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Challenges of preschool teachers in the implementation of early children's curriculum

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by preschool teachers in implementing the early childhood curriculum, utilizing a fully quantitative approach to gather data. A sample of preschool teachers was selected through simple random sampling to ensure diverse representation. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS software to identify the key factors influencing curriculum implementation. The findings reveal significant challenges, including a lack of resources, insufficient training, and time constraints, which hinder effective curriculum delivery. The study underscores the need for increased support and targeted professional development for preschool teachers to enhance the quality of early childhood education. Insights from this research can help policymakers, administrators, and educators understand the obstacles within curriculum implementation and foster an environment that promotes a holistic and effective learning experience for young children. This study contributes valuable quantitative data on the barriers in preschool education, informing strategies for improved curriculum application in early childhood settings.

Keywords: Challenges; Preschool Teacher; Children; Curriculums

1. Introduction

Early childhood is a term that refers to childhood from birth to the age of eight (Aries, P., 2020). Education can involve both good and bad things. Education is a process or activity directed at changing human behaviour (Janius, N., Ishar, M. I. M., Jahadi, N. E. H., Amdan, M. A., & Sid, R., 2024). As humans, we are born with nothing. Therefore, when a person grows up, that is where the responsibility of everyone around to shape the personality and habits in a person lies. Preschool education is a program that provides learning experiences for children aged 4 to 6 years over a period of one year or more before they enter Year One (Meltzer, L. J., Williamson, A. A., & Mindell, J. A., 2021). Preschool education aims to provide learning experiences for children to develop their potential in all aspects to master basic skills and foster a positive attitude in preparation for entering primary school.

Etymologically, the word curriculum comes from the Latin word "curere" which is a translation of course literacy (Vakhovska, O., & Isaienko, O., 2021). Curriculum is defined as an approach to help teachers achieve goals in teaching and learning. Often, the curriculum for preschool is structured based on some basic assumptions about the nature of children. For example, children actively learning by exploring their environment will result in a different early childhood curriculum based on the idea that children learn passively. At the same time, Adentwi (2005) is of the view that children are basically uncontrollable, and they need strict control so that they can learn and will lead them towards an alternative that is closer than the thought that children generally strive towards acceptance social than others.

According to Ramli Abd Samat (2011), Rosmah Abd Ghani and Mariani Md Nor (2014), the effectiveness of the implementation of the instructor education curriculum depends on the understanding and skills of a teacher in the

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school. In Malaysia, in line with developments that occur with teaching frameworks around the world, the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) has also undergone changes. In addition, KSPK 2017 began to be implemented in all preschools and kindergartens in January 2017. The implementation of the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) 2017 which has been reconsidered in line with the quality efforts of early childhood education in line with the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025.

Preschool teachers are the main educators and have a very important role in the implementation of the curriculum in the early stages of children (Amdan, Janius, & Kasdiah, 2024 & Amdan, Janius, N., Jasman, & Kasdiah, 2024). This may include guiding and disciplining children, respecting cultural diversity, and creating appropriate teaching and learning methods according to Mc Donnell, 1999. In addition, Prak, 2008, also suggests that an understanding of the early childhood curriculum is very important to teachers -teachers so that the correct implementation of the curriculum can help teachers achieve their goals. This means, when preschool teachers do not understand what the theoretical and practical framework of early childhood curriculum is in detail, they will not be able to implement early childhood curriculum successfully (Janius, N., Aniq, & Amdan., 2024; Janius, N., & Amdan, M. A. B., 2024a & Janius, N., & Amdan, M. A. B., 2024b). Therefore, there are many challenges faced by teachers when implementing the early childhood curriculum.

1.1. Problem Statement

According to NAEYC (National Association for Education Young Children) 2005, there are methods to provide good quality education (Nganga, L., Sisson, J., Thapa, S., Kambutu, J., & Madrid Akpovo, S., 2024). Therefore, there is a need for teachers to prepare the standard, especially their role in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. However, knowledge in the early childhood curriculum is more challenging and heavier as a responsibility in early childhood education (Janius, Ishar, Bang, Sid, & Wong, G., 2023 & Janius, Ishar, Yusof, Y., Bang, P., Sid, R., & Wong, G., 2023). Therefore, teachers need to implement teaching and learning based on the syllabus that is appropriate to the child's level of development. Early childhood curriculum has been formulated to meet the developmental needs of children and help them emerge with extraordinary potential and experiences covering various areas of human experience. However, the implementation of early childhood curriculum lacks attention in preschool.

This research is to be identifying the challenges faced by preschool teachers during the implementation of the curriculum is a necessity, because when the challenges are accurately detected, it will make it easier for the researcher to deal with the challenges. In this regard, it is very important to conduct a study to ascertain the challenges faced by preschool teachers in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in some selected preschools in the city of Marudu.

1.2. Study Objectives

- This study aims to examine the challenges of preschool teachers in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in Kota Marudu.
- Identify the level of challenges faced by preschool teachers in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.
- Identify the level of readiness of teachers in facing the challenges of teaching and learning in the classroom.

1.3. Research questions

- What are the challenges faced by preschool teachers in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum?
- What is the level of preparedness of teachers in facing the challenges of teaching and learning in the classroom?
- What factors influence the early childhood curriculum?

1.4. Operational Definitions

1.4.1. Education

Education also refers to education, education, training and teachings (Burns, M., 2023). According to Mook Soon Sang (1991), in his book "Education in Malaysia" sums up that education is an activity that seeks to develop the physical, intellectual, social and emotional of an individual as well as increase skills, abilities, knowledge and experience so that it can provide joy, benefit and progress in life. According to Atan long (1976-1978), his book entitled "Educational Psychology" provides views on education that have been presented by several scholars and Islamic scholars. Among them is Syed Muhammad Qutb stating that education is a process of forming a human being in a comprehensive and balanced way.

1.4.2. Curriculum

Based on the writer Ishak Ramly (2013), the curriculum includes all the experiences found inside and outside of school and the things that are taught in school. Curriculum comes from the Latin word that refers to the path in a competition. Based on the concept, the word curriculum is linked to the word 'paths or paths'.

1.4.3. Preschool

Preschool is part of the Malaysian education system. The Malaysian Ministry of Education provides preschool education to enable children aged 4 to 6 years to enter school earlier, especially children from low-income groups. Preschool teachers play a crucial role in implementing early childhood curricula that foster comprehensive development in young children. They apply frameworks that emphasize culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate practices, guiding learning in physical, social, emotional, and cognitive domains. By integrating professional learning opportunities, teachers enhance their skills in adapting curricula to meet individual needs and support each child's progress (Frontiers, 2023; NAEYC, 2023). Moreover, coordinated curriculum planning across age levels ensures continuity and reinforces meaningful, play-based learning experiences aligned with developmental milestones. This approach helps build foundational skills critical for future academic success.

2. Literature Review

Preschool education in Malaysia is an education program for children older than 4-6 years (Frontiers, 2023). The main purpose of the Preschool education program, among others, is to provide learning opportunities for children before entering formal education in Year One (Zhang, L., & Ma, Y., 2023). The quality of teaching and learning in preschool education depends on the quality of teachers and the curriculum used. Therefore, in the implementation of the preschool curriculum, teachers need to have knowledge and skills related to the development of children at various age levels (Fadel, Ishar, Jabor, Ahyar, & Janius, N., 2022). This is very important to ensure that teachers can modify the curriculum to suit the age group, abilities, abilities and interests of the children (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2010).

2.1. Concept of Early Childhood Education

The definition of the term early childhood education depends on one's point of view on the concept (Sullivan, J., 2023). In terms of children's lives, according to Campbell, 1990, early childhood education is the period from birth to the age of eight. Moreover, according to Grotewell and Burton (2008), also share this definition because they describe it accordingly as the time between empty to eight years. However, in school terms, early childhood education incorporates group settings for infants through the third grade of elementary school (Campbell, 1990).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a crucial stage that supports the development of children from birth to around eight years old, preparing them for lifelong learning. This period emphasizes a holistic approach, targeting cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development through play-based and interactive learning experiences. ECE frameworks often include culturally responsive practices, which create an inclusive learning environment and allow children to see their experiences reflected in the curriculum (UNESCO, 2021). Research shows that high-quality ECE lays a foundation for academic success, social skills, and overall well-being, making it essential for childhood development (NAEYC, 2023).

According to Gonzalez Mena, 2008, early childhood education is a branch of special education that provides services to children from infancy to third grade. As this authoritative definition states, I believe that childhood brings or exposes a child from birth to eight years of age to the world (Hassan, Z. B., Janius, N., Atan, N. A., & Idris, 2018a & Hassan, Z. B., Janius, N., Atan, N. A., & Idris, 2018b). The importance of early childhood education has increased rapidly throughout the world over the past twenty years.

2.2. Implementation of Early Childhood Curriculum

The implementation of the early childhood curriculum requires the practice of courses that are formally set for studies, syllabi and subjects. This process involves helping students gain knowledge or experience. It is important to note that curriculum implementation cannot happen without students.

Therefore, students are the main figures in the curriculum implementation process. Implementation occurs when students gain experience, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are planned or intended to enable the same student to function effectively in society (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

2.3. The Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education in the past few decades has considered different fields such as developmental psychology, cultural psychology, childhood studies, cultural anthropology, history and philosophy according to Johnson (2005). According to Clough, Nutbrown, and Selbie (2008), recently, many studies have been focused on aspects of children's lives because young children are born with the ability to understand the world around them if the necessary environment and qualified teachers are in their hands. Breedekemp and Copple (1997), hold the idea that children's brains are ready to learn when all conditions are met. For them, the flow of brain processes, both the environment and genes play an important role that further builds the brain. Early childhood education becomes more important especially for children who come from a low socio-economic background according to Botta, 2009. He further identified that the importance of children is revealed from the beginning of education coming from low-income families because of cognitive growth and their school readiness is highly influential.

Children come from low socio-economic backgrounds and given the importance of quality early childhood education with proper curriculum implementation (Ismawi, Ishar, & Janius, N., 2022 & (Janius, N., Jahadi, Abdullah, & Ling, M. S., 2023 & Janius, N., 2023). It will provide them with early reading and math skills, high cognitive, self-image that positive and help them cope with children of high and medium socio-economic status. According to Webb (2003), he explained that children learn cooperation through the early education they receive from childcare centers and it helps them acquire the skills needed in life. These skills help them follow the rules and stay safe in society.

In Seng's study (1994), it was revealed that one of the biggest reasons parents send their children to early childhood education centers is to make them social, active and acquire some basic skills in life. In a longitudinal study by Kagitcibasi (1991), it was explained that children who receive early childhood education will be emotionally and socially competent compared to those who do not receive early education.

2.4. Challenges by Preschool Teachers in the Implementation of Early Childhood Curriculum

In the study of Aktan and Comert (2007), one of the causes of problems related to the implementation of the preschool curriculum is the facilities available in schools. According to a study conducted by Gundogan (2002), in-service training organized by school administrators is not enough to keep up with the development of preschool teachers with the current flow of the early childhood curriculum.

It was found that the type of in-service training received by preschool teachers is not from the field of early childhood learning (Naldo Janius, Mohammad Aniq Bin Amdan, Mohamad Aidil Hazidi Bin Kasdiah, Nur Izzah Binti Harifin, & Fatin Asyiera Nabila Binti Shamshol Bhari., 2024a). Therefore, the in-service training that teachers participate in may not support them as they seek answers to their questions about curriculum implementation. According to Cisneros, Cisneros- hari Chernour Moreno (2000), in their study revealed that preschool teachers face problems in implementing early childhood education. According to Reid, Stoolmiller and Webster-Stratton (2008), the teaching experience of preschool teachers can also be a problem in implementing early childhood education practices.

2.5. Factors That Affect the Implementation of the Early Childhood Curriculum

There are several factors that affect the implementation of the early childhood curriculum such as teachers, students and the availability of materials and resources.

2.5.1. Teacher

According to Dhochak, N., Singhal, T., Kabra, S. K., & Lodha, R. (2020), he asserted that teachers see their role in the implementation of the curriculum as an autonomous one. They choose and decide what to teach from the set syllabus or curriculum. Since implementation occurs through student interaction and planned learning opportunities, the teacher's role and influence in the process cannot be disputed. Goodman and Brand (2009) showed that, teachers characterized as motivated, responsible, and organized and open to new learning, they were found to be high curriculum implementers compared to teachers characterized as unmotivated, not open to change.

2.5.2. Students

Students are also a critical element in the implementation of the curriculum. While teachers are the arbiters of classroom practice, students hold the key to what is delivered and adopted from curriculum officials (Naldo Janius, Mohammad Aniq Bin Amdan, Mohamad Aidil Hazidi Bin Kasdiah, Nur Izzah Binti Harifin, & Fatin Asyiera Nabila Binti Shamshol Bhari., 2024b). The official curriculum can be quite different from the actual curriculum. The official curriculum can be quite different from the actual curriculum. Student factors influence teachers in the selection of their learning

experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the diversity of student characteristics in the implementation of the curriculum.

2.5.3. *Materials And Facilities Resources*

No meaningful teaching and learning can take place without the provision of adequate resource materials. This depends on the implementation of the curriculum as well (Division of Curriculum Research and Development, 2006). This means that a formally designed curriculum can be fully implemented as planned, the Government or the Ministry of Education must provide schools with sufficient resource materials such as textbooks, teaching aids and stationery to enable teachers and students to play their role satisfactorily in the curriculum process implementation.

The Research and Curriculum Development Division also maintains that government centers need to provide physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries and field sports to create an environment that allows implementation to take place (Naldo Janius, Mohammad Aniq Bin Amdan, Mohamad Aidil Hazidi Bin Kasdiah, Nur Izzah Binti Harifin, & Fatin Asyiera Nabila Binti Shamshol Bhari, 2024c). The availability and quality of resource materials and the availability of appropriate facilities have a great influence on the implementation curriculum.

2.5.4. *Past Studies*

There are several studies that pay special attention to the implementation of preschool curriculum in Malaysia. Among them the study of Habib Mat Som & Syed Kamaruzaman Syed Ali, 2011; Department of Education Johor (2011) which examines obstacles and motivators related to teachers in the implementation of educational changes. This is because each teacher has a different skill background, knowledge, experience and psychology. So, changing the curriculum requires adjusting many things before, during and after the Pdp process is carried out.

Teacher's competence in implementing the planned curriculum includes the teacher's attitude, knowledge and skills that determine the success of a curriculum. According to the Johor Education Department, (2011) the success or failure of curriculum dissemination is influenced by teachers' attitudes towards curriculum and teaching. A study by Suriana Ismail (2012) found that changes in a curriculum cause the teacher's workload to increase. He stated that the pressure experienced will have a negative effect on the teacher's behavior. So, in the event of frequent curriculum changes, it will indirectly cause problems among teachers (Yakop, A., Ishar, M. I. M., & Janius, N., 2024 & Zulkafli, S. S. A., Ishar, M. I. M., & Janius, N., 2024).

Research by Nur Athirah Ariffin and Faridah Yunus (2017), the success of a teacher depends on their willingness to develop themselves and their profession through various activities. Teachers are advised to be prepared to try various PdP techniques in the face of changes in terms of curriculum content and the use of technology. Teachers' readiness to handle PdP includes subject knowledge, skills to teach subject content and teachers' attitude to their responsibilities.

3. Methodology

The study uses a quantitative research design and a survey type to find out the level of challenges faced by preschool teachers in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. A descriptive survey design was used or thought appropriate because the study aimed to collect data from a sample of teachers from various preschools regarding the challenges they face in implementing the early childhood curriculum and the factors that influence implementation using questionnaires.

The study location is around Kota Marudu District, Sabah. The total number of schools selected is 28 primary schools. The schools were chosen as study locations because the researcher wanted to know the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the early childhood curriculum.

This questionnaire is the result of modifications made by the researcher from previous theses. Before this questionnaire instrument is distributed to the respondents, it needs to be checked and verified by relevant and experienced lecturers in the field being studied to obtain the validity of the research content so that it is in line with the objectives of the research that has been produced.

All information collected from the study using questionnaires was checked for accuracy and clarity of expression. All respondents answered the questions completely and the expressions were found to be meaningful and understandable. The answer to why the questionnaire was compiled and analyzed in relation to the research question for which the instrument was designed for the study. Statistical and social science products (SPSS version 21.0) were used to analyze

the data. Basically, the data collected in the study is analyzed descriptively using tables, graphs, frequencies and percentages. The results of the study were interpreted accordingly.

3.1. Research Analysis

Based on the findings of the study, female respondents are far more numerous than male respondents which is 34 people with a percentage of 68.0% and male teachers as many as 16 male teachers which is 32.0%. There has been a lot of syntax showing that female teachers have dominated places in preschools compared to males, especially in early childhood education courses.

Most respondents are 20 to 30 years old with a percentage of 46.0%. This is followed by respondents 41 to 50 years with a percentage of 20.0% and 31 to 40 years with a percentage of 18.0%, respondents who stated the least age is 51 years and above with a percentage of 16.0%.

Based on the findings of the study, 28 teachers (56.0%) are married, and 22 teachers are single with a percentage of (44.0%). Overall, the number of respondents who are married is the largest number of respondents in this study.

The results of the analysis show the highest percentage of 40.0% or 20 people with a degree level education. Next, followed by 24.0% or 2 people educated at master's level, 16.0% or 8 people educated at STPM / diploma level, followed by 12.0% or 6 people educated at SPM level. The lowest level of education is 8.0% or 4 people educated at PHD level

Based on the results of the study, explaining the highest percentage are teachers who have served for 1-5 years with a value of 38.0% or 19 people. Next, 30% or 15 people are at the level of serving 6-10 years, 18.0% or 9 people are at the level of serving that is 16 years and above. Next, the lowest level of service is 14.0% or 7 people are at the level of serving 11-15 years.

4. Discussion

The findings of the study show that preschool teachers do not fully understand the children's nature of the curriculum, therefore they face problems with the content of the curriculum. Preschool teachers' knowledge in the swallowing curriculum revealed in the study that the knowledge and experience of teaching in the early curriculum is problematic in the effort to implement early childhood education (Reid, Stoolmiller and Webster-Stratton., 2008; Yang, W., 2022).

Preschool teachers play a pivotal role in implementing early childhood curricula, ensuring that children receive engaging and developmentally appropriate experiences (Su, J., & Zhong, Y., 2022). Research emphasizes that teachers who undergo curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL) report improved confidence and effectiveness in delivering curricula that align with both educational standards and individual child needs (Yang, Bautista, & Li, 2023). Studies show that high-quality training for educators enhances their ability to adapt curriculum to diverse classroom contexts, encouraging active, inclusive learning environments (NAEYC, 2023). Furthermore, effective curriculum implementation relies on teachers' skills in integrating play, cultural relevance, and continuity across developmental stages, which significantly influences children's foundational skills and learning outcomes.

Parents do not care about the education of their wards in stage pre-schools (Kyarilo, N. S., 2024). Most preschool teachers complain about parents' attitudes towards early childhood education. According to preschool teachers' parents do not understand early childhood education but see it as a waste of time when they involve themselves Janius, N., Amdan, M. A. B., Kasdiah, M. A. H. B., Harifin, N. I. B., & Bhari, F. A. N. B. S. (2024c). Some parents think of early childhood centres as a playground and not a serious place to learn. This situation was also detected in a study conducted by Cisneros, Cisneros-Chernour and Moreno (2000) in their study revealed that preschool teachers have problems in implementing early childhood curriculum since parents superficially early childhood education as playground children are not learning and this attitude of parents results in barriers between school and home cooperation.

Further studies provide evidence that preschool teachers do not receive adequate in-service training regarding the early childhood curriculum. Most of the sample of preschool teachers for this study agreed that their school administrators do not organize regular in-service training for teachers to keep up to date on new trends in early childhood curriculum Janius, N., Amdan, M. A. B., Kasdiah, M. A. H. B., Harifin, N. I. B., & Bhari, F. A. N. B. S. (2024a). These results support Gundogan's (2002) study that regular in-service training for school administrators is not enough to keep up with preschool teachers' current trends in the early childhood curriculum. Facilities in preschools in the Cape Coast metropolis have been confirmed by preschool teachers in a study that they do not facilitate the implementation of the early childhood curriculum Janius, N., Amdan, M. A. B., Kasdiah, M. A. H. B., Harifin, N. I. B., & Bhari, F. A. N. B. S. (2024b).

This agrees with Azzi-Lessing (2009) who found that the infrastructure found in preschool centres affects teaching and learning.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded in the study that insufficient teaching and learning materials, lack of adequate services. training for preschool teachers, lack of parental involvement, lack of knowledge of preschool teachers in the early childhood curriculum is an obstacle to the successful implementation of the early childhood curriculum among preschools in Kota Marudu. Also, teachers and insufficient teaching and learning materials are among the main factors that affect the implementation of the initial curriculum. Researchers recommend that private owners and government authorities overseeing preschool programs should organize regular in-service training for both teachers and parents regarding the early childhood education curriculum.

This can help ensure that parents and teachers are informed about the importance of early childhood curriculum and its impact on children's education Implications of this study have the potential to assist policy makers and educational leaders in finding and analysing the challenges faced by early childhood teachers in relation to the implementation curriculum as well as finding out how preschool teachers can overcome this challenge.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

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Statement of ethical approval

The researchers used the research ethics guidelines provided by the University Kebangsaan Malaysia Research Ethics Committee (RECUKM). All procedures performed in this study involving human subjects were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Permission and consent to participate in the study were also obtained from all guardians of the study participa.

Statement of informed consent

All authors voluntarily consent to participate in this research and understanding its purpose, procedures, risks, confidentiality, and my right to withdraw.

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