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## THE TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NEW PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

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### Abstract:

The new preschool curriculum in Malaysia is known as the National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum (NPSC) (Revised 2017) requires knowledgeable, well-skilled and more experienced teachers in its implementation. This study aimed to identify the teachers' level of knowledge about the new preschool curriculum from the private sector. A total of 269 private kindergarten teachers in a Selangor district were randomly selected as respondents. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire and the data collected were then analysed descriptively. Overall findings showed that the majority of those private kindergarten teachers had a High Level of knowledge about the new preschool curriculum. The demographic details also revealed that the majority of private kindergarten teachers had more years of experience, but half of them did not have any professional qualifications and not involved in professional development. In conclusion, these findings explained that though half of the private kindergarten teachers do not meet the professional criteria, they have good knowledge of NPSC (Revised 2017). This study has suggested that further research relating to the preschool curriculum is needed and provides supportive information to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and local private kindergartens.

### Keywords:

National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum (Revised 2017), Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum, Private Kindergarten Teachers

## Introduction

Preschool education is one of the vital parts of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as the quality of its education gives a huge impact on the readiness of learning among children. The enacting of Education Act 1996 (Act 550) clearly showed that the government is concerned about the early education needs for children by officially recognizing preschool education as part of the national education systems along with primary education, secondary education, post-secondary education and higher education. This act sets out the standards that must be followed by all agencies who deal with preschool education in Malaysia including the aspects of establishment, operation or management of kindergarten, the power of ministry to establish kindergartens, preschool curriculum, intermediate language, regulations and others to ensure the needs of children aged four to six years old are fulfilled.

Regarding the preschool curriculum, the MOE has designed the first National Preschool Curriculum (NPC) to all preschools and kindergartens under the provision of subsection 22(1) in Education Act 1996 (Act 550). A Circular Letter No. 15/2002 was issued by MOE specifying the NPC consumption for all levels of government and private preschools (Mohd Nazri & Wan Nurul, 2018). On that account, all government and private preschools or kindergartens must oblige to implement the NPC drafted by the Curriculum Development Division, MOE beginning January 2003 (Kamarulzaman, Nordin, & Abdul Rahim, 2017). However, under the provision of subsection 22(3), the private sector are authorized to implement additional curriculums but must obtain the prior written approval from Head of Registration, MOE.

Preschool curriculum in Malaysia has been transformed to ensure that the quality of preschool curriculum is in line with international standards. Moreover, the transformation of the preschool curriculum which produces NPSC requires more professional teachers because lessons must be conducted according to standards and children's needs (Aliza & Zamri, 2015). Yong, Khadijah and Anuar (2015) agreed that the implementation of NPSC requires knowledgeable, skilled and experienced teachers in the process of Teaching and Learning (T&L) to nurture the children with 4M skills namely Reading (Membaca), Writing (Menulis), Counting (Mengira) and Reasoning (Menaakul). Children's assessment should be conducted continuously to conform to the National Education Philosophy (NEP) during T&L (Mardziah, Mariani, Damaety, & Rahman, 2017). Hence, the knowledge of preschool curriculum is the knowledge base that needs to be mastered by teachers because the effectiveness of T&L process begins from teachers' understanding of that curriculum.

Although NPSC is compulsory to be followed by all government and private sectors which offer preschool education programs (Kamarulzaman et al., 2017), the critical discourse analysis of previous writing by Ting (2018) revealed that private kindergarten teachers did not fully use the NPSC in their daily teaching as a consequence of some private kindergartens had less understanding of NPSC after it was formally launched. This is supported by a survey by Foong, Veloo, Dhamotharan and Loh (2018) which the findings revealed that most of 3,087 private preschools teachers and childcare providers across the country were still young, inexperienced and unqualified. On the contrary, the literature study by Mustafa and Azman (2013) reported that private kindergarten teachers were professional in dealing with parents and children, well-trained locally and oversea, and also highly qualified. This has raised some questions about the knowledge of private kindergarten teachers' and their understanding of NPSC (Revised 2017) as well as their professionalism in implementing it. There is a significant concern because Jain

et al. (2015) study confirmed that the preschool teachers failed to implement the NPSC because the lack of knowledge about that curriculum.

Therefore, by reviewing previous studies which identify the trend of parents nowadays who tend to prefer private kindergartens as an early education destination for their child (Kamarulzaman et al., 2017; Mustafa & Azman, 2013) and also inform that there are still limited studies related to NPSC (Revised 2017), the current study aimed to identify the teachers' level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum from private sector. In meeting the aim of the study, the questions are constructed as follows:

1. What is the profile of private kindergarten teachers?
2. What is the level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum in terms of philosophy and core principles among private kindergarten teachers?
3. What is the level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum in terms of curriculum content among private kindergarten teachers?
4. What is the whole level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum among private kindergarten teachers?

### **Chronology of Malaysian Preschool Curriculum Transformations**

After five years of NPC implementation since 2003, MOE had conceptualized this curriculum based on the recommendation in Subsequent Meeting of Cabinet No. 6/2008 on May 23rd, 2008 (MOE, 2017b). NPSC concept was subsequently approved by the Central Curriculum Committee Meeting No. 3/2009 on October 2nd, 2009 and in the following year, this curriculum was implemented (MOE, 2017b; Sofiah, Kamarul, Sapiyah, Zabedah, & Khairunnisa, 2018). The transformation of the NPC to NPSC focuses on standards, modular curriculum form and admittances six strands by replacing components as continuances for primary and secondary school (MOE, 2010). This transformation outlines the aspects of content, pedagogy, time allocation, methods, assessment, material and management (Aliza & Zamri, 2015).

NPSC 2010 was then revised to align to the demand of Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 and to ensure the quality of curriculum compatible to the international standards (MOE, 2017a, 2017b). According to Mohd Nazri and Wan Nurul (2018), the revision of NPSC is to ensure that the preschool curriculum is comprehensive according to current needs and in continuity with the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR). This revision involves the existing learning programs to enhance students' achievement based on six aspirations in MEB 2013-2025 which are knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality and national identity (MOE, 2017b). The implementation of NPSC (Revised 2017) began in 2017 was approved by the National Curriculum Committee Meeting No. 2/2015 on June 9th, 2015 and 208th Education Planning Committee Meeting on September 21, 2015 (MOE, 2017b; Sofiah et al., 2018).

### **Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum**

According to Fernandez (2014), every profession has different knowledge that makes one becomes skilful and is considered as professional appropriate to his or her profession. In teaching profession, teacher's knowledge gives a significant impact on the effectiveness T&L process (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Seven types of knowledge base categorized by Shulman (1987) should be mastered by teachers in order to build students' understanding: i) Content

Knowledge, ii) General Pedagogical Knowledge, iii) Curricular Knowledge, iv) Pedagogical Content Knowledge, v) Knowledge of Learners, vi) Knowledge of Educational Contexts, and vii) Knowledge of Educational Ends. However, a literature study refined by Fernandez (2014) revealed that there is still no consensus on specific knowledge needed by teachers and confirmed that one teacher needs only to know some particular content. For this reason, the current study only focuses on curricular knowledge.

As stated by Şahin and Soylu (2017), curricular knowledge is an equally crucial component of the knowledge base in the teaching profession. Curricular knowledge is a specific understanding of materials and programs for teachers' support (Shulman, 1987). In detail, this knowledge gives teachers an understanding of the teaching materials and curriculum content as well as the capability to use both effectively (Şahin & Soylu, 2017). Beaver, Wyatt and Jackman (2018) mentioned that curriculum designed specifically to early childhood is for children to interact with the instructional content, materials, resources and evaluating the process of objective achievement in T&L process. Thus, in the context of the current study, knowledge about new preschool curriculum refers to teachers' knowledge base of materials and programs in NPSC (Revised 2017) which support them to implement effective T&L process and appropriate to the children. Two main constructs of the knowledge about new curriculum preschool: i) Philosophy and core principles, and ii) Curriculum content in NPSC (Revised 2017) are considered important and need to know, understand and mastered by teachers who are involved in preschool education whether the government or private sector.

### ***Philosophy and Core Principles***

The drafting of the Malaysian preschool curriculum since NPC is based on NEP, National Principles (In Malay known as *Rukun Negara*) and guided by the early education views, philosophies and theories, psychology and child development, and current learning trends (MOE, 2001). NEP is a cornerstone to develop human capital in accordance with community and national goals through the formation of curriculum as well as teachers' references to meet the MOE's aspiration (Norfaezah, Siti Nurhajaria, Awatif, & Idi, 2017). National Principles, on the other hand, is a national hold and guide to uniting the diverse cultures in response to voice, confidence and determination with regards to Malaysians (Yahaya, 1978). Four core principles underlying the formulation of Malaysian preschool curriculum are i) Holistic, Balanced and Integrated Development, ii) Developmentally Appropriate Practice, iii) Fun and Meaningful Learning, and iv) Life-long Learning (MOE, 2017b). Therefore, teachers' knowledge about NEP and National Principles is a crucial guide and reference in nurturing human capital with balanced development and national identity. Teachers' knowledge about core principles are also important as teachers provide quality and appropriate early education for children to meet their needs (Abdul Halim, et al., 2019)

### ***Curriculum Content***

The review of NPSC 2010 resulted in the formation of NPSC (Revised 2017) which emphasizes on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTs). HOTs are aimed to provide children with the most recent knowledge, skills and values to face the challenges in the 21st century (MOE, 2017b). Thus, the basic ideas of HOTs in NPSC (Revised 2017) is an aspiration to produce globally competitive students (MOE, 2017a). NPSC revised is still based on the integration of the six learning strands: i) Communication, ii) Spirituality, Attitudes and Values, iii) Humanities, iv) Personal Competence, v) Physical Development and Aesthetics, and vi) Science and Technology (MOE, 2017b). Each of these strands is the main domain that

complements one another and integrates critical, creative and innovative thinking to produce human capital who holds high moral values based on religion, knowledge, competence, creative and critical thinking and innovation (MOE, 2017a). The integration of six learning strands are clearly emphasized in the Malaysian preschool curriculum development and should be practiced in throughout its implementation (MOE, 2017b). Accordingly, teachers need to be creative in creating the creative, fun and meaningful T&L process in order to stimulate children's development holistically.

As specified by MOE (2017a), there was no one best method or strategy in the T&L process with diverse of children. For that reason, NPSC (Revised 2017) recommends numerous T&L strategies to make the learning fun, effective and appropriate to meet the children's needs with diverse backgrounds and abilities (MOE, 2017b). Some of the examples are child-centred learning, learning through play, inquiry-based learning (exploration), integrated approach, thematic approach, project-based, mastery, contextual learning and multiple intelligences (MOE, 2017a). Nonetheless, according to MOE (2017b), every T&L plan needs to take heed of various styles children's learning, assessment, material suitability and flexibility of learning environment. On that account, teachers should have knowledge of children's development, so that the T&L process will be implemented appropriately alongside with systemic and continuous assessments.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This is an initial study related to NPSC (Revised 2017) among kindergarten teachers from private sector. This study has employed a survey design with a fully quantitative method to comply with the purpose of the study.

### ***Population and Sampling***

This study involves the population of 929 teachers from private kindergartens who were registered under the Private Education Division, MOE in a district of Selangor and using the NPSC. Referring to Table of Determining Sample Size by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if a total of population is 929, the sample size required at least 269. Therefore, 269 private kindergarten teachers in a district of Selangor were selected as respondents through simple random sampling technique. All respondents were stated their consent to participate in this study. Their identities were kept confidential and only used for research purposes.

### ***Research Instrument***

This study used questionnaire as a research instrument in collecting the data. Briefly, this study has adapted the 'Quality of Malaysian Early Childhood Care and Education' questionnaire which was developed by Che Nidzam et al. (2018) for both National Child Development Research Centre (NCDRC) in Sultan Idris Education University Sub-Projects Research namely Evaluation of Existing ECCE Program to Improve Quality that Inform Policy (P1/CUR) and Determining Contributing Factors of Quality ECCE (P3/TLA/LMM). This questionnaire is summarized and refined into three main sections: A) Profile of Respondents, B) Philosophy and Core Principles, and C) Curriculum Content. The adapted questionnaire was renamed as 'The Knowledge of Preschool Curriculum Among Private Kindergarten Teachers' and obtained the excellent validity (Scale Content Validity Index [S-CVI/Ave]=0.907, with average Modified Kappa Statistic [ $k^*$ ]=0.757) and reliability (Cronbach Alpha [ $\alpha$ ]=0.961).

### Measurement Procedures

The scores obtained from the respondents were analysed descriptively involving numerical measures such as Frequency ( $n$ ), Percentage (%), Standard Deviation ( $SD$ ) and Mean ( $M$ ) to identify the overall profile of respondents as well as the private kindergarten teachers' level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum. Three levels, Low, Medium and High will be determined based on mean scores value as shown in Table 1. These levels were adapted from 'Determination of Fairness of Performance Appraisal Levels' in Abdull Sukor et al. (2008).

**Table 1: Determination Levels of Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum**

Scale Counting	Mean Score	Level
$\frac{4-1}{3} = 1.00$	3.01 - 4.00	High
	2.01 - 3.00	Medium
	1.00 - 2.00	Low

Adapted from Abdull Sukor et al. (2008, p. 167)

### Findings

#### Overall Profile of Respondents

From the total number of 269 respondents, it indicates clearly that the preschool education in private sector are dominated by 259 female (96.3%). Malays were the majority with 132 respondents (49.1%) while the majority of the respondents were Muslims with 133 private kindergarten teachers (49.4%). In terms of age, the average  $M=3.41$  was the highest in range between 20-29 years old which reflected 77 respondents (28.6%). The most notable finding is that the half of private kindergarten teachers did not have any professional qualifications in ECCE/Preschool Education with the total number of 109 respondents (40.5%) and not involved in any professional development with a total number of 115 respondents (42.8%). However, the majority of private kindergarten teachers had more than six years of experience with the total number of 124 respondents (46.1%).

**Table 2: Overall Profile of Respondents (N=269)**

Profile		$n$	%	$M$	$SD$
Gender	Male	10	3.7		
	Female	259	96.3		
Race	Malay	132	49.1		
	Indian	36	13.4		
	Chinese	98	36.4		
	Indigenous people	0	0.0		
	Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	3	1.1		
	Others	0	0.0		
	Religion	Muslim	133	49.4	
	Christianity	38	14.1		
	Buddhism	71	26.4		
	Hinduism	27	10.0		
	Others	0	0.0		
Age	Below 20 years old	1	0.4	3.41	1.19
	20 - 29 years old	77	28.6		
	30 - 39 years old	68	25.3		

	40 - 49 years old	66	24.5
	50 - 59 years old	47	17.5
	60 years old and above	10	3.7
Professional	None	109	40.5
Qualifications	ECCE/Preschool Teaching Certificates	73	27.1
	Diploma in ECCE/Preschool Education and above	87	32.3
Years of	Less than 3 years	80	29.7
Experience	3 - 6 years	65	24.2
	More than 6 years	124	46.1
Professional	None	115	42.8
Development	NPSC Courses	31	11.5
	Malaysian Skill Certificate (SKM) Courses	21	7.4
	Basic Childcare Courses (KAAK)	51	19.0
	PERMATA Childcare Courses (KAP)	28	10.4
	Others	23	8.9

### ***Level of Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum in Terms of Philosophy and Core Principles***

The analysis of the result is illustrated in Table 3. It showed the mean value of all items in philosophy and core principles construct is on the High Level. The whole mean value was also found on the High Level ( $M=3.40$ ,  $SD=0.42$ ). Therefore, this has highlighted that private kindergarten teachers have good knowledge about the philosophy and core principles in NPSC (Revised 2017).

**Table 3: Private Kindergarten Teachers' Level of Knowledge in Term of Philosophy and Core Principles**

Item No.	Item	M	SD	Level of Interpretation
B1	I understand the mission of the NPSC implemented in my kindergarten.	3.42	0.59	High
B2	I understand the objective of the NPSC implemented in my kindergarten.	3.42	0.58	High
B3	I understand the National Education Philosophy implemented in NPSC.	3.39	0.57	High
B4	I know my kindergarten supports the National Education Philosophy in NPSC through the planned activities.	3.36	0.57	High
B5	I know the NPSC emphasizes six-strands' holistic development through the integrated approach.	3.37	0.57	High
B6	I know the Developmentally Appropriate Practice principle in NPSC as a guideline to teach children.	3.43	0.59	High
B7	I know the NPSC complies with the Culturally Appropriate Practices and local values.	3.37	0.49	High
B8	I know the NPSC promotes the development of children's thinking skills.	3.46	0.54	High
Overall		3.40	0.42	High

***Level of Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum in Terms of Curriculum Content***

The same analysis, as shows in Table 4, illustrated that the mean value of all items in curriculum content construct was on the High Level. The whole mean value was also on the High Level ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=0.38$ ). Similar to the prior analysis, private kindergarten teachers have good knowledge about the curriculum content in NPSC (Revised 2017).

**Table 4: Private Kindergarten Teachers' Level of Knowledge in Term of Curriculum Content**

Item No.	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Level of Interpretation
C1	NPSC develops socio-emotional skills among children.	3.39	0.51	High
C2	NPSC stimulates gross and fine motor skills among children.	3.55	0.52	High
C3	NPSC develops the understanding of early mathematics among children.	3.51	0.50	High
C4	NPSC promotes the development of children's reasoning skills.	3.42	0.53	High
C5	NPSC focuses on early literacy and language among children.	3.52	0.52	High
C6	NPSC inculcates noble values in children.	3.57	0.53	High
C7	NPSC develops the understanding of early science among children.	3.41	0.53	High
C8	NPSC instils religious/spiritual beliefs among children.	3.37	0.67	High
C9	NPSC emphasizes learning through play.	3.53	0.52	High
C10	NPSC promotes the development of children's problem solving skills.	3.36	0.51	High
C11	NPSC emphasizes communication skills in children.	3.53	0.50	High
C12	NPSC nurtures children's aesthetics values.	3.45	0.56	High
C13	NPSC encourages children to express their creativity through learning activities.	3.45	0.52	High
Overall		3.47	0.38	High

***Overall Level of Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum***

Subsequent analysis revealed that the majority of the private kindergarten teachers with the total number of 204 (75.8%) out of 269 respondents were on the High Level. The remaining was on the Medium Level with the total number of 65 (24.2%) respondents. No one was on the Low Level (0.0%). Thus, the result of this analysis showed the majority of private kindergarten teachers have good knowledge about NPSC (Revised 2017).



**Table 5: Frequency and Percentage of Private Kindergarten Teachers' Level of Knowledge About New Preschool Curriculum (N=269)**

Level of Knowledge	N	%
High	204	75.8
Medium	65	24.2
Low	0	0.0

### Discussion and Recommendation for Further Research

The findings indicated that private kindergarten teachers had a High Level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum in both philosophy and core principles, and curriculum content. Majority of private kindergarten teachers also had a High Level of knowledge about new preschool curriculum. The findings of the respondents' profile analysis even indicated that half of the private kindergarten teachers did not have any professional qualifications and had never involved in any professional developments, but majority of them were highly experienced with more than six years. These findings are quite interesting, despite the fact that most of private kindergartens looked unprofessional, howbeit they have high knowledge about new preschool curriculum (Abdul Halim, et al., 2019). As a result, it could be concluded that private kindergarten teachers have good knowledge of NPSC (Revised 2017) due to their years of experience in preschool education services.

Nevertheless, the findings of current study have limitation to confirm the above assumption. Those findings, in fact, cannot completely support the survey by Foong et al. (2018) or disapprove the literature review by Mustafa and Azman (2013) because the analysis was only conducted descriptively. The current study howbeit was an initial study on NPSC (Revised 2017) involving kindergarten teachers from private sector. On that account, it is suggested that further study should be conducted in form of inferences research to investigate relationships, differences, effects, factors, influences or control of selected private kindergarten teachers' profile on knowledge about new preschool curriculum. There should also be qualitative research to have an in-depth investigate to identify the practices or skills of private kindergarten teachers in the implementation of NPSC (Revised 2017). This is important because according to the Malaysian Teacher Standard Model, professional teachers need to possess: i) Professional practice values, ii) Knowledge and understanding, and iii) T&L skills (MOE, 2009). The Iceberg Model and Central and Surface Competencies by Spencer and Spencer (1993) also revealed the importance of knowledge in conjunction with skills as a core competency. With the aforementioned analysis, the research on the preschool curriculum among kindergarten teachers of private sector would be enhanced.

### Conclusion

Overall, private kindergarten teachers have good knowledge of NPSC (Revised 2017). Nevertheless, private kindergarten teachers are still considered unprofessional as half of them did not have any professional qualifications and had never involved in any professional development trainings. Based on these findings, it would be apprehensive that their knowledge is not align with their practices in implementing the preschool curriculum. In conclusion, this study offers some opportunities for ECCE/Preschool Education scholars to pursue studies on NPSC (Revised 2017) or professionalism among kindergarten teachers from private sector. This study also provides supportive information to MOE and local private kindergartens in helping kindergarten teachers to have a professional certificate of at least a Diploma in ECCE due to the quality of preschool education hinge relies on the quality of teachers. With the high-

quality preschool education by private kindergartens alongside with the government, the goal of preschool education in NPSC (Revised 2017) would certainly be achieved, thus, met the demand of NEP. In general respondents agreed the present Malaysian ECCE curriculum is well developed, however there are some elements that have been suggested to be added into the curriculum exemplary practices with learning through holistic approach. On the other hand, the experts however maintained the present curriculum is adequate, but the implementation of the curriculum needs a competent, passionate and skilful teachers.

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