical issues in leadership such as: What are the common leadership education challenges we are facing in teaching leadership skills with necessary ethics, value and character from early age?

Research Design and Methods.

The study reported here is qualitative in nature and explores the enhancement of teachers in teaching leadership skills in Foundation Phase. A qualitative perspective assumes that one must examine the larger context in which people and knowledge function (Johnston and Vanderstoep, 2009). The study was generated by means of the use of focus group interviews. The interviews concerned capitalized on the communication engaged in between research participants in order to generate data, with the researcher depending on in group interactions and discussions for the generation of rich data. Four primary schools from

Limpopo Province under Vhembe District at Sibasa circuit were selected for the study. The schools were purposively selected to provide a range of rural area so that views could be obtained from schools serving primary education. The rural location of many schools is an important factor in South African education (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). The sample surveyed comprises the teachers and focus group drawn from each school. The focus groups consisted of eight teachers, with two teachers from each school.

Ways That Teachers Can Help Learners to Develop Leadership Skills.

ENewsletter for Better Kid Care (2012) show some ways that teachers can help children develop leadership skills. Learners learn from seeing what others do. It is important to model leadership behavior to learners. Tell the learner what you are doing and why you are doing it. They learn that you do things with purpose which have outcomes.

Teach learners how to see things from another's point of view. Good communication is a key component to being an effective leader. Teach learners how to listen carefully and how to respond to others in a calm and respectful way.

Help learners build their leadership self-confidence by giving them opportunities to do a good job and offer praise when appropriate. Teacher might say, "I am so proud of you that you volunteered to be the leader of the group. It is a big job to make sure everyone is doing their part."

Influence of Teachers on leadership skills.

Teachers have a powerful influence role in influencing leadership development in the classroom environment (Fox, 2012). It is important that teachers should have an understanding of what leadership looks like in the learners so they recognize and support leadership skills development. Teachers need to recognize learners' leadership behavior in order to support emerging leadership. Since leadership characteristics are displayed at early ages and researchers suggest that nurturing these abilities also begin early in a child's life.

Researchers such as (Mawson 2011; Karnes and Bean, 2010; Karnes and Stephens, 2000) contribute information in this area about how well teachers of young learners recognize learners' leadership skills behavior.

Teachers' interactions in developing leadership skills.

Teachers' interactions in teaching leadership skills to learners can have a significant effect upon learner's developing abilities. This interaction can be strongly implemented if teachers have knowledge and skills on how to support leadership skills revealed by the young learners in the learning environment. Sometimes the teachers supported leadership skills actions in less aggressive learners while discouraging leadership in others. Teachers sometimes ignore or do nothing about supporting learners' leadership skills that he or she revealing (Mullarkey et al., 2005) because they either don't recognize, or do not even want to support the leadership behaviors. This lack of support can lead to frustration of the learners, or learners showed behavior problem. Teachers' interactions play a crucial role in leadership skills development because of their influence. If this leadership behavior is recognized yet discouraged by the teacher, learners may hide these skills and not develop to his or her full potential.

Findings

The findings from this study revealed that teachers should be aware that learners aged 5 through 9 years are in the initiative developmental stage (Erikson, 1963). This means that teachers should realize that learners demonstrate leadership skills that involve initiative. Teachers should also learn how leadership skills behavior taught in young learners so they can recognize these skills behavior and know how to support them. Foundation Phase teachers need to realize how important it is to teach and encourage young learner's emerging leadership skills so that the children will continue practicing them and notice them. Teachers must be aware that they apply influence over young learners (Fox, 2012).

Recommendations.

Department of Education should develop training manuals that show teachers how important it is to teach, encourage, support learners and develop leadership skills at an early stage in order to build moral on how person behave. Therefore, more studies examining teachers training and effects it has on recognition and support of learner leadership would be appropriate. The study also recommended that teaching learner's leadership skills help learners to gained confidence, enthusiasm, courage, and other skills.

Conclusions.

The encouraging responses from the teachers in the study proved that it is possible for teaches to teach, create and build young generations to feel confidence, enthusiasm when they lead in all area in the classroom settings.

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Best Practices in Early Childhood Teaching and Learning: A Comparative Analysis

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Author Note

The study was a self-funded initiative by nine senior educators representing three Malaysian Teacher Education Institutes.

Abstract

A self-funded nine-team senior educators from the Malaysian Teacher Education Institute (IPGM) formed themselves as a research team. They embarked the journey of a lifetime for a 16-day professional comparative study to the United States of America in March 2014. Their mission was to gain hands-on experience on best practices, one of the variables looked into was teaching and learning strategies implemented. Six schools were selected to be included in the study. Selected were one public elementary school, one state university owned daycare center, and two private daycare centers in Blacksburg Virginia; one private school pre-k to grade 8 in Falls Church Virginia; and one private school pre-k to Grade 12 in Long Island New York. A one day participation, observation, interview, and discussion was done with school administrators, teachers, support staff and children in each of the schools visited. A narrative and descriptive analysis showed The Montessori; and The Reggio Emilia Approach were widely used. From the six schools visited, four were using The Reggio Emilia Approach, with Reggio Emilia exclusively found in private school settings.

Keywords: *best practices, early childhood education, personal professional development, teaching and learning approaches, Reggio Emilia Approach*.

Education begins in preschool and kindergarten for a reason. These are important formative years where students build skills and develop behaviors to carry them through many years of learning. In order for younger students to learn in a new environment, certain procedures and routines have to be established. Students must feel comfortable and welcome in their learning environment.

Teachers have been trained to educate a child's mind. Sara Truebridge (2014) in her blog wrote teachers now find themselves not only dealing with the child's mind—the academic needs—but also with the child's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. Furthermore, many parents are relying on teachers to provide answers to help develop these needs.

There is an earnest search by parents, educators, and all stakeholders in education for child-focused and developmentally appropriate resources that support children in becoming successful, independent, loving, compassionate, cooperative, happy, balanced, and contributing members of our world. As society has become more complex and parents' roles are challenged, so too are the roles of teachers.

Unfortunately, today's educational system has been scrutinized not only by many stakeholders in education, but also by our communities at large. Education has become a national concern. The diminishing level of confidence in our educational system has put education and schools "under the microscope" (Truebridge, 2014).

This phenomena does not exclude Malaysia’s Education System from radar. A comprehensive review of the education system in Malaysia was done, and the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) was launched officially launched September 6, 2013 (Malaysian Education Blueprint [2013-2025]). A preliminary Blueprint that evaluated the performance of Malaysia’s education system against its historical timeline and international benchmark was completed within 11 months before finalizing the Blueprint in December 2012.

There are five outcomes that this Blueprint aspires to for the Malaysian education system as a whole: access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. Beyond these system-wide outcomes, stakeholders were also very clear on what "quality" should look like at the individual level (p. E-16). The MEB will continue to use the National Education Philosophy's vision of a balanced education as its foundation for individual student aspirations that was written in 1988. The specific skills and attributes include: Knowledge; Thinking Skills; Leadership Skills; Bilingual Proficiency; Ethics and Spirituality; and National Identity.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has sequenced the transformation to occur in three waves (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2012):

- Wave 1 (2013-2015): During this period, the focus will be on raising teaching quality by upskilling the existing pool of teachers, raising school leadership quality by improving how the education system appoints and trains principals, and improving student literacy (in both Bahasa Malaysia and English language) and numeracy through intensive remedial programs. The MOE will also strengthen and empower state and district offices to improve the quality of frontline support provided to all schools. By the end of Wave 1, the MOE will ensure that all teachers, principals, and schools have achieved a minimum quality standard. (p. E-37)
- Wave 2 (2016-2020): During the second wave, the MOE will roll out structural changes aimed at accelerating the pace of change, and introducing a new secondary and revised primary curriculum that addresses concerns regarding the knowledge, skills, and values needed to thrive in today's global economy.
- Wave 3 (2021-2025): By the start of the third wave, all schools, teachers, and principals should be performing well above the minimum standard. The MOE will focus on increasing operational flexibility, and will also move most

> schools, onto a school-based management model, and scale up successful models of instructional innovation. (p. E-37)

As benchmark, among the salient points of the Blueprint are ensuring near-universal enrolment for students and to be in at least the top third of countries in terms of performance in international assessments, as measured by outcomes in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) within 15 years.

However, in contrary to the excitement and the measures taken, analysis of other agencies provided a different and negative feedbacks. For example, in the Attorney General's Office portal, the Attorney General's Chambers described the country's education system has been deemed a failure. Despite higher enrolment in pre-primary (with less than 2% of students 7 to 12 years are out of school) and secondary school levels, Malaysia's performance in standardized international student assessment too, has fallen. According to the World Bank (2013) report for the year ending 2013, Malaysia's performance have deteriorated over the past decade, and schools have become more segregated in the past 40 years decreasing their potential to contribute towards greater social cohesion (p. 46).

The World Bank (2013) report further reiterated based on assessment of the drivers of the current performance of the system, transforming the teaching profession to significantly upgrade the quality of teaching needs to be pursued with vigor and urgency (p. 47). This situation is alarming, and little was mentioned regarding teaching and learning in the Malaysian Education Blueprint.

It was surprising how The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) for the years 2008 and 2013 were not discussed by the MOE despite both TALIS and PISA were conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

A brief background, TALIS is the Teaching and Learning International Survey and is the first, and the largest international survey to focus on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in schools. This survey is not about ranking teachers and their performance. TALIS give teachers and school leaders in mainstream public and private schools around the world a role to speak about their experiences. TALIS included questions on:

- teacher characteristics
- working environments
- leadership
- learning and development opportunities
- appraisal and feedback
- pedagogical practices and beliefs
- self-efficacy and job satisfaction

Traditional methods of teacher training is inadequate to educate the New Humanity as put forward by Truebridge (2014). Teachers now find themselves not only dealing with the child's mind—the academic needs—but also with the child's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. Furthermore, many parents are relying on teachers to provide answers to help develop these needs.

> Educating the new humanity focuses on global peace and cooperation rather than competition. Educating the new humanity focuses on moving from the "me" to the "we." Educating the new humanity focuses on the development of the whole child and the whole person—one who is nurtured and supported in all areas: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual—so that he/she may become an independent, responsible, resilient, healthy, happy, kind, gracious, balanced, empathetic, compassionate, cooperative, collaborative, and

> contributing member of the world. Educating the new humanity is about providing all people with quality educational practices and developmentally appropriate resources and support that awaken and guide them as they discover the importance and explore the wonders of love, service, and beauty as a means to respecting and helping themselves, others, and the world (Truebridge, 2014).

Recruiting, retaining, and developing teachers are vital in ensuring high-quality student outcomes in school systems worldwide. Developing a system of effective education for teachers will require coherent national policy and a commitment to implementation, developing learner-friendly, learning materials, selection of appropriate and relevant technologies for delivering instruction, competent trainers, facilitators, content expert, and educational technologists and funding.

Before the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2004, teacher education in Malaysia was shouldered by the MOE. From 2004 onwards MOE trains primary teachers through the Institute of Teacher Education (ITE), previously known as Teacher Training Colleges, and MOHE trains the secondary school teachers via the government-funded universities. There are 27 ITEs in Malaysia which provide both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs.

Since ITE Malay Language Campus is one of the 27 centers for teacher education assigned to educate and train prospective teachers who will color the child from the nursery stage, we have been called upon (by our souls and conscience) through our own expense to develop our very own research team to identify any vacuum on early childhood education that may exist in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The research team embarked the journey of a lifetime for a 16-day professional comparative study to the United States of America in March 2014. Their mission was to gain hands-on experience on best practices, one

of the variables looked into was teaching and learning strategies implemented. Six schools were selected to be included in the study. Selected were one public elementary school, one state university owned daycare center, and two private daycare centers in Blacksburg Virginia; one private school pre-k to grade 8 in Falls Church Virginia; and one private school pre-k to Grade 12 in Long Island New York. A one day participation, observation, interview, and discussion was done with school administrators, teachers, support staff and children in each of the schools visited. The research team participated in a conference on Early Childhood Education to gain insight on how the conference contribute to personal professional development of the teachers, and how the knowledge gained in the conference were implemented in their classrooms. The study provides insights into the beliefs and attitudes about teaching that teachers in Virginia United States of America bring to the classroom and the pedagogical practices that they adopt.

Formulation of the Problem

The problem of this study is: What are the best practices on teaching and learning strategies implemented in selected schools and daycare centers visited?

Significance of the Research

The immediate contribution to the nation includes:

1. To provide an effective input to the development of Early Childhood Curriculum;
2. Collaboration between the researchers with experts and practitioners in the field of Early Childhood Education in the United States of America
3. Upgrade the professionalism of the researchers who can then better train pre and in-service teachers.

The Limitations of the Research

This research is limited to the following problems:

1. There is no funding to the research since it is a self-sponsored trip;

2. Research is conducted only in the state of Virginia and one school in Long Island New York;
3. Only six institutions were visited due to time and monetary constraints.

Research Methodology

This study is conducted using the qualitative approach in educational research. Six schools were selected to be included in the study. Selected were one public elementary school, one state university owned daycare center, and two private daycare centers in Blacksburg Virginia; one private school pre-k to grade 8 in Falls Church Virginia; and one private school pre-k to Grade 12 in Long Island New York. A one day participation, observation, unstructured interview, and discussion was done with school administrators, teachers, support staff and children in each of the schools visited. A narrative and descriptive analysis were done to find out what teaching and learning strategies were used.

The Results

A narrative and descriptive analysis showed The Montessori; and The Reggio Emilia Approach were widely used. From the six schools visited, four were using The Reggio Emilia Approach, with Reggio Emilia exclusively found in private school settings. This was in contrary to Malaysia where electic approach was used in their government preschool, and private franchised preschools were exclusively practicing either the Reggio or Montessori approaches. Other private preschools use a somewhat or claimed to be Reggio or Montessori, but they are not.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Teachers who effectively implement the best practices for teaching and learning are differentiating instruction to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. The best practices for teaching and learning allow teachers to customize learning for each of their students.

Based on the findings, below are a number of recommendations to be looked into with regards to best practices on teaching and learning:

1. There are no quick fix towards proper preschool curriculum practices. All preschool operators and educators should be exposed to real mechanism on how a Reggio or Montessori approach is carried out through proper training to ensure the authenticity of the approaches used.
2. In Malaysia, Reggio Approach would be a better mechanism to use to those preschools with minimal monetary or operating resources. Reggio Approach requires creative, innovative, and attentive teachers using available resources around them. The approach creates homelike environment, which is quite easy to emulate.
3. Reggio Approach is relevant to the newly introduced Malaysian Education Blueprint which was implemented in 2013, and will end in 2025. The Approach will be able to develop young Malaysians who are knowledgeable, think critically and creatively, have the required leadership skills and able to communicate with the rest of the world.

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The Effectiveness of a Counseling Program to Develop Creative Thinking in Female Students at the Faculty of Education Kindergarten Department and Its Impact on Their Self Concept

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Abstract

This research investigated the effectiveness of a counseling program to develop creative thinking in female students at the Faculty of Education (Kindergarten Department) and its impact on their self-concept. The sample included 15 fourth-year female students. Quasi - experimental approach was used to develop creative thinking. A descriptive -comparative analysis was used to investigate the improvement in creative thinking and also self concept before and after applying the program. Another analysis used was Correlation Coefficient, to investigate the relation between self-concept and creative thinking. The researcher used these tools: 1) a counseling program to develop creative thinking based on brainstorming strategy, problem solving, role-play, modeling and discussion. 2) Torrance test of creative thinking - verbal form (Arabization by Abu Hattab, Fouad and Soliman, Abd Allah). 3) Tennessee self-concept test -counseling form (Translated by Safwat Farag and Sohair Kamel, 1985). The finding indicated that there was an improvement in creative thinking and self-concept after applying the program, and also a direct correlation between self-concept and creative thinking.

Keywords: *Creative Thinking; Self-concept; Developing Creativity; Counseling Program.*

The Effectiveness of Creative Thinking and Its Impact on Self-Concept

For the past 50 years, educators and psychologists have been interested in creativity and how it could be discovered. They found that, "Creativity can be viewed from different perspectives, such as the creative thinking process, the product, the creative environment and the individual" (Klieger & Sherman, 2015). Others were concerned with how it could be measured and developed (Guillford, 1950; Torrance, 1968). As a result researchers have come up with tests to measure creative thinking abilities; in order to have a creative student, a creative teacher is needed. As Natalia and Pedro (2012) said, "In order to improve the educational effects of creative skill development, creative development should be incorporated into the objectives through the teaching and learning process of the educational methodology. This aspect highlights the importance of preparing the trainee teacher in creative thinking skills". Due to the fact that creative thinking has a significant role in the creative process, thus the researcher sought to develop creative thinking through different strategies and techniques in upcoming teachers for kindergarten. The studies (as shown in table1 below) suggest that training affects creativity.

Table 1:

Summary of Research on Effectiveness of Creativity Training Programs

Program	Study	Findings
Brainstorming Strategy in Developing Creative problem Solving Skills	Al-Katib, Belal Adel (2012)	Brainstorming strategy develops creative problem solving skills.
Teaching for Creativity: Examining the Beliefs of Early Childhood Teachers and Their Influence on Teaching Practices	Cheung, Rebecca Hun Ping (2012).	The most teachers held similar beliefs about good creative practice and these beliefs generally aligned with those suggested in the literature.
Teaching Creativity in Adult Education	Tsai, Kuan Chen (2012).	Creative thinking in fact is a useful vehicle for adult learners to polish their

		abilities and orientate the world around them.
Creative Self-Efficacy Development and Creative Performance.	Tierney, Pamela; Farmer, Steven M. (2011).	Increases in creative self-efficacy corresponded with increases in creative performance as well.
A Scientific Educology of Creativity	Daiva Karkockiene (2005)	There are real possibilities to develop students' creativity during the learning process in the university. The data suggested the need to rethink education in universities in order to promote better conditions for the recognition and development of creative potential.
Training in Relation to Creative Confidence and Creative Self-Leadership	Phelan, Sherry; Young, Angela M. (2003).	Creative Style Preference tending toward Innovator was positively related to Creative Confidence.

Research Questions

In an effort to address some of the unanswered questions about the development in creative thinking and its relation to self-concept in upcoming kindergarten teachers, a study had been designed to compare performance before and after applying a counseling program for developing creative thinking. The following questions served as the focal points for this research.

1. How effective is the counseling program for developing creative thinking in the upcoming teacher for kindergarten?
2. What is the relationship between creative thinking and self-concept?

Methods and Procedures

Participants

The sample included 45 female students ranging from the age of 18-21. Out of the 45 students, 30 were taken as a sample to check the validity and reliability of the tools Tennessee Test for Self – Concept and Torrance Test for Creative Thinking. The latter "has been used in more than 35 countries for research purposes" (Kim, 2006). The students were from the Faculty of Education. The other 15 students were the main research participants in the program, from the department of kindergarten at the Faculty of Education, October 6 University, for the 2011/2012 academic year.

Treatment

The program was conducted over a period of 13 weeks. Pretest measures were administrated a week earlier. During the first two weeks the student received general information about creativity (definition, importance, nature of creativity and its components, characteristics of creative individuals, the problem that creative person might face and how to overcome it) using lectures, discussion and power point presentations. Starting from the third week the researcher interfered with practical sessions and administrated activities based on the strategies (brainstorming; problem solving; role-play; modeling and practicing). All participants were provided with instructions for each activity as well as activity pages and materials when needed, to apply the stages of the creative process which were preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. The program was designed to help students in creative thinking abilities which include fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. The theoretical background of the program was based on divergent thinking section in Guilford's Structure of Intellect Model (1976). Another theoretical approach used was cognitive development in Vygotsky's theory that focused on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The average number of activities implemented in the sessions was 20, with the average of two activities per week. Posttest measures were administrated immediately after the end of the training. One month later, follow up measures were executed to track the effectiveness of the program.

Program validity

The program was shown to five judges comprising of university staff members. They expressed their views about the program in terms of relevance to the purpose of the study. Four out of five judges agreed with a rate of 80% on the validity of this program.

Measures

Seven verbal subtests of Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT; Torrance, 1974) were used to assess the following creative thinking abilities: (1) fluency, the ability to generate as many ideas as possible that students gave to the stimulus situation. (2) Flexibility, the number of ideas that were different from each other the students provided to a problem. (3) Originality, the number of unique responses students gave that is statically infrequent. The individual gets one mark for each item that was correct according to the above definitions. TTCT was used as a pretest and posttest. The Tennessee Self-Concept Test (TSCS) - counseling form - was used to assess the following self-concept aptitudes: 1) physical self, the individual's responses to which she thinks about her body image, health states and appearance. 2) Moral self, the response of her own value system and faith. 3) Personal Self, refers to the individual's self-esteem regardless of her appearance or relation with others. 4) Family self, the individual's responses to which she is an active family member and the way she feels value to her family. 5) Social self, the degree to which the individual is accepted by peers or feels popular. The form has 100 items consisting of self-descriptive statements that allow the individual to portray her own self-picture using five response categories – "always

false," mostly false," partly false and partly true," " mostly true," "always true" each item was scored from 1 (low perceived competence) to 5 (high perceived competence). The internal reliability for the five scales ranged from 61 to 82. (Farag and Kamel, 1985). TSCS was used as a pretest and posttest for this research.

Tests Validity and Reliability

The researcher used the Cronbach's alpha to count tests reliability, the validity were counted by Pearson correlation coefficient. Validity and reliability scores shown in table 2 shows a high statistical significance of 0.01.

Table 2*:*

The validity and reliability for the TTCT and TSCS

TTCT	**Cronbach's alpha**	**Pearson correlation coefficient**	**Sig.**
Skill			
Fluency	0.734	0.765	0.000**
Flexibility	0.501	0.844	0.000**
Originality	0.818	0.594	0.000**
Total Score	0.776		0.000**
TSCS			
Physical self	0.840	0.766	0.000**
Moral self	0.859	0.662	0.000**
Personal self	0.882	0.561	0.000**
Family self	0.833	0.755	0.000**
Social self	0.811	0.835	0.000**
Total Score	0.872		0.000**

(**) Sig: at (a =0.01)

Data analyses

The research used the Analysis of variance (ANOVA) to address the research questions by measuring the differences between (pretest- posttest – follow up test) in TTCT and TSCS. Also used a Pearson correlation coefficient to find the relation between the above tests.

Result

Results related to the first question: the statistics show that by applying a counseling program there has been a significant progress, at 0.01 in creative thinking abilities as shown in table 3. The differences between the means in pretest and posttest were significant, which proved the effectiveness of the program. Moreover, the consistency between posttest scores and follow up test one month later reflect the continuing impact of the program after its end, which suggests a change in the abilities of creative thinking.

Table 3:

Means and Deviations for sample's scores on the (pretest- posttest – follow up test) TTCT

Skill	Pre-test		Posttest		Follow up		Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Fluency	60.0	8.3	87.0	4.1	86.0	4.1	0.000**
Flexibility	5.3	2.1	8.9	2.3	9.3	2.5	0.000**
Originality	1.9	1.4	4.3	1.5	4.4	1.5	0.000**
Total Score of creative thinking	67.1	10.4	100.2	7.2	99.7	7.1	0.000**

(**) Sig: at (a =0.01)

Results related to the second question that tried to find out the relation between self-concept and creative thinking. We had first to find out if there was an improvement in self-concept after applying the program. As reported in table 4, there was a significant progress, rating from 0.05- 0.01 in self-concept aptitudes, except the moral self, that had no progress

after applying the program. This means that ethics and beliefs was not affected by developing creative thinking abilities, on the contemporary of other aptitudes that were affected.

Table 4:

Means and Deviations for sample's scores on the (pretest- posttest – follow up test) TSCS

Skill	Pre-test		Posttest		Follow up		Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Physical self	54.3	8.1	67.9	5.5	69.1	5.9	0.000**
Moral self	53.9	6.5	58.5	8.4	57.8	8.0	0.214
Personal self	49.5	7.9	65.1	7.9	64.5	8.0	0.000**
Family self	49.9	7.8	57.0	6.7	54.9	8.1	0.038*
Social self	45.5	8.5	62.1	7.3	62.3	7.6	0.000**
Total Score	32.5	310.5	29.4	308.7	31.5	8.1	0.000**

(*) Sig: at (a =0.05); (**) Sig: at (a =0.01)

Then the researcher directed to the relationship between creative thinking and self concept as shown in table 5. There was a significant progress rating from 0.05- 0.01except moral self. However, this didn't affect the total score of both tests, which had a high significance at 0.01 which proved the correlation between the two variables.

Table 5:

The Relationship between Creative Thinking and Self-Concept

Self Concept \ Creative Thinking		Fluency	Flexibility	Originality	Total score of creative thinking
Physical self	Correlation Coefficient	0.768	0.570	0.553	0.756
	Sig.	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
Moral self	Correlation Coefficient	0.256	0.183	0.115	0.244
	Sig.	0.090	0.229	0.451	0.107
Personal self	Correlation Coefficient	0.606	0.259	0.341	0.555
	Sig.	0.000**	0.086	0.022*	0.000**
Family self	Correlation Coefficient	0.448	0.360	0.329	0.446

	Sig.	0.002**	0.015*	0.027*	0.002**
Social self	Correlation Coefficient	0.701	0.455	0.474	0.676
	Sig.	0.000**	0.002**	0.001**	0.000**
Total Score of self-concept	Correlation Coefficient	0.662	0.428	0.431	0.636
	Sig.	0.000**	0.003**	0.003**	0.000**

(*) Sig: at (a =0.05); (**) Sig: at (a =0.01)

Conclusion

Developing creative thinking abilities helped the individual to feel more confident and that will reflect on the quality of life.

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Learning through Play: Educators' Understanding and Practical Implication

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Abstract

Play is widely regarded as providing a rich context for children's learning. Evidence from psychological research revealed that child's instincts to play, explore, experiment and bond with others provide the natural foundation for education. This paper aims to determine Malaysian early childhood educators' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning development and explore the impact of this understanding on the actual situation of how play is allocated and practiced in the settings. Data were collected via classroom observations and in-depth face to face interviews with 30 early childhood educators across five different types of early childhood settings. Findings from educators' responses revealed that many early childhood educators in the present Malaysian sample are unable to articulate exactly what a child is gaining from a play activity in classroom teaching and learning climates. There was a mark discrepancy in their understanding between play contribution to child development and play in relation to educational development of the children in classroom practice. While results from the observational data indicated that play activities tended not to provide learning experiences of acceptable quality in most of the settings. This paper addresses four main factors in current knowledge, concluded as impeding the progress of deploying play in Malaysian preschool practices. These barriers include attitudinal barriers, structural barriers, functional barriers and conceptual barriers. Due to the empirical fact that early academic learning can cause long-term harm; one implication of this

study is that effort must be made to assist educators, parents and administrators as well as policy makers to work collaboratively in the process of giving play its central role in children's learning programs and granting preschool children their right to play and be free from academic pressure.

Keywords: *learning through play, play as the foundation for learning, play to learn, children right to play*

Learning through Play: Educators' Understanding and Practical Implication

Play is an activity where children show their remarkable ability for exploration, imagination and decision making (Anne K.,2010), and play is often defined as activity done for its own sake, characterized by means rather than ends, flexibility and positive affect (Smith P. K. & Pellegrini A., 2008). As stated in Mastura (2006, p. 81) the concept of play in childhood and the importance of play are recognised and supported by researchers from a range of disciplines including psychology, education, philosophy, sociology, recreation and health. Play indeed is a natural part of children's life and it provides a basis for children's learning; from babies in the first few months of life through to children of compulsory school age and beyond. Meanwhile, in an Islamic worldview, play is also considered as a valuable approach in educating young children. The contribution of play to child development and education are acknowledged and recognised by early Muslim educators and philosophers such as Avec Sina (1038), Al-Ghazali (1111), Ibn Sahnun (870) and Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziah (1350).

Gray (2011), affirmed that children's instincts to explore, play and bond with others provide the natural foundation for education. He is also expound on the conditions in which these educative instincts seem to operate best. In other respect, evidence from various psychological research indicated that the decline in play is a cause of rises in anxiety, depression, and sense of helplessness among children and adolescents (Gray, 2013). Furthermore, report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) warns that teaching more formal skills from an early age could lead to increased anxiety and have a negative impact on their self-esteem and motivation to learn (Rawstrone, 2002). Other studies by Lepper et al. (1973), Darling-Hammond & Synder (1992); Marcon, 2002; Greenberg et al. (2005), Gray (2009), Gray (2011); Gray & Riley (2015) discovered that early academic

training and teaching academic skills to young children can cause long-term harm and bad effect on the development of intellect.

Evidence from research on play in preschools, however, indicates that the rhetoric of play is not realized in practice and there remains a significant amount of confusion about the role that play has in young children's education. Even though play is considered to further learning and development, there are issues of defining what good play is and how such forms of play can be defined as having educational aims. As Moyles (1994, p. 3) states:

> "Q*uality links between play and learning seem obvious to many practitioners and parent: yet the dilemma still exists as to whether play can provide any kind of excellence in relation to real learning in early year's educational contexts."*

Meanwhile, Bennett et al. (1997) argue that evidence from research on play in preschools and school settings indicates that the rhetoric of play is not realized in practice. Findings from a research project conducted by Keating et al. (2002) also demonstrate that there remains a significant amount of confusion about the role that play has in young children's education.

In relation to the Malaysian context, the implementation of learning through play (LTP) approach in preschools faces many challenges in incorporating it in the early childhood curriculum. First, children in Malaysian preschools are being educated in a formal way and this 'formal world' will not allow for the needs of child development that leads to the challenges in responding to calls for more academic stress or academic monitoring. There seems to be a competition with each other among the preschool providers to attract 'customers' and to show that their school is the best and excellent in educating the children.

Consequently, the function of preschool has changed from educating social aspects, play and adapting the school environment to a formal learning approach (Rohaty, 1986). Ling Chu Poh (1983) stated in his study that the vast majority of preschools in Malaysia implemented a very academic and formal curriculum. Another challenge to implementing

play in Malaysia may reflect parents' preference regarding the activities that should be undertaken by their children in preschool. Research has indicated that many parents preferred more structured programme and do not appreciate play as approach to learning (Hewitt & Maloney (2000); Mastura (2004).

Significantly, in Malaysian context there is currently a lack of research available on the evaluation and investigation of the implementation of this approach to learning in early childhood settings. Thus, the fundamental reason for conducting this study was to investigate early childhood educators' understanding of the concept of play in child development and education and its impact on the practicality of LTP in early childhood settings. It is assumed that two main themes arise from this study, namely the early childhood educators' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning, and their understanding of play in relation to teaching learning climates in preschool context.

Based on this intent, this study aims to investigate the learning through play practices to the following research questions:

1) How do Malaysian early childhood educators understand play and the significance of play in child development and education?
2) To what extent do educators understand the concept of play in relation to children's learning?
3) How is the learning through play approach implemented in classroom practice?
4) What are the problems or barriers faced by the educators in deploying play in early childhood settings?

This study could describe the actual situation how play is understood by early childhood educators and how play is allocated in classroom practice across different kind of early childhood settings as explained by the educators themselves. It is assumed that as a result of this study, factors impeding the progress of the implementation of learning through

good quality play experiences in Malaysian care and education settings would be recognised. This will help administrators, stakeholders and authorised individuals who are responsible for the early childhood arena to find solutions to resolving the problems.

Method

A qualitative design was used to reach in-depth information on a small group of participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) which "increases the understanding of the cases but reduces generalizability", Patton 1990 (as cited in Erdogen, 2010, p. 14).

Sample

A total of 30 early childhood educators were involved as the participants (interviewees). These educators varied in terms of their teaching experience and qualification. The selection of these samples were based on specified criteria. First, these samples were representative of the various agencies or types of organisations in which they belong; government, quasi-government, non-government and private institutions. Second, the locations of the samples were in both rural and urban areas. In order to fulfil these criteria, a purposive stratified random sampling was used for this study. This involved dividing the population into a number of groups with similar characteristics, then random samplings within the groups (Robson, 1999).

In the first stage, the preschools were stratified according to the types of organisation to which they belonged, while in the second stage the preschools were stratified according to their location (Kedah and Selangor). This strategy was also considered as purposive because the researcher used her own judgement to build up the sample to satisfy her specific needs in this study. After stratifying the samples, the total of preschools and the locations involved in this study were obtained through a process of simple random sampling.

Data Collection Instruments

The interview questions for this study were self-designed and some items were adopted from other instruments used in previous research similar to this study. Yet, the procedures were adapted to suit the purpose of this study. The interview questions were pretested through a pilot study in order to test the initial procedures of collecting the data. According to Robson (1999), pilot study helps researchers to throw up some of the inevitable problems of converting their design into reality.

The second task was to develop observation schedules that combined two criteria: category based-system and anecdotal recording. The observation instruments had been piloted in a mini project task conducted in three different types of preschools in England (Mastura Badzis & Lindsay, 2002). In the present study, the contexts for the category based-system of observation were the same as the above study: the date, the time of the day, the length of the investigation and the activities in which the class was engaged. However, some amendments were made to the contents of observation in the present study and the new variables involved were: teaching organisation and play status, as the focus of observation was on the status of play implemented in the classroom not on educators'.

Data Collection Procedures

Since the study was to have been done in two states, Selangor and Kedah, the researcher had applied permission from the State Education Department of both states stating the school intended as the first step. The next step after obtaining the letter of approval was approaching the preschools seeking permission from the head teachers, principals or managers either by writing or through telephone conversation.

The data were collected in three stages. First, by visit or telephone to the schools, explaining the aims of the study and to establish a good rapport and relationship; and followed by agreeing the date and time for the interview. Second, the researcher conducted the

interviews with the educators in the preschool office which took between 45 minutes to one hour each. At three interviews per week, this suggested approximately five weeks required for basic data gathering. All the interview sessions were tape-recorded for the process of transcribing the data. The third stage was related to the observational method of data collection. These small-scale observations were made throughout the preschool session, once for each of the 15 preschools across five different types of settings, over two weeks.

Data Analysis

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed using traditional method of qualitative analysis. The data were firstly transcribed in verbatim. The data transcriptions which was written in Malay Language were translated carefully into English and written in a *'special form'* (sort of summarising the contents of the answer) but still using the interviewees' words/phrase (without changing the style/structure of interviewees' language). All the data which were transcribed in that special form were read carefully, then the important words or phrases for each of the interviewing answers or prompts were highlighted and summarised. The data were analysed according to the chronological number of each participant. Similarities and differences among respondents were identified with reference to their answers to each number of interview questions. Classification for each phrase mentioned by interviewees was made by giving specific code. Answers were recognised according to the theme and the themes or sub-themes were identified and presented.

Meanwhile, the data gained from observation schedules were also analysed using traditional method of qualitative analysis. In analysing the observation schedule used in this study, the raw data in a form of words and anecdotal recording were transferred into summary sheet tables Through those summary sheet tables, the data were converted into what is referred to as a 'write up'.

Findings

The analysis of educators' responses in relation to their understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning development were analysed based on five major themes; meaning and concept of play, play allocation, willingness and reflection. Each theme was subdivided into several relevant topics.

In summary, findings from the current study revealed that many early childhood educators in the present Malaysian sample were unable to articulate exactly what a child is gaining from a play activity in classroom teaching and learning climates. There was a marked discrepancy in their understanding between play contribution to child development and play in relation to educational development of the children in classroom practice. Besides, play is rarely incorporated into their plans and was not promoted as the foundation for learning, even though some of the play materials are provided and the time to play are allocated.

Meaning and Concept of Play

Apparently, almost all of the responses revealed that they do recognise play as having a great value and playing a big role in constructing child development. There were clear view about its defining quality and what it does for children. However, the answer did not show that they were really confident about what they were talking about and many of them perceived play as something that did not have much educational value. For example, instead of explaining how play contributes to child development, one of the educators interviewed lamented:

> "*I'm not good enough in answering this question, but I think if the children were playing too much, they can't develop their thinking. They just think of playing, not care about anything else…*"

When questions related to the significance of teaching and learning through play in preschool practices were asked, 80% of the responses indicated a marked discrepancy between the stated value of play and play in classroom practice. They seemed to believe that

play is something to do 'instead of learning' and therefore they claimed that time should be divided between play and learning.

> "*In my opinion, we divide time. Ok. This time is for play. When the time is up, we ask them to stop and we ask them to continue learning…*"
>
> "*For me, it should be balance between play and learning…"*

Moreover, when they were asked to comment on two opposite opinions; "**play is valuable and very important" or "children are wasting their time in preschool by playing where they should be learning"** and whether they feel that "**the advent of the curriculum leads to the loss of time if it would be used for play**", typical comments were: *'play should be in limited time', 'not too much play' or 'not keep on playing all day'*. The main opinion pointed out by 19 out of 30 educators was that if play is to be allocated in classroom practice it would not be considered as wasting time so long as it took up a minority of the time.

> "*If me, I just give them time to play as short as possible…I don't say it wasting time but I don't let them play until half an hour. We give them a little bit of time to play might be 'in passing' or while sitting, then we continue on learning…not much play*"
>
> "*If we let them play, people say 'wasting time' but too much play indeed wasting a time! For me, if the work is finished, then only then they can play…"*

Many of the respondents believed that knowledge and skills can best be learned if they are transferred from teacher to children through didactic teaching. They seemed to draw a distinction between children's play and 'real' learning such as counting, naming letters, printing and reading. One educator commented:

> *"I think yes, personally I think yes (loss of the time) if so much plays. I know no doubt that they will learn but then, they will take up so much on playing. So, what about your reading, writing, language and all that? …"*

In another respect, some of the educators' emphasised that children are supposed to know the objective of coming to school is to learn and listen to teacher, not to play:

> "*For me play at home is enough. So, why not they concentrate on learning when they come to school? …*"

Indeed, responses revealed that educators' thoughts of play were related to achieving academic potential, stressing on 3R competencies. About 14 out of 30 teachers described how children learn through play by stating examples of how children achieve academic potential through academic play activity. Some teachers mentioned how children learn social and emotional skills through play but at the end, they related it back to academic outcomes. It was rare to get a response that through play, children get input for their overall development or through play children explore the physical world and expand their level of thinking.

Promoting LTP in the preschool classroom was perceived by some educators as even more problematic given the different constraints in terms of demands on teachers' time and children's disruptive behaviour or discipline problems that occurred during play such as " *a bit more noise*", "*out of control*", "*intervene others*" etc. These teachers also assumed that play could lead to 'negative' attitude or bad habit to children such as "*dawdling on play*", "*wander from learning*", "*thoughtfulness*" etc.

Play Allocation

As an impact of an understanding that play is an enjoyable activity which can be a 'relief tool', many teachers, 21 of them, felt that "release tension" and "removing bored" are the main purpose of allocating play in classroom practice. Other familiar phrases used by these teachers were:

> "*to attract their attention, looking forward/enjoy to come to school"* and *"attraction for children to learn, so, they are motivated to do work and concentrate on learning*".

It was rare to get an answer from educators that the main purpose of play is for fun learning for the sake of fulfilling children's needs and natural tendency.

Even though 14 out of 30 teachers seemed to have the opinion that play increases cognitive outcomes, the majority related it to academic purposes that were limited to the development of reading, writing and counting.

> "*to simplify the process of teaching and learning. Make easier to achieve the objectives. Some times through play, look they are just playing… but at the same time when we asked them back what they've learned through that play, let say numbers or counting, they are likely to remember better…*"

Many of the educators tended to allocate academic play in preschool teaching rather than free play or play that provides chances to children to explore, develop curiosity and challenging their cognitive awareness. There was no opportunity for play for the purpose of language development, sensory development, enhancing social and emotional development; and understanding physical world.

Many of the educators when they were asked about their current teaching style claimed that they were indeed teaching through play. However after further discussion regarding how they implemented play and examples of types of play, it was found that these teachers were actually putting play as "doing something in passing" or "as alternate activity in finishing work" rather than the meaningful concept of "learning through play". Hence play was regarded as fun activity that could remove the sense of boredom. The educators sometimes allocated play sort of short fun action deployed while the academic learning occurred such as clapping hands, running on the spot, one minute physical exercise etc. Besides, play also was accepted as **"**interval activity within a formal learning". One of the teachers that used this style described,

> *"…there is also story-telling, as interval activity within a formal learning when the children are fed up. We exchange, so the children are pleased. When they feel bored of singing, we get back to formal learning. Then, we continue back…"*

In other respects, in some preschools, play was put as one of the compartmental subjects written in the timetable under the name of "art" and "physical education". But, the educators perceived them as core subjects compulsory to be taught and not as play, LTP.

Table 1 below summarises the play allocation in classroom practice. However, categories of responses are not mutually exclusive, hence some teachers illustrated it in more

than one situation. The image of play as illustrated by teachers in table 1 ranged from the simple joy of playing through to the incidental learning opportunity in which play sometimes provided learning.

Table 1:

Status of Play in Classroom Practice

Play Status	Teachers n=30
Parallel play with academic-based activity then rotated	5
Free choices parallel play activities	2
Well-planned and structured academic play	3
As foundation or medium for learning	4
As a reward	5
Play then work/work then play	15
Interval or alternate activity within a formal learning	6
Play in passing while learning a formal lesson	12
No play during teaching and learning time	1

The results in Table 1 above reveal that many teachers favoured allocating play as activity before or after work. "We *give them opportunity to play right before the formal class started or during break, but only if they finish their work. Finish work first then you can play*", explained one teacher from a government-based preschool. Hence, 15 out of 30 teachers put play as 'play then work' or 'work first then play'; consequently, many of the teachers divided time between learning and play. There were two separate times: time to play and time for learning. Usually time for learning lasted longer while time to play was provided for about five to ten minutes before the formal lessons or after the period of a particular lesson that was about to finish.

The second choice favoured by teachers was 'play in passing' while formal learning is occurred at the same time.

> "*I just give them time to play as quick as possible…because they are quick to get bored. I don't say it wasting the time but I did not let them play until about half an hour. We give them time to play may be in passing or while sitting. Then, we continue on learning. Not much play*".

In some circumstances, educators granted play as reward of 'real learning' or doing work,

> "*Sometimes, it's to persuade the children to do their work. Who finish their work early, they can play. It sort of…reward... But, with a condition that they have to do all corrects. When we do like this, it's easier to deal with them…*"

Due to the situation whereby teachers put play as 'play in passing while learning a formal lesson', the play activity was engaged in for only two to five minutes within one hour. It is quite difficult then to assume the frequency of time provided for this kind of play in classroom practice because the status of play might be debated - whether it could be considered as a 'real play' in child development. Even though about 17 out of 30 teachers indicated that they allocate play every day, many of them actually put play as 'play in passing' rather than the meaningful context of 'teaching through play'.

Willingness of the Educator

In order to get more clarification regarding teachers' attitudes towards play activities in classroom practice, they were asked specifically whether they were interested and willing to implement play in conducting activities with children. Furthermore, the educators were also asked how confident were they in using play as the approach of teaching young children. Three out of 30 teachers interviewed frankly stated that they are not interested in teaching through play. They preferred to teach in a formal way and they were also not confident that play is the suitable approach in teaching preschool children.

Generally, educators with reservations admitted that they were interested in play provided that the play occurred in such terms and conditions. First, not too much play or not playing all day which was the same reason given by some of the teachers when they were asked whether play is valuable or wasting the time. "*I think I'm interested. I 'm willing to implement play a bit! But, as I said before, not too much play"*, said one of these educators.

The second condition refers to a situation whereby they were able to implement play but not for all subjects. Some of these educators believed that play could not be applied in all subject areas while some others said that play depends on the suitability of particular subject topics and on children's mood and condition, then only would they be confident and willing to implement. In some situations, there were also reservations relating to the willingness of using play and the degree of confidence in their preparation and the provisions of play materials.

Reflection: The Parents' Perception on Play in the Eyes of the Teachers

> "*Sometimes parents said that their children going to school only to play, but they didn't know the play concept…"*
>
> *"Parents are very concerned if we let their children play too much…"*
>
> *"Does my child play in school?"*

The above quotations referred to typical expressions articulated by the majority of teachers indirectly regarding their feelings or what they see in terms of parents' perception on play in classroom teaching.

Indeed, no direct question regarding parents' perceptions towards play were asked to the teachers. However, no matter what question they were discussing, whether play in curriculum, play as teaching style, problems, philosophy; many teachers kept on referring to parents' preference of preschool activity. Parental involvement in their children's education and their preference on academic achievement sometimes leads to parental pressure as described by some teachers.

During the interview sessions, many educators seemed to work out their feeling regarding parents' perceptions towards play and there is an element of pressure faced by them to the extent that one stated that she is afraid of parents, "*For me as a teacher, surely learning is through play but parents… I'm afraid of parents… their perception is different! They think*

is just play…" Another educator from the same type of preschool has the same feeling and she stated, *"…Indeed, I won't allocate play activity when parents are in the classroom. I won't show them! Otherwise they think that children 'just' play with no purpose…*"

In discussing this point of view, another educator even blamed and stated forthrightly that the phenomenon that happens is due to parents' misunderstanding towards children's early learning, *"…Sometimes they are too excited. They want their children can read in a short period of time. Come to Kindergarten and can read purposely….*"She lamented. Parents' attitude and objection towards play in preschool classrooms can even become the main problem of not deploying play in classroom practice. This fact was actually stated by 23 out of 30 teachers. "*The problem is parents. Parents who said that their children are not learning, they are only playing*" stated one of these teachers.

Meanwhile, educators' arguments regarding their justification to parents' objectivity merely related to their view that the necessity of play is basically to avoid children from getting bored and release the tension and stress of learning. The content of their argument was also almost the same whether they view play as very important or a waste of time. Therefore, a typical statement in justifying parents' objectivity as stated by 14 out of 30 teachers is; "*not playing all day, divide time between play and learning*" or "*children will feel bored if they keep on learning*" or "*to attract children's interest and attention to learn*".

There were also some educators who related their justification to academic achievement and informed parents their children were involved only in academic play in school while some teachers said that they never received any complaints from parents due to not teaching through play or having no involvement from parents. In some cases there were also educators who even stated straightforwardly, "*I don't know how to answer them*" or "*difficult to say…let them say what they want to say…*" statements that may reveal that they didn't see the necessity of play in children's learning.

Discussion

Results from the interviews conducted with 30 teachers demonstrated that there were a mismatch between teachers' understanding of the word play in child development and play in relation to the educational program of the children. Almost all teachers' responses revealed that they readily accept that young children need to play and they do recognise play values and roles in constructing child development. However, their perceptions toward play when it relates to children's learning in classroom practice indicated a marked discrepancy between the stated values. There were three categories or patterns of teachers' understanding. The first category refers to teachers who stated that they are teaching through play and they put play as the foundation for children's learning. Children in their classroom were given opportunities to be involved in a meaningful context of LTP characterised by criteria in line with those proposed by experts and professionals in early years' education (Curtis, 1998; DES, 1990; EYCG, 1992; Johnson & Ershler, 1982; Moyles, 1989; Bruce & Maggit, 1999).

Educators in this category were rare, only 4 out of 30, and they also did not emphasise 3R achievement when teaching young children. The second category refers to teachers who claimed that they provide children with activities that involved LTP. However, after further exploration made throughout the interview regarding their perceptions toward play and its significance in classroom practice, and play in relation to children's learning; a more complex situation was revealed. Educators in this category perceived play as having one or more of the following features:

- Too much play leads to the loss of teaching and learning time
- Play should occur for a limited time
- Play is only appropriate if implemented in a form of academic play with specific outcomes enhancing 3R skills

- Play must be led and guided by teachers and children should not be left to play freely
- Play is suitable only for less able or new entering school children
- The main aim of deploying play was either to release children from boredom, or to 'attract' interest and attention before formal learning started or as a reward after finish work NOT as foundation for learning
- Play could lead to some negative effects on children's learning: dawdling, thoughtlessness, negligence, tiredness and lack of concentration on learning, and other discipline problems.

The vast majority of the teachers interviewed, regardless of settings were from this category.

The third category comprises the teachers who admitted that they did not teach through play and they preferred to teach children in a formal, traditional way as they were used to this. Teachers in this category believed that children had their opportunity to play during break, before or after the learning session; and some of them even perceived that time to play should be at home and not in school. In addition, they also perceived that play has 'bad characteristics' such as thoughtlessness and causing discipline problems. This made them feel that play cannot be practised as an approach in teaching. This is actually opposed to teachers' theory in Bennett's (1997) study that stated, "*children experience less frustration in play, which reduces discipline problems*" (p.32). As with the first category, there were small numbers of teachers from this category.

In general, teachers from both rural and urban areas, regardless of settings, did not differ in terms of style in play allocation in classroom practice. These teachers in general have similar academic qualifications as well as limited exposure to professional training. They both have to face the pressure of the larger society for the academic achievement of the child. Previous background literature Ling Chu Poh (1983), Rohaty (1986) and EPRD, MOE (1990)

stated that many preschool teachers taught children in a very formal way. This study supports the contention.

Having analysed all the educators' interview data, length of experience in teaching seems not to be significant since there were also some 'senior' teachers who didn't practise teaching through play in a meaningful context of learning. Only teachers holding degrees who specialised in child development and education and those who had been exposed to professional training perceived play in preschool similarly to the purposes and features as proposed by Froebel (1826), Piaget (1896), Weininger (1980), Rubin et al. (1983). These teachers also implemented play in a similar way to that proposed in the Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999).

Meanwhile, results from the observational data provided rich evidence of what was practised in preschool classrooms. Only 2 out of 15 educators observed in teaching allocated play as a medium and foundation for learning. The remaining of 13 teachers seemed to allocate 'learning through play' as advocated by the majority of them during interview sessions but the play practised by them appeared to be not in line with what was advocated by Sharp & Mannings (1977), Moyles (1989), Bruce (1991), Tassonni & Hucker (2000), and Macintyre (2001).

Results from the observational data indicated that play activities tended not to provide learning experiences of acceptable quality in most of the settings. The educators tend to take a more didactic role and children are less physically active, spend very limited time exploring environment around them and more time sitting still. Flash cards, song and movement and playing with plasticine were the typical type of play activities implemented in the classroom. The materials used for play actually were primarily used as 'instructional learning materials' in teaching and not for other various purposes of play. When too little time was allowed for children to play with materials and even when time was given, the teachers did not extend the

children's play towards further learning. This kind of situation was referred to by an HMI Report (DES, 1992) as 'the undervaluing of play'.

Besides, 13 out of the 15 teachers observed based their teaching on workbooks and exercise books more frequently than any other activity. Ibn Khaldun (1332) was very much against the use of concise textbooks or workbooks in teaching, as children's learning style was compressed to the content of the workbooks which make children finally lost interest in learning (Quraishi, 1983).

This sample was also found to restrict to 'academic play'. In other words, play engaged primarily as a form of academic play and focused on developing 3R skills. It means that opportunity for children to play was not in broader perspectives and challenging environments as advocated by Johnson & Ershler (1982), Curtis (1986), and Moyles (1989). Play is potentially broader than that purpose. There seem few chances for children to develop their socio-emotional development, higher level of cognitive thinking, natural curiosity through problem solving and other aspect of development. Could this be considered as 'fulfilling holistic and wholesome development of the children' as proclaimed in the Malaysian National Preschool Curriculum? Even in Al Ghazali's view, the central roles of play as cited in Al-Barjis (1980) is to cultivate happiness and self-satisfaction in child's socio-emotional development and to makes children feel that education is pleasure and joyful not to feel pressure of academic stress!

Additionally, the educational games or academic games are not considered as play by Rubin et al. (1983) in their survey of play literature because games, in contrast with play, have externally applied rules. Based on Piaget's observation (1962) play with rules (games) is a feature of children in the late preoperational and operational period approximately 6 years onwards because this kind of play involves complexity in recognition and acceptance of rules (Sylva and Lunt, 1982), Smith (1994).

Owing to situations whereby teachers in this study often used play as a 'time-filler' or 'alternate activity', it could be viewed as 'lacking both purpose and challenge', as concluded in the Bennett & Kell study (1989). Play also has become apart from the learning process itself. Maulby (1997) argued that research in early childhood development does not support the idea that play is something to do instead of learning. According to her, the way that young children learn is part and parcel of the way they act naturally in the world – through play.

'Play then work' or 'work then play' was also observed practised by the majority of teachers from university-based preschools, government-based preschools and private preschools. Even though many teachers said that they put that kind of play as reward for children and encouragement to finish their work, again, this kind of play apart from the learning environment appears to be 'quite ridiculous and pointless' as viewed by Cass (1971, p. 66). Tassoni & Hucker (2000) in defining play stated that one of its features is something children choose to do because they like to do it, not for an end product or reward.

The situation then is similar to that reported by OFSTED (1993, p.10) on the standards and quality education in the UK reception classes:

> "*Fewer than half teachers fully exploited the educational potential of play. In more than a third of the schools play was only recreational, it lacked on educational purpose and was usually undertaken only after work had been completed"*

If in the UK it has been challenged for many years to give play its central role in the primary schools, in Malaysia it has been challenged to give play its central role even in preschool classrooms!!

Results from the present study also demonstrate that mainly there were four main factors concluded as impeding the progress of deploying play in Malaysian preschool practice. These barriers include a conceptual barrier in addition to the three other barriers those advocated by Kagan (1990). The conceptual barrier identified in this study refers to the

issue of 'construct validity' in constructing the real meaning of 'teaching and learning through play' when translated into classroom practice. Different interpretations may put play as undervalued activities. If 'Learning through Play' has become one of the principles in preschool settings and in curriculum planning, it needs to be made clear to all who work with young children, so that everyone could share the same meaning of LTP in classroom practice (Lally, 1995). As also stated by Moyles (1989), those involved in working with young children should investigate and establish to their satisfaction what is meant by play especially when it is related to the teaching approach.

The phrase 'Learning through Play' was translated into Malay Language as 'Belajar Melalui Bermain'. Because the phrase was translated from English to Malay, it is nature that the teachers or administrators would have different interpretation regarding the meaning. In this study, teachers and even administrators throughout the interviews typically perceived it as 'playing (in passing) while learning'. There was, therefore, a possible confusion and semantic difference in interpreting the phrase. The word 'through' which was supposed to be translated as 'melalui' was translated as 'sambil' which can mean 'doing something in passing'. Instead of perceiving that children will 'learn something while playing' (MOE, 1996), majority of the teachers especially from the second category previously mentioned, perceived the validity of LTP as 'playing something while learning'.

Consequently, play is perceived as 'doing simple, fun, short interval activity within a formal learning' and NOT as 'learning something through the play' or the play is the medium for learning. It is not surprising, therefore, many teachers in this study put the main purpose of allocating play in the classroom was to attract children's interest or to avoid boredom of formal lessons. If the children could sit still and be well behaved without showing off their 'bored' condition through disruptive behaviour, some of the educators acknowledged that they might not implement play!

If we choose the definition as defined by Rubin et al. (1983), Moyles (1989), Bruce 1991), Tassoni and Hucker's features of true play and Macintyre (2001), this kind of play that is practised in the Malaysian preschool is not considered as providing the context for meaningful play experience. Even though the teachers did allow children to act out songs or 'one minute body movement' within formal learning this does not seem to permit them to engage in activities where they are intrinsically motivated (Rubin et al., 1983) and self-initiated (Bennett et al., 1997).

One implication of believing that play could be deployed as 'play by passing while learning', is that play corners would not be needed in the vast majority of preschool classrooms. What they have - as stated by the teachers - is subject corners displaying teachers' rather than children's work. This is indeed not in line with what proposed and agreed by many practitioners and experts in the area (Almy et al., 1984; Curtis, 1986; EYCG, 1992; and DFEE, 1990). Moyles (1989) for example, argued that play is always structured by the environment, the materials or contexts in which play takes place. The teachers in this study practised such kind of play that could be questionable in terms of its real meaningful context of play.

In relation to the meaning construct of play, if we refer back to the Malaysian preschool curriculum (1988), (2002) and (2010), there was no explanation of how play was supposed to be implemented in classroom practice or to be deployed as the foundation for preschool learning. There is no 'stepping stones' guideline explaining examples of how play could be practised in teaching and how such kind of play contributes to various aspects of child development. As was stated by Rohaty (1986), the development of children's learning and teaching style in Malaysian preschool always referred as depending on the creativity or tactics of the teacher. The teachers and administrators involved in this study even acknowledged this problem.

Meanwhile, the attitudinal barriers in the Malaysian context refer to the belief it is valueless. There is denigration of the place of play in child education and concerning whether play could support children acquiring certain skills for achieving the required academic performance. As stated by Loughrey (2000) many believe that real academic learning occurs only within a formal curriculum and that schools should provide this formal environment.

Orientation towards an examination-based system was actually the most influential factor. In the majority of settings teachers were pressured to promote literacy and numeracy in order to fulfil the demands of the curriculum and obtain reliable evidence of learning. When expanding this issue, many teachers, administrators and even the policy maker viewed that the main constraint is parental pressure on academic achievement especially reading ability.

With reference to the structural barriers, there is no doubt that in many settings too little space and inadequate play materials or resources for both indoors and outdoors environment caused a great problem. This is in line with the findings concluded in Siti Zaliha's study (1999). In addition, there were also problems with the structure of the school timetable, an 'overloaded' syllabus and inappropriate staff: child ratio.

Finally, as concluded beforehand, the majority of teachers' and even administrators' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning was not in line with professionals and experts in this area. This issue leads into the problem of a functional barrier.

Conclusion

This paper urge to the need for rethinking the practice in Malaysian preschool settings regarding awareness and knowledge of the existing patterns of teachers' understanding of the concept of play in relation to children's learning. As stated by Klugman & Smilansky (1990) there is a great need for more conscious advocacy work in support of children's play in actual practice.

The results from this study may prove useful for the planners and administrators of preschool in developing policies, designing programs and managing settings. This is in anticipation of the future role of the Malaysian government in preschool education whereby presently there is a need for co-ordination between agencies in terms of curriculum planning, teacher training and provision of play in preschool practice.

Firstly, findings from this study showed a clear manifestation of the formal method involved in teaching young children and the focusing on academic skills development rather than other crucial aspects of child development that needs to be enhanced and improved. The pressure for academic learning that communities put on preschools and even children needs to be recognised and addressed.

One implication of this study is that effort must be made to assist teachers, parents and administrators as well as policy makers to work collaboratively in the process of giving play its central role in children's learning programs and granting preschool children their right to play and be free from academic pressure. To acknowledge the importance of play is not to deny and undervalue other educational aims such as literacy and numeracy. Educators should have many concerns in facilitating the holistic development of children in order to produce 'a balanced human being' as advocated in the Malaysian National Education Philosophy.

The government of Malaysia, specifically the MOE, need to expend a great effort to call upon experts in child development and education to sit together and discuss ways of implementing the curriculum that suits children's needs, especially through play. Play should surely have an honourable part in the National Preschool curriculum. The new curriculum (CDC, 2010) could be used to support planning by setting the context to maximise the opportunities for developing the resources and materials, the settings and the people who are working with young children and managing settings for children's learning. The quality of

children's play and learning depends on attitudes, time, space, materials, and the quality of preschool educators.

The Ministry of Education and agencies involved in the development of preschool education in Malaysia should organise more workshops and professional training programs for the purpose of implementing play in preschool practice. Through the workshops and seminar discussions, preschool educators and administrators would be exposed to an appropriate environment suitable for children's needs and their development. Indeed, the teachers' understanding of the crucial role of play in children's learning could be a powerful argument for the justification of play in the early childhood curriculum and in classroom practice. Parents also should be given opportunity of developing their knowledge regarding child development and parenting skills. Above all, the budget for the sake of child development in Malaysia should be expanded and put as a main consideration, only then will it be possible to provide quality for future early childhood education programs.

In other respect, the issues raised in this study reflect on the Malaysian Education System, which is exam-oriented stressing academic monitoring, producing a sense of pressure, of 'chasing' a high level of academic achievement. Unfortunately, while rushing to achieving the target, society forgot that children are unique in terms of their development. Educating young children by focusing on academic pressure could cause negative effects to their later development and, significantly, there would be no balance in terms of their various aspects of development. If the Malaysian Muslim government is informed by religious belief, they should be aware that play is valued and acknowledged in Islamic law (Mastura, 2006).

This is the time when we need to listen to the voice of children in Malaysia. Perhaps traditional parenting which suggests: "You children, you keep quiet, you know nothing!" should be reviewed. Children need to be respected as well as anybody in the whole world. Children are an asset to our nation, so, in order to ensure their holistic development, they need

to be educated in an appropriate environment, suitable to their needs and uniqueness. In this millennium, research on the brain as well as in other areas of study (Bruce, 1999) provides clear evidence that children need to play. What children, especially under 7 years need is time to play, mature and develop their intellectual skills by learning a wide variety of opportunities and experiences. This can be achieved through play if this forms the foundation for learning. Above all, our children need to have time to be the young children as they are and never will be again. Pity them if they were stressed for academic pressure!

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A Case Study on The Relationship between Young Children's Creative Drawing and the Development of Their Arithmetical Skills

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Abstract

This study, in the form of a case study, attempted to find out if a group of young children's creative drawings demonstrate episodes of mathematical patterns. The study then examined whether the development of patterning in the young children's creative drawings has any relationship with the development of their arithmetical skills. In order to determine the relationship, two instruments were used – a collection of the children's drawing samples and an administration of two arithmetical tests with similar themes to identify the children's level of arithmetical skills. In the course of the study, 114 pieces of drawing samples were collected and the tests were administered in two sittings. The children's test scores were first tested for consistency to ensure that they could be used effectively to determine the relationship. Finally an analysis of the test scores was also carried out to examine if gender differences exist. The findings of the case study suggest firstly, that evidence of mathematical patterning existed in all the children's drawing. Secondly, all the children scored well in their arithmetic tests. Thirdly, there is evidence to show that girls did better in the tests compared to boys.

Although both instruments showed positive results, these could not be categorically interpreted to indicate that a relationship existed between patterning and arithmetical skills due largely to the absence or few occurrences of discrepancies in the data.

Keywords: *Mathematics and Science; Case Study; Young Children; Creative Drawing; Arithmetical Skills*

The Relationship between Young Children's Creative Drawing and the Development of their Arithmetical Skills

The importance of mathematical patterns in the development of children's interest in mathematics has been highlighted in the literature. In many instances researchers have also made connections between children's ability to draw patterns in drawing activities with their conceptualization of mathematical patterning. This so-called connection has somewhat helped us understand more about the importance of developing children's mathematical patterning skills as much as helping to spur their interest in the learning of mathematics.

Purpose of Study

The focus of the study was to find out if the 'connections' described above do really exist. Based on the importance of mathematical patterns in young children's creative drawing and how this is believed to have an influence on the development of their arithmetical skills, this study basically attempted to explore, firstly, if patterning skills occurred at the Year One level when the children were involved in drawing activities in the school setting. Secondly, the study attempted to determine whether there was a link between the children's ability to draw patterns in their drawings with the development of their mathematical skills. This study further examined if the displayed patterns, if existed, were systematic and have a causal effect on the development of the children's arithmetical skills. The task at hand sounded complicated since the subjects involved were actually young children in Year 1 of schooling and to determine their numeracy skills at this young age could prove difficult because at this stage the children were also attempting to develop their literacy skills. Despite these challenges, the findings of this case study were able help discover facts that have not been established fully especially in the context of Brunei Darussalam.

Aims and Objectives

Based on the title and purpose stated above, this case study aimed to answer the following questions:

a. Do young children's creative drawings show episodes of patterning?
b. If so, what are the common mathematical patterns evident in the children's drawing?
c. Do these episodes of patterning relate to an initial evidence of positive development in their arithmetical skills?
d. What difference, if any, between male and female children in relation to the appearance of mathematical patterning episodes and the development of their arithmetical skills?

Overview of Research Methodology

The present research adopted a case study research methodology. As a case study, the research only involved a small group of children that comprised 47 pupils aged between 5 to 6 years old. The group consisted of 19 boys and 28 girls from two Year-One classes attending a private school in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Data collection was conducted in two stages; firstly by way of organizing drawing activities during school hours of which the children were asked to draw anything out if their interest. Samples of the children's drawing were collected and numbered individually in three different occasions. The second stage involved administering two arithmetic tests on similar contents in two different occasions to the pupils. The test paper consisted of items on number patterns, shapes, addition and subtraction. The total number of test items differed to avoid children thinking that the two tests were identical but the marks for each test paper would be adjusted to 100%.

Significance of Study

The study was considered significant to Brunei Darussalam in that no research had been done locally to study the relationship between mathematical patterning and arithmetical

skills. The findings from this study would certainly contribute to our understanding of the relationship between mathematical patterns and mathematical development among young children. Additionally, if patterning appeared in the children's drawings and they relate to an initial evidence of positive development in arithmetical skills, then curriculum developers in the country may consider including patterning skills as another core skills to be developed in the school curriculum.

Scope and Limitation

As this study adopted a case study approach, it was understandable that a research of this type had several known limitations. The study had limitations specifically in terms of sampling, duration and the required data to be collected. In relation to sampling, the research sample in this study, as in any other case studies, was restricted only to a small number of subjects that may have not adequately represented the whole population to which the group belongs. Secondly, data collection was only conducted within a period of one month and due to this short duration only a limited number of the children's drawing samples could be collected. The one-month duration for data collection was agreed at the outset with the school administration so as not to disrupt the children's other classroom learning activities. Due to the time limitation, the desired results of the children's drawing activity including the drawing samples collected could have impacted in relation to quality and the type of evidence sought. As in any case study research, the findings were usually contextualized and therefore they cannot be generalized to inform of or relate to other situations in totally different contextual settings.

Literature Review

The link between patterning and mathematical concepts

Piaget (1956) claims that a child's cognitive competence can be reflected through the child's drawing. Similarly, children's drawing can also be considered as a window into their

general cognitive development. Based on Piaget's claim, the relationship between children's drawing and their cognitive development has been further extended to explore the possibility of a link between children's ability to show mathematical patterning and the development of mathematical concepts.

Many authors and researchers have mentioned the importance of mathematical patterns in raising children's interest in mathematics as well as developing their mathematical concepts. Although there is still limited literature on studies relating to patterning and its relationship with mathematical skills development, a number of relevant background research have indicated the existence of this relationship.

According to Warren (2005), the power of mathematics lies in relations and transformations which give rise to patterns and generalizations. Warren (2005:305) states that abstracting patterns is the basis of structural knowledge, the goal of mathematics learning. In strengthening the claim on the relationship between mathematics and patterns, Steen (1990:5) states that, "Mathematics is the science and language of pattern". Bruns (2000), Clemson & Clemson (1994), Heddens & Speer (2001), and NCTM (2000) all agree that pattern exploration has been identified as a central construct of mathematical inquiry and as a fundamental element of children's mathematical growth. One other report which shows the clear link between patterning and mathematical achievement is that of Arcavi, (2003) and Booth & Thomas (2000) quoted in English (2004), in which they state that visualization skills, which frequently involve recognition of patterns and structure, are positively correlated with mathematical achievement and analogical reasoning.

Importance of patterning skills

The importance of mathematical development in the early years has been highlighted in a number of instances. According to McCracken (1987), children learn the real basics of thinking about mathematics through personal experience and playful activities and with

appropriate learning experiences from birth through the early elementary years they will develop a lifelong interest in using mathematics (McCracken, 1987). Clements and Ginsburg (as cited in Fox, 2005), stated that education before formal schooling known as a period of profound development change, is where many mathematical concepts begin.

Several authors and researchers have all come to an agreement on the importance of mathematical patterning in the early childhood setting. For example, Waters (2004) quoted Baroody & Coslick (2000) and Steen (1990) as saying that "patterning is fundamental to mathematics". Fox (2005), on quoting Buns (2000), Heddens & Speer (2001), NCTM (2000), and Pengelly (1992) states that 'mathematical development is a central construct of mathematical inquiry'. According to these researchers, as reported by Fox (2005), pattern exploration has been identified as a central construct of mathematical inquiry and it also a fundamental element of children's mathematical growth.

The notion that patterning is critical to the abstraction of mathematical ideas and relationships and the development of mathematical reasoning in young children has been illustrated by English (2004), Mulligan, Prescott & Mitchelmore (2004), and Waters, (2004). Mulligan, Mitchelmore & Prescott (2005) later found that children with early patterning experiences would help them to engage in 'seeing the structure of mathematics' and it was also found that children experiencing difficulty in learning mathematics did not always recognize pattern and structure. Many research studies like Fein (1993) and Freeman (2000) studied children's drawings in terms of their meaning and functions and most importantly the patterns exhibited in the scribble and drawing made by these children. However, it is important to note here that the developmental stages of patterning in children, whether in form or function, have not been clearly identified and defined categorically.

In addition to the above claims of the importance of patterning in relation to mathematical reasoning or thinking in young children, Mason, Stephens & Watson (2009)

believe that the roots of mathematical thinking lie in detecting sameness and difference, in making distinctions, in classifying and labeling, or simply in "algorithm seeking". All these skills are therefore usually found in patterning exercise especially in art or drawing. The importance of early patterning skills is further noted by Blanton & Kaput (2005), Carraher, Schliemanna, Brizuela, and Earnest (2006), English (2004), Papic, Mulligan, and Mitchelmore (2011) in that studies of young children's mathematical reasoning have provided complementary evidence of the importance of early patterning skills, analogical reasoning and the development of structural thinking.

Research Methodology and Design

The aim of this study was to find out if a group of young children's creative drawings demonstrate episodes of mathematical patterns as well as to find out if the development of patterning in the young children's creative drawings had any relationship with the development of their arithmetical skills. For this purpose a qualitative rather than a quantitative research method of investigation was chosen taking the form of a case study.

Research protocol

As noted earlier this case study aimed to answer four specific research questions. The following provides further explanations on the research protocol according to each research question:

Do young children's creative drawings show episodes of patterning? To answer this question the pupils were given opportunities to produce creative drawings. As these were supposed to be free drawing activities, it was important that the pupils were not influenced by the researcher to draw any particular topic or design. These drawings were to be numbered individually and then examined to determine whether episodes of patterning exist.

What are the common mathematical patterns evident in the children's drawing? As a continuation to the first research question, that was, if evidence of patterning existed,

then the patterns were studied and categorized to determine the kinds of patterns drawn. As noted earlier, the kinds of patterns may appear in the form of repetitive shapes and figures or even in the form of scribbles.

Do these episodes of patterning relate to an initial evidence of positive development in their arithmetical skills? In order to relate the pupils' ability to produce patterns in their drawings and their arithmetical skills, it was necessary to obtain data on the latter by way of giving arithmetic tests. When this was done the scores obtained by pupils were compared with their drawings. To determine whether a relationship between the two aspects occurred, pupils who indicated episodes of patterning in their drawings would tally with high scores in the arithmetic test. If this was not the case, then no relationship was found.

What difference, if any, between males and females in relation to the appearance of mathematical patterning episodes and the development of arithmetical skills? Based on the findings on the above third research question, and if a relationship was established, then those who indicated evidence of the link were differentiated by their gender to determine whether gender differences occurred in the causal effect of this relationship.

To answer the research questions as stated above, the case study required two main instruments as a means of obtaining the relevant data and these were: sample pieces of creative drawings to be produced by the children in three separate occasions, and arithmetic tests to determine the levels of the children's arithmetical skills and abilities. The latter were administered in two separate occasions and both will have to conform to the existing Arithmetic curriculum prescribed to the class level which the children were in at the time of data collection. The test items comprised of activities on the identification of mathematical patterns and these will be further explained below.

Sampling

The sample for this research consisted of a total of 47 pupils comprising 19 boys and 28 girls aged between 5 to 6 years old. These pupils were from two Year 1 classes at a private school in Bandar Seri Begawan. The reason for choosing these Year 1 pupils was that, firstly, they were categorized as young children in the early childhood education stage that was suited to the purpose of this research. Secondly, since the research required finding the relationship between the pupils' drawings and their arithmetical competency, it was therefore necessary to choose a sample that has both Arithmetic and Art offered as part of their school subjects.

Data collection

Prior to commencing the study, the pupils were first divided into four small groups - Group A consisting of 13 pupils (5 boys and 8 girls); Group B 11 pupils (4 boys and 7 girls); Group C 12 pupils (5 boys and 7 girls); and Group D 11 pupils (5 boys and 6 girls). The reason for this grouping was to enable proper supervision and management of data gathering by the researcher.

In relation to the collection of data for the research, two types of data required were the pupils' free-style drawings, and the pupils' arithmetic test scores. The drawing samples were used to determine the existence and categories of patterning while the test scores determined the children's arithmetic skills and ability level. The test scores were used to ascertain whether a relationship occurred between the evidence of patterning episodes in the pupils' drawings and their arithmetic competency level.

For data collection of the pupils' drawings, each group and each pupil were offered three opportunities to produce their free drawings within a period of a month. The reason for asking the pupils to produce three drawings was to ensure consistency in the event that evidence of patterning episodes existed. The pupils were given about 30 minutes for each

opportunity during an art lesson. Extra time was given to the pupils if they were unable to complete in time.

As there were 47 pupils comprising of Year 1 pupils, the expected number of drawings after the three drawing activities was 141 pieces. However, the actual number collected were not as expected due to absenteeism. The drawings were numbered accordingly to identify the owners. In this respect a drawing sample, for example, was coded as BDC12 whereby B denoted a male pupil (in contrast with G which referred to a female pupil), D denoted a drawing sample (in contrast with A which denoted an Arithmetic Test), C denoted a third drawing activity (A was for the first activity while B for the second), and lastly number 12 referred to pupil number 12 in the master male and female pupils list. The drawing activities and all the drawing samples were also photographed.

Data collection for the second part required the administration of arithmetic tests. To ensure consistency of the test results, the pupils were required to answer two sets of arithmetic tests; one given at the middle of the data collection period and the other towards the end within a period of one month. Each test paper consisted of items on number patterns, shapes, addition and subtraction. The pupils were given 60 minutes to complete each test paper. The total number of answer scripts expected was 94. However, due again to absenteeism only 83 were collected. In order to determine that the results of both tests were consistent, a reliability test was conducted and the result analyzed.

Findings

Analysis of Drawings

The analysis of the drawing samples involved seeking evidence of patterning episodes and these include repetitive patterns such as squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, ovals and the like. Repetitive shapes and figures or even scribbles were also considered as evidence of

patterning episodes in the analysis and examples of these include stars, heart shapes, buildings, cars, boats, birds, trees, and birds.

When all the 114 drawing samples were analyzed, it was rather surprising to note that all drawings showed evidence of patterning episodes. The patterns evident in the pupils' drawing samples vary extensively according to their creativity in expressing their interest and imagination. However, it appeared that many of the repetitive patterns evident in the pupils' drawings could be categorized as repetitive patterns of squares, circles, triangles, heart shapes, stars and ovals which in many instances were manifested in the shape or form of houses, sceneries, playgrounds, dresses, and so on.

Analysis of Arithmetic Tests

From the list of 44 pupils submitting their drawing samples, seven pupils were found to be absent once or twice at the time when the two arithmetic tests were administered, thus making them ineligible to be included in the case study since the requirement was to have the pupils who have sat for both tests to measure the consistency of their test results. Due to this elimination, only 37 pupils' test scores were analyzed, fewer by 10 as originally planned. This number therefore resulted in the reduction of the total number of subjects involved in this case study from the original 47 to only 37 of which 14 were boys while 23 were girls.

The results were encouraging in that none was found to fail and in fact a number of pupils managed to score full marks. The lowest mark obtained for the first test was 64 while the second lowest was 71. A statistical analysis of the two sets of test scores showed that the two arithmetic tests have a high mean and median and it was also found that the tests were relatively consistent in measuring the pupils' arithmetical skills in that a correlation coefficient of .953 was obtained significant at the 0.01 level. The statistical report is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1*:*

Statistical Analysis of Arithmetic Test Scores

Score Range	Test 1	Test 2
Mean	90.76	91.89
Median	95.0	96.0
Standard Deviation	10.23	9.05
Pearson Correlation	.953	
Significance Level	0.01	

Relationship between Patterning Episodes and Arithmetical Skills

In the analysis of the pupils drawing samples it was found that all the drawings showed evidence of patterning episodes and in the analysis of the arithmetic tests, which proved to be a reliable measure, it was also found that the pupils managed to score highly. In this situation it was rather difficult to state whether the evidence found in patterning episodes had a direct relationship to the pupils' arithmetical ability simply because the data obtained from the use of both instruments did not clearly differentiate the levels of performance of the pupils. It can be assumed, however, that the pupils had already mastered the ability to produce patterns in their drawings due to past learning exposure and intellectual maturity suited to their age level thus resulting in their increased arithmetical development and skills. In other words the instruments used failed to show any relationship between the two abilities because the pupils may probably had mastered both. In contrast, there could also be the possibility that there was no definite relationship between the ability to produce patterns in the pupils' drawings and the development in their arithmetical skills.

The Trend between Boys and Girls

Due to the failure to relate or differentiate the pupils' performance between their patterning and arithmetical skills, the analysis on gender ability was only based on their arithmetic test scores. As shown in Table 2 below, the girls on average seemed to perform better than the boys both in the range and the mean scores of both tests.

Table 2:

Arithmetic Test Scores Analysis by Gender

Gender	**Lowest Score**	**Highest Score**	**Mean Score**
Boys	67.5%	99.0%	88.0%
Girls	70.0%	100%	93.3%

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be derived from this case study was that the patterning episodes expected in the pupils drawing samples could not be differentiated because all the pupils clearly showed their ability to produce patterns in their drawings. These patterns ranged from varying shapes and figures to actual representations of things that they saw around them. The drawings were also expressed creatively in that many were beautifully drawn and brightly colored. The fact that all pupils managed to produce patterns in their drawings could give an indication that they had fully developed and acquired the skills.

The arithmetic tests were intended at the outset to seek the relationship between patterning skills and the pupils' arithmetical skills. This was done on the assumption that if there were evidence of patterning episodes in the pupils' drawing samples coupled with a relatively high achievement in the arithmetic test scores, or contrariwise, then a relationship existed. Since the findings suggested that all pupils showed evidence of patterning in their

drawing samples and that they also scored well in the two arithmetic tests of which were proven to be statistically consistent, then it could be simply stated that a relationship exists between the two. However this may not be the case because there could be an anomaly in the research design and its intended outcome – a common phenomenon in any research projects.

One of the aims of this case study was to explore causation or determine the relationship between two skills that was to show that the development of one skill (arithmetical) was caused or determined by the other (patterning). However, since the developmental trend was not clearly and specifically evident in the findings, it could be assumed that the pupils had already passed the developmental stage. In other words the evidence being sought may no longer be applicable when the children were at the age range of between 6 to 7 years old. This had implications for future research as indicated below.

One final interesting findings from this case study, which was considered supplementary to answering the fourth research question, was in relation to gender differences in the arithmetic test scores. Although a triangulation of patterning skills and arithmetic test scores according to gender differences could not be achieved due to the reasons explained above, the pupils' achievement in the test scores indicated gender disparity in that the girls did better than the boys on average.

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The Impact of Rules and Routines on Pleasure and Creativity in Nurseries: A Transcultural View of Toddlers' Adjustment to Out-of-Home Day Care

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Abstract

The paper presents the first results of a research project carried out by Austrian and Thai scientists. This project is a continuation of earlier studies that examined the consequences of burdensome feelings experienced by toddlers separated from their familiar caregivers. If infants are severely affected by such feelings, they become incapable of relating with interest and pleasure to the people, circumstances and events they encounter at the nursery. This inhibits their capacity to enter into a lively exchange with other children or adults, to play creatively with toys and generally to experience fun. Under such circumstances, toddlers are capable only to a small extent to benefit, as regards their personal development, from the environment and the variety of activities they find on offer at the nursery. At the same time,

indications can be found to suggest that toddlers find the transition to out-of-home care in nurseries easier to cope with if life in the nursery school is structured by fixed rules and routines. These hints were followed up with the use of videography, Young Child Observation according to the Tavistock model and a transcultural observation concept. Using case material, it is shown that rules and routines are particularly helpful if they (a) support children to experience continuity and stability, as well as giving them a solid foothold and a sense of security and (b) if they stimulate children to feel connected with others and to interact with them. This finding is finally discussed with an eye on culturally differences.

Keywords: *Transition to Nursery; Rules and Routines; Observation according to the Tavistock Model; Young Child Observation; Cultural Differences in Nursery Education.*

Toddlers' Transitions from Home-Care to Out-of-Home Day Care: A Challenge for Nurseries

The number of children that are under three years old and taken care of in nurseries is increasing in many countries. For example, while in Austria 8.5 % of all the children who were two years old or even younger attended nurseries and nursery schools in 2003, it was 23.0 % in 2013 - and the trend is still upward (Statistik Austria 2014, 84).

With the growing number of toddlers being cared for outside their family, nurseries find themselves confronted, with increasing challenges. This stands in connection with the fact that nurseries, increasingly, are being defined as educational institutions. As such, they are expected to not only take care of the children by providing them with basic necessities, but also to stimulate and support their development in general. Fulfilling this task is rather difficult, however, because young children need and demand closeness to their caretakers they are familiar with (who usually are members of their families). In most cases, they suffer if they regularly have to spend three, four or more hours, on several days a week, away from their parents, siblings or other members of their families. Numerous studies in the fields of psychoanalysis, attachment research and academic psychology have shown that children react to that kind of separation with intensive emotions (Robertson & Robertson, 1989). These feelings include uncertainty, pain, powerlessness, helplessness, anxiety, anger, despair or the "feeling of becoming lost"(Datler, Datler, & Funder, 2010). Hence if infants are beset or even overwhelmed by such feelings, they lose the ability to encounter the people, the environment and the events at the nursery school with any interest or pleasure. This severely limits their potential to enter into a lively exchange with other children or adults, or to play creatively with toys and generally experience fun. Toddlers at this point are in a position only to benefit to a very limited extent, with regard to their personal development, from the rich palette of opportunities on offer at the nursery. From an educational perspective, it is therefore

necessary to offer the children some targeted support in the course of their transition from home-care to out-of-home care. It is important to ensure that while they are at the nursery school they can gain experiences from the outset that will protect from being exposed to burdensome and hurtful emotions too strongly, excessively often and for too long a time.

It is, however, not easy to accomplish this task. Because, firstly, it is not always clear how children actually experience the separation from their parents and what feelings they are struggling with. From attachment research it is known that some insecurely attached children avoid showing their unpleasurable feelings altogether. Psychoanalytic theories point out that even very young children defend themselves from being aware of disturbing emotions and may subsequently avoid openly showing just how they feel. Other studies, which examined physiological aspects of the experience of stress, also showed that children in separation situations sometimes experience stressful feelings, which hardly can, however, be recognized by parents and teachers (Ahnert et al., 2004). As a second point, it is crucial to note that nursery teachers in their training are, for the most part, only insufficiently prepared to handle the transition of their young wards from home-care to out-of-home day care on a theory based level of high quality. And this, thirdly, depends, not least, on the fact that internationally only a few research studies exist that have looked more closely into how this transition can be accomplished by more helpful means and ways.

Rules and Routines Observed in Austrian and Thai Kindergartens.

Intending to ameliorate this research deficit, the University of Vienna instigated a research project entitled ‘Toddlers’ Adjustment to Out-of-Home Care’, which was run from 2007 to 2012 by one of the presenters, in cooperation with Lieselotte Ahnert (Datler et al., 2012). In the course of this project, financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), it was examined how 102 children experienced the adjustment to out-of-home day care in nurseries and which factors proved to be helpful or distressing. The results of a number of single-case

studies seemed to favour the conclusion that children suffered especially hard while being separated from their families if the activities at the kindergarten were shaped only to a limited extent by rules and routines (Datler, Datler, & Funder, 2010).

With the intention of studying this phenomenon in greater detail, a follow-up project was started, within the frame of a close cooperation between the University of Vienna / Austria and the Srinakharinwirot University of Bangkok / Thailand which is supported by ASEA-UNINET, the 'ASEAN European Academic University Network'. Crucial to this project is the assumption that the cultural context has a significant influence on the way rules and routines are practiced and experienced in society in general and in nurseries in particular. It is therefore to be expected that the investigation of processes of transition would lead to in-depth results if studies were carried out in both Thai and Austrian nurseries and analysed by scientists from both countries. In the current presentation, some early results of this research project will be presented.

Research Methods and First Results

The presentation covers three research methods that were employed among others. In particular, the analysis of video recordings, young child observation according to the ethnographic approach of the Tavistock model and the analysis of transcultural observations are described. The latter method features, as its distinguishing characteristic, a particularly developed practice whereby scientists who were socialised in different cultures, will carry out observations within the educational facilities of a culture that is foreign to them in order to discuss these observation in culturally mixed research groups.

Subsequently, and with reference to specific case materials, the divergent rules and routines encountered in Austrian and Thai nurseries and nursery schools are presented. In this context case studies are referred that show the many ways in which the lack of rules and rituals makes it difficult for children to cope with separation, let alone find enjoyment in the

things they encounter at the nursery school. By comparison, it is shown (i) that rules and routines prove to be particularly helpful for the development of pleasurable interactions and creative play, if they support the children's efforts to experience continuity, stability and 'holding', either within the parameters outlined in psychoanalytic concepts, or as seen in the light of attachment theory. Beyond that, certain rules and routines in nurseries (ii) tend to motivate children to feel connected to, and to interact with, others in a supportive way. This finding will be compared with research results published by Coraro (1979) or Bock (2009).

In conclusion, culturally specific distinctions are discussed. The thesis is presented that in Austrian nurseries and nursery schools more space is allocated to the children's development of their individuality, responsibility and self-determination, than is done in Thai nurseries and nursery schools. From this situation emerge different forms of encumbrances but also of relief that affect children in Austrian and Thai nurseries and nursery schools in different ways. Consequences resulting from this finding are outlined concerning further research as well as the training of nursery teachers in the future.

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Home School Transitions: The Process of Teaching Social and Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Centers

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Abstract

Recent literature in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum suggests a closer alignment of ECE curriculum to that taught in grades 1, 2 and 3 of formal schooling. This imply that formal education in ECE is gaining more emphasis than child development. (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000, Clark & Sharpe, 2003). Transition from home to ECE centers in terms of child development (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989), is a crucial step that may be compromised by the increasing focus on academic head start competence to better prepare learners for formal education. It is in this domain that I focus this paper. Data was collected in two phases. In phase one a survey was conducted with 35 teachers attending a Certificate program in ECE. In phase two, two teachers were interviewed to explore and understand what constitutes social and emotional learning for their learners transiting from home to ECE centers; why such social and emotional skills (SES) are being developed in learners; and how ECE teachers teach these skills. Findings show that teachers understood to some extent the skills to be taught and how it contributes to the development of the child.

However they are limited in their understanding of when and how to teach social and emotional skills.

Keywords: *Social Emotional Skills, Transition, Early Childhood*

Home School Transitions: The Process of Teaching Social and Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Centers

The home-pre-primary transition is the first transition that a young child experiences in the early childhood years (0- 8 years old). Starting pre-primary school is an important milestone in the life of the child as he/she moves from either home or a daycare center to a larger group of children. In their pre-school, they meet unfamiliar adults as well as peers. This transition involves a change of social context and a shift of status from child to pupil while adapting to the expectations of being a kindergartener (Fabian 2002; Lam and Pollard 2006). The teacher has a key role to play to support children cope with the demands of this new environment.

The goals of pre-primary schooling is to cater for the holistic development of the child as well as to prepare the child for later formal primary school. The holistic development is related to the domains of human development: physical, cognitive, emotional and social development (Berk 2007). To cater for this holistic development of the child, activities at pre-primary level are planned for different areas of learning. In the National Curriculum Framework Pre-Primary-Republic of Mauritius (2010), six areas of learning has been identified which relates to all the domains of development. However, the holistic development would seem far from the reality of schooling in the Mauritian context where the end of primary schooling assessment is highly competitive.

In this academic competitiveness, the academic component of school education is privileged to the exclusion of the physical, social, and emotional development of the learner. Teachers give more importance to reading, writing and counting activities compared to physical activities and activities for social and emotional development. The Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) is one of the six areas of learning in the curriculum for which teachers have to plan activities and implement in the classroom. The teaching of social

and emotional skills is already compulsory, however over my years of engagement with pre-primary school teachers, I have noted that teachers give less importance to activities related to this area in the Mauritian context.

What is Social Emotional Skill?

Social and emotional skills (SES) are related to the emotional and social domains of development. There are different theories explaining this domain of development. Two theories, the Erikson's theory (1963) of psychosocial development and Salovey and Mayer's theory (1997) of emotional development have been identified to guide this paper. There are several other theories that could be used to explore these development in children (e.g. Bowlby 1969, Bandura 1977), but for the purpose of this paper, we have selected the above two theories based on their focus on child development in early school learning.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development explains how children develop a sense of trust, autonomy and initiative during the early years and explains how the early years are important for the psychosocial development. His theory is based on the cumulative principle of development, where the development at each stage builds and adds up on the previous stage. The psycho-social development of children during the early years according to Erikson is lasting throughout life-time. The interaction of children with the social world help or hinder them to resolve the conflicts during the different stages of development during the early years. The ways adults and peers interact during the early years are critical for the psychosocial development.

The second theory is the theory of emotional intelligence of Salovey and Mayer. Emotional Intelligence, is defined as '... the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Goleman (1996), identified five components of emotional Intelligence: Self-awareness, self-

regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills. The theory of emotional intelligence underpins a number of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. These programs forms part of the curriculum as educators find it equally important for children to master skills which are essential for living just as acquiring skills in Maths and languages.

Why Social Emotional Skills?

The development of social and emotional skills (SES) during the early years of a child prepares the child to adapt to a new surrounding when starting formal schooling. Research show that the development of social and emotional skills during the early years contributes to positive outcomes throughout life. Children who are socially and emotionally well-adjusted do better at school, have increased confidence, have good relationships, take on and persist at challenging tasks and communicate well (Pahl and Barrett, 2007)

Teaching of Social Emotional Skills

There is a debate on whether social and emotional skills (SES) should be taught or not and how it should be taught. In the literature reviewed on the teaching of social and emotional skills in young children, it was found that early childhood scholars have diverse views concerning optimum and developmentally appropriate ways of teaching these skills.

The literature reveals three ways of teaching SES. Firstly, the explicit teaching of these skills in formal lessons, second is about not teaching but rather creating an environment to foster these skills, and thirdly using an integrated model of these two approaches.

There is also a number of social and emotional learning skills curricula. Among them are: '*You Can Do It'* (Bernard 2004); '*Fun Friends'* (Barette 2007) where children receive structured lessons; '*Studies carried out'* (Payton, J., Weissberg, R.P., Durlak, J.A., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., Schellinger, K.B., & Pachan, M., 2008). Nelson, Westhues & MacLeod (2003), Bernard and Walton (2011) have shown that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

programs, where teachers present activities which explicitly teach young children social and emotional competencies have positive effects on both cognitive and academic outcomes.

Some early childhood educators also advocate the use of games and stories as methods of teaching social and emotional competencies (Cohen 2001). However, a different view is held by scholars who for certain developmental reasons believe that teacher-led, explicit curriculum is not appropriate for teaching social and emotional skills to young children (Hyson 2004). They believe that social and emotional development is best fostered by placing children in carefully tailored ,caring environments with adults responding in particular ways.

The integrated model as proposed by Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg (2009) consists of a combination of explicit instruction, sensitive warm interactions in a classroom environment which is not overtly structured or regimented. These approaches can be seen to be found on a continuum with on one end the explicit teaching and on the other end, not teaching but carefully planned environment and responding to the needs of the children and in between these two the integrated approach which considers both these two approaches. Studies reviewed on the approaches of teaching of social and emotional skills are mostly longitudinal, impact studies which shows the positive outcomes in children later in life. We do not want to show that developing social and emotional skills in children has an impact later in life .This paper will focus on the approaches newly trained teachers use to develop these skills in young children.

Method

A survey was conducted amongst ECE teachers as a first phase of data collection. An opportunistic sampling process was used, wherein, ECE teachers who have recently attended a training program at Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) constituted the sample pool. Thirty five teachers participated in this survey. As this is a qualitative study of teachers'

teaching social and emotional skills in early childhood centers, opportunistic sampling was deemed appropriate to explore what and how social and emotional skills are taught in EDC centers. Two teachers were then interviewed to explore further about teachers understanding of social and emotional skills and how they are teaching their young learners.

The larger study, from which this paper was derived from, extends the survey analysis through interviews and observations of teachers teaching social and emotional skills in their respective schools.

Findings

The questionnaire analysis revealed the following findings:

Time dedicated to teaching SES

Minimal time is dedicated to teaching social and emotional skills within the ECE curriculum. Teachers reported that at most, they spend 30 minutes per day on developing these skills in their learners, with most indicating around 15 to 20 minutes per day. This limited time dedicated to teaching social and emotional skills is of concern considering the nature and importance of personal, social and emotional development in the child's development as suggested by these teachers.

Important SES Skills

The social and emotional skills that teachers think are important can be categorized into six foci of development. These include: getting to know the self, working with others, values education, hygiene, communication and adaptation. While these foci areas are consistent with the literature on early childhood development needs, how these are developed within the curriculum is of concern. The interviews also revealed that teachers are aware about the components of social and emotional skills. From the interviews it was found that the young teachers mentioned that they are preparing children for the world of tomorrow, hence these skills are of upmost importance for them for their future life and responsibilities.

How SES are taught

The responses from the respondents on how they teach these social and emotional skills suggests that they are not deliberately taught. This is supported by their indication of how much time they spend on teaching social and emotional skills. Most respondents indicated that these skills are taught through activities throughout the day.

Common approaches to teaching SES

Common approaches to teaching social and emotional skills include group work, role play, storytelling, questions and answers and through song, dance and videos. These approach further suggest that these social and emotional skills are incidentally taught or developed in learners.

Discussions

This paper focuses on newly trained teacher's understanding of what constitute social and emotional skills, why these skills are developed and how they are teaching these skills. The results show that young teachers of pre-primary schools understand what constitute the components of social and emotional skills, as they are able to identify social skills as sharing, accepting others, working in groups, and interacting with others. Emotional skills were skills related to emotion and feelings and these were control of emotions, expressing emotions using words, understanding the feelings of others, and showing empathy. This can be explained because teachers use the National Curriculum Framework as guide to plan their work. In this Framework the skills are explicitly listed as the performance indicators for this area of learning.

Even though the study was carried out with teachers with five years of teaching experience which is viewed as young in the Mauritian context, they show concerns about the long term consequences of teaching these skills. One teacher added that "we need to teach social and emotional skills to avoid delinquencies, fights, war, murder, emotional disturbance,

egocentrism or egocentric emotions". Another teacher added that we need to teach these skills "to be in harmony with others while living in the same society". This shows that teachers are aware of the long term impact of teaching social and emotional skills as shown in several longitudinal impact research carried out on the teaching of social and emotional skills.

The finding further reveals that teachers use a range of strategies such as sociodramatic play, and group work where they can develop a range of social skills such as sharing ideas, valuing others ideas, and waiting for your turn. This reflects their limited knowledge and application of strategies that can be used to teach these skills.

The findings show that teachers use two approached to teach these skills. They plan activities for a limited period of time by using the explicit teaching approach, where they plan for some specific skill in an activity. However, they also believe that these skills can be developed throughout the day where these skills can be developed by creating the proper environment, and giving the opportunities to children to engage in activities which would require these social and emotional skills.

The findings also suggests that the time that teachers spend on teaching explicitly the social and emotional skills in learners is indicative of the emphasis placed in this area of child development by ECE teachers. The minimal time spent on social and emotional skills give the impression that this learning is peripheral to early childhood develop. It is believed that the reason for this marginalisation is related to the high premium placed on the academic performance component of ECE because of competitive behaviour and head start rationality that consumes society in our modern day world, suggesting an econometric focus of early childhood curriculum that is shaping early childhood education in the school settings.

Conclusion

This paper set to explore the experiences of teachers teaching social and emotional skills within the formal schooling settings. From the data generated for this paper, it became

clear that social and emotional skills is being developed incidentally within the early childhood development curriculum, and that the focus of development in children in largely related to set them in a course of competitive behaviours patterns which we believe will compromise their further development as citizens on the country living in a harmonious tension between excelling and social cohesion.

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Language Problems amongst Foundation Phase Learners: What is the Role of the English First Additional Language Teacher?

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Abstract

Language problems amongst the Foundation Phase learners (age 5- 9 years) are difficult to identify as such teachers and parents often leave them unattended. Language problems affect learners and the development of teaching and learning if they are not properly attended or addressed. Thus, unattended language problems turn to become barriers to learning. The study sought to identify language problems, their implication to teaching and learning and the role of the English First Additional Language teacher. The study adopted a qualitative design in which a sample of ten Foundation Phase English First Additional Language teachers participated. Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The study identified problem of fluency, which is rate and rhythm of speech and language problems as common language problems amongst Foundation Phase learners. The study found out that language problems affected negatively teaching and learning. The study also found out that the English First Additional Language teacher has an important role to play in order to help learners experiencing language problems. It is therefore recommended that parents who have children with language problems should communicate with the language teacher, so that together they help the learner learn despite language problems.

Keywords: *fluency, rhythm, language, teaching and learning.*

Language Problems amongst the Foundation Phase Learners

Foundation Phase (age 5-9 years) is the most challenging phase in education. It is where a solid foundation of communication needs to be laid. Learners need to be thoroughly prepared in the learning of English First Additional Language, as they have to use it as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) and medium of instruction from Grade 4.

Learners at school are bound to communicate or to exchange information and ideas with each other and with the teachers. Inability to communicate efficiently and effectively with others may result in negative perception about oneself. It is therefore important for learners in this Phase to be able to communicate well with others. It is at this age where parents fail to identify their children's language problems. From the schools' perspective, teachers also face difficulties of identifying the same, as such these problems are left unattended. Unattended language problems affect learners and the development of teaching and learning. Thus, they turn to become barriers to learning. In order to eliminate language problems and other barriers to learning, the Department of Basic Education (2011:5), indicates that inclusivity should become a central part of the organisation, planning, and teaching at each school. This can only happen if all teachers have a sound understanding of how to recognise and address barriers to learning and how to plan for diversity.

What is language?

Language is the use of the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people to represent thoughts and ideas. Written language involves writing rather than speech, whereas spoken language is expressed in speech rather than writing. It involves understanding and expression, grammatical speech production form, language use in context (use) and fluency (Hornby, 2010:834). Language refers to speaking (expressive) and understanding language (receptive). That is, using words to build up sentences, sentences to build up conversations and longer stretches of spoken language; and understanding and

making sense of what people say (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.; Gordon, 2014). Well established skills enable learners to establish and maintain social relationships with others, to express and share their thoughts and feelings, to represent and to understand the world around them (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.). On the contrary, learners with language problems are at increased risk of developing behavioural, emotional and social difficulty (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2010).

What is language problems?

Skills in speech and language develop in an orderly way, although the pace may differ for different children (Mahn, n.d.). This means that the learners whose skills in speech and language are not fully developed experience language problems. Teachers are aware of the importance of language both as a means of communication and medium of instruction (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.).

Many learners enter the Foundation Phase with physical and /or mental disabilities that have not been detected by the parents or care-givers because they are not easily identifiable (Joshua, 2001; Nacro, 2011). Problems and difficulty in learning a language are commonly thought to impede the fluency of learners, hence are perceived to be major obstacles in achieving the desired performance goal in language. Whenever learners anticipate these problems while speaking they get frightened. Lack of success when trying to achieve the expected performance reinforces learners' lack of confidence in their general linguistic knowledge which makes them feel inferior (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013).

What are the common language problems?

- Receptive and /or expressive language difficulties that is difficulty understanding language (Nacro, 2011; Loraine, 2008). In other instances learner have problems following oral directions (Thomas & Thorne, 2003).

- Expressive language problems, difficulty using language (Nacro, 2011; Loraine, 2008). A learner with expressive language problem becomes non-verbal, does not talk much, he/she is hesitant or slow in speech (Thomas & Thorne, 2003).

Learners who have language development deficits, their language skills grow much more slowly than those of typically developing learners. They may make errors in pronouncing words or may stutter. These learners may struggle to find the right word and organize those words in a meaningful way to communicate a message or hold a conversation. Their vocabulary remains relatively small while other children are adding new words every day (Loraine, 2008; Oideachais & Lear, n.d.).

- Fluency problem- are problems with rate and rhythm of the flow of speech such as stuttering and stammering. The learners' flow of speech is disrupted by sounds, syllables, and words that silent block or inappropriate inhalation or exhalation, as such there is abnormal number of repetitions, hesitations, prolongations or disturbances. Stuttering is the most prevalent fluency problem. Involuntary blocks in fluency will be accompanied by muscle tension due to frustration. The mouth may tighten up or the eyes may blink rapidly. A learner may become so embarrassed by stuttering that they talk as little as possible to avoid the struggle. This may have serious academic and social implications. Stuttering progresses to self-consciousness, embarrassment and eventual avoidance of speaking (Nacro, 2011; Mahn, n.d).

What is the role of the English First Additional Language teacher?

The English First Additional Language (EFAL) teacher's role in the classroom is to try and pick up any difficulties the learners might have (Joshua, 2001), and to create the condition under which learning can take place. It is an environment that makes learners feel relaxed and build self-esteem and confidence (Beltran, n.d.). Assessment of specific receptive

and expressive language abilities is needed in order to understand the learners' communication difficulties and facilitate communication (Zembrzuski, 2013). The teacher has to make the language classroom environment less formal and friendly, where learners can make mistakes without looking or sounding inept. The teacher's positive way of providing corrective and constructive feedback is recommended rather than interrupting and correcting learners when they are still communicating. The teacher should be patient, calm and have a good sense of humour as he/she listens attentively keeping a natural eye contact to the learner (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Mahn, n.d.). Teachers should have access to specialist training and resources they need so that learners with language problems succeed. Many learners need to be directly taught the speech, language and social communication skills that other learners learn naturally (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.).

The EFAL teacher should consider content of the learner's verbalizations rather than how the learner says it. The teacher should become familiar with the learners' sounds system and the substitutions they make (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.). The teacher has to respond to the message rather than the way the chid says it, to set a good example to all the learners, teaching them how to handle this situation and how to behave under the circumstance. He/ she should speak slowly without rushing and should spend time every day with the child, conversing in an unhurried and relaxed way. The teacher need to ask learners questions that need few words response (Department of Basic Education and Department of Health, n.d.).

The teacher should encourage learners to use gestures, drawings or writing to aid understanding (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.). The teacher should help learners develop assertiveness and negotiation skills without forcing them to speak in front of others to avoid stigmatization, laughing and discrimination. The teacher should address teasing and bullying; teaching other learners how to respond and how to behave when other learners stutter or have difficulty expressing themselves (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.). The teacher should make effort to

create a sense of friendship and cooperation among learners (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). In order to improve communication, the English language teacher should support and praise the learners' good interactions/ speech and the learner's other strengths (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.). The teacher should not criticise the learner's speech.

Research Design and Methodology

A sample of 10 Foundation Phase English First Additional Language teachers participated in this qualitative designed study. Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire which English First Additional teachers were given to fill in. Creswell (2013) points out that a study is contextual when the researcher collects data from participants in the natural setting where they experience the phenomenon, rather than in a laboratory.

By definition, qualitative research refers to a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. The researcher's interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understanding (Creswell, 2007). Dawson (2007) points out that qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through such methods as interviews or focus groups (p.15-16). It attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants. A qualitative perspective assumes that one must examine the larger context in which people and knowledge function (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke (2004:3) maintain that qualitative research claims to describe life-worlds 'from the inside out', that is, from the point of view of the people who participate in the study. By so doing, it seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features.

Sampling techniques

A sample is the subset of people from the population who will participate in the current study (Creswell, 2007). According to Rossouw (2003), the process of selecting a part of a group under study is known as sampling (p.108). For the purpose of this study, a purposive sample of 10 Foundation Phase English First Additional Language teachers was chosen to participate. In purposive sampling, researchers use their own judgement about which participants to choose, and they select only those who best meet the purposes of their studies (Swartz, de la Rey, Duncan & Townsend, 2008; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

Vockell & Asher (1995) defined questionnaire as a device that enables respondents to answer questions. Dawson (2007) outlines three basic types of questionnaires, namely; closed–ended questionnaires, open ended questionnaires or a combination of both. The study used an open-ended questionnaire to collect data from the participants. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to give details freely without any prompting (Vandum & Rankin, 1998). The questionnaire was selected based on its quality of ensuring anonymity and hence the participant's willingness to freely provide responses.

Data analysis in this study was based on descriptive framework. Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). De Vos and Fouche (1998) describe data analysis as the breaking down of ''data into constituent parts to obtain answers to research questions''. Data was coded, analysed and then interpreted to find answers to the research questions raised in the study. De Vos and Fouche (1998) further explain that to find answers one must first analyze the data and then interpret the results of the analysis. The analysis is largely presented in words.

Research Findings and Discussions

Although it was challenging to identify language problems amongst Foundation Phase learners, fluency, receptive and expressive language problems were identified. Stuttering which is a problem of fluency (rate and rhythm of speech) was found to be amongst the most identified language problems (Nacro, 2011).

Learners with language problems experience inability to express oneself, due to lack of vocabulary, omission of words, distortion of words and in some cases learners formulate some words which are not found in English. This tendency distort meaning, as such the flow of communication is hindered (Loraine, 2008; Oideachais & Lear, n.d.).This is an expressive problem, which makes the learner to be less talkative (Nacro, 2011; Loraine, 2008). The teachers indicated that learners who talked less or do not talk at all were problematic because it became impossible for the teacher to find out the areas where the learner needed help, and ended up by not performing well.

Language problems affected negatively in teaching and learning. The teachers indicated that language problems erode self-esteem, affect educational achievement, social integration and general behaviour. Oideachais & Lear (n.d.) indicated saying that language disorders can result in poor self-confidence and low self-esteem, which can affect personal and social relationships. Poor conversational skills, poor non-verbal skills and poor social perception hinder the ability to form friendships with peers and may lead them becoming marginalized (Nacro, 2011).

In order to help learners, experiencing language problems teachers should be patient, refrain from interrupting and speaking for the learners, but should encourage and motivate learners to speak with him/her and with the other learners (Oideachais & Lear, n.d.). It was also indicated that the teacher should create a learning environment which supports learning

where there is no laughing at one another or teasing or bullying (Department of Basic Education and Department of Health, n.d.; Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013).

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that parents who have children with language problems to communicate with the language teacher, so that together they help the learner learn despite their language problems. Language abilities (receptive and expressive) needed to be assessed so that communication difficulties may be identified, understood and necessary support be provided. It is crucial that any concerns for speech and language problems be investigated further. In order to help the English Language teacher, the Department of Education has to make provision for health support, provision of speech therapists and provision of psychologists in schools, so that screening and support be easily accessible.

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Validity and Reliability for Malay Version of Parental Sleep Attitude Scale (PSAS): Preliminary Study 2

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess validity and reliability of the Malay version of the Parental Sleep Attitudes Scale (PSAS). This instrument was used to measure maternal attitudes and opinions towards sleeping arrangements of infants and young children. The scale is consisted of 16 items that tapped the extent of their endorsement of solitary sleeping and bed-sharing. The content of items included independence, closeness, security, crying, convenience and marital intimacy which were highlighted in the research literature. PSAS was translated into Malay language by using Back to Back Translation procedure proposed by Brislin (1970). Respondents of the study were 88 working mothers between the ages of 25-45 years old. The two subscales were negatively correlated. The result of internal consistency were questionable for bed sharing subscale (α=.647) and single combined scale (α=.692). However, for solitary sleeping subscale the result yielded poor value (α=0.590). Findings showed that PSAS can be used within Malaysian context. However, future revision on translation works is needed. Grouping of respondents also need to be classified according to the age of the child.

Keywords: *Parental Sleep Attitudes Scale (PSAS), validity, reliability, infant, young children*

Validity and Reliability for the Malay Version of Parental Sleep Attitude Scale (PSAS): Preliminary Study 2

Sleep arrangement between parents and their infants and young children has become a popular topic of research in recent decades. The question of 'child sleeping with whom' has become the focus of various research fields including psychology, sociology, anthropology, health and medical (McKenna, 1996; Shweder, Jensen & Goldstein, 1995).

According to Song (2010), the attitude of parents plays an important role in selecting sleep arrangement. Several studies have found a positive correlation between the qualities of marriage, parenting attitudes and practices (Cox, Owen, Lewis & Henderson, 1989; Grossman, Eichler & Winickoff, 1980). Parent-child relations and spousal character of interdependence with each other play important roles in the family system dynamics, with the quality of a good marriage to be positively associated with attitudes and beliefs of parents (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984).

There are a variety of instruments developed to measure the attitude of parents towards the selection of children's sleep arrangement. One of them is the Parental Sleep Attitudes Scale (PSAS). The instrument developed by Keller and Goldberg (2013) aims to measure the attitudes of the mother toward sleep arrangement of infant and young children. Since not all items in the instruments were appropriate for Malaysia local context, the study translated PSAS into the Malay language and to determine its validity and reliability, and to make it suitable for use for mothers in Malaysia.

Method

The study was an online survey using Parental Sleep Attitudes Scale (PSAS). It aims to determine the validity that assessed in terms of inter-correlation of subscales and the level of reliability that assessed in terms of internal consistency of the instrument.

Sample

Sample of the present study consisted of 88 working mothers between the age ranges of 25-45 years. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique because only working mothers with children between the ages ranges of 0-5 years were chosen. Research was not dedicated to a specific demographic location because of reviews were conducted online, and sample came from various locations around the country.

The Instruments

In this study, a questionnaire was used which comprised of two parts, namely the Personal Information Form and the Parental Stress Attitudes Scale (PSAS).

Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form includes demographic items enquiring information such as age, level of education, number of children, age of the eldest and the age of the youngest child.

Parental Stress Attitudes Scale (PSAS)

PSAS with 16 items was designed to measure maternal attitudes and opinions towards sleep arrangements of infants and young children (Keller & Goldberg, 2013). Parents were asked to respond to items that tap the extent of their endorsement of solitary sleeping and bed sharing, with responses ranging from 1 to 6 *(1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree)*.

Data Analysis

IBM Statistic 21 was used to analyze the data. As for validity, the intercorrelation between subscales method was used, and for reliability, the scale internal consistency Cronbach Alpha coefficient method was examined.

Result and Discussion

Demographic

According to descriptive analysis, Table 1 showed the distribution of the samples based on their age, level of education, number of children, age of the eldest and the age of the youngest.

Table 1:

Distribution of Samples (N-88)

Variables		Percent (%)
Age	Below 25	1.1
	26-35	83.0
	36-45	15.9
Education	SPM	1.1
	STPM	1.1
	Diploma	20.5
	Degree	39.8
	Master	23.9
	PhD	11.4
	Others	2.3
Number of Children	1	33.0
	2	31.8
	3	25.0
	4	6.8
	5	1.1
	6 and above	2.3
Age of Youngest	0-2	58.0
	3-4	13.6
	5-6	5.7
	7 and above	3.4
	Missing	19.3
Age of Eldest	Below 6	62.5
	7-12	25.0
	13-18	5.7
	19 and above	1.1
	Missing	5.7

Evidence of Validity

The evidence for validity of PSAS was obtained by examining the intercorrelation between subscales. The subscales were predicted to show negative correlation to one another based on the assumption that the subscales designed to measure different underlying construct. In this study, it was expected that both subscales would have negative correlation with each other.

Table 2 showed the results of intercorrelation for both subscales. As expected, both subscales were negatively correlated with each other. Similar intercorrelation result was obtained by Keller and Goldberg (2013) in their study. Keller and Goldberg reported that the two subscales were negatively correlated with each other (r=-.73). The result supported a prior assumption about the pattern of the relations between subscales and provided evidence of convergent validity of this instrument.

Table 2:

Intercorrelation of the Subscales of PSAS

Subscale	Bedsharing
Solitary	-0.721**

**, k<0.01

Evidence of Internal Consistency

The evidence for internal consistency of PSAS was obtained using the internal consistency Alpha Cronbach's method. The reliability coefficients for PSAS subscales were presented in Table 3. Questionable reliability coefficients were found for single combined scale (α=.692) and bedsharing subscale (α=.647). However, the solitary sleeping subscale showed poor value of reliability coefficients (α=.590).

These results differed significantly to studies by Keller and Goldberg (2013). Keller and Goldberg reported that the internal consistency was strong for both subscales (α=.84) for bedsharing subscale and (α=.90) for solitary sleeping subscale, as well as for the single

combined scale (α=.92). The results indicated that PSAS is not a reliable instrument for the assessment of attitudes mother toward child sleep arrangement in Malaysia. However, it may reliable if the translation of the items revised. Besides, the respondents in this study were included child with age range of 0-5 years. This instrument also may reliable if a group of respondents were classified according to the age of child.

Table 3:

Reliability Coefficients of the PSAS Subtest

Subtest	Alpha Coefficients
Solitary Sleeping	.590
Bedsharing	0.647

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated a good convergent validity for the subscales. However, the study showed questionable reliability for combined single scale and one of the subscale as well as poor for the other subscale. Results indicated that PSAS is a valid instrument but not reliable for the assessment of attitudes of mothers in Malaysia. Future study need to revise the translation of every items and reclassify respondents according to the age of the child.

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