

Teaching Approaches in the Classroom among Preschool Teachers

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the teaching approaches preschool teachers based on management aspects of teaching in the classroom. This study is a case study, of qualitative nature. A total of four preschool teachers were involved at Negeri Sembilan under Ministry of Education. Data were collected through interviews protocol, the protocol of observation and analysis of the contents of documents in duration of four months. The data are based on the recommendations of Miles & Huberman (1994). The results showed that pre-school teachers mastered the management of the administrative aspects of teaching but do not have clear understanding of teaching approaches and the integration of all the aspects in teaching from KSPK.

Keywords: Teaching approaches, Preschool Teachers, KSPK, integration aspects, management

Introduction

Malaysia needs professional preschool teachers who are capable to execute standard-compliance teaching while taking into consideration the needs of students, in line with curriculum content that introduces 4M (reading, writing, counting, and reasoning) at preschool level. In order to meet standard's criteria, preschool teachers need proper guidance, hence they will be able to implement 'play' in a flexible manner (Miller & Almon, 2009). Preschool education focuses on student-centred curriculum through active learning activities, such as learn through play, etc. Play is important in preschool years, because children acquire knowledge through play (Morrison, 2011).

To achieve all the above, a preschool teacher has to be imaginative in implementing appropriate teaching approach. Teaching approach is the most difficult skill to master. This skill includes managing students' behaviour, a skill that will only be achieved through years of teaching experience.

In line with the transformation of preschool education curriculum, which now focuses on student-centred curriculum, Malaysia Ministry of Education (MOE) has established a new curriculum, known as National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK). One of the important aspects being emphasized in KSPK is Developmentally Appropriate Practice (ABP). Based on ABP, the main focus of the curriculum is teaching approach and child-centred learning (KPM, 2010).

Problem Statement

Among the objectives stated in KSPK is the acquisition of 4M skills among pre-schoolers. However, Malaysian Ministry of Education 2015 reported that a higher percentage of Standard One students who were required to participate in Literacy and Numeracy program (LINUS) was from those who attended MOE's funded preschools, compared to other preschools (such as KEMAS, Perpaduan and private preschools).

In year 2015, 38% of Standard One students were required to participate in LINUS, which is a fairly high percentage, and surprisingly, 29% were students from MOE's funded preschools (KPM, 2015).

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to identify the issues encountered by preschool teachers pertaining to teaching and learning approaches in the classrooms.

Literature Review

A research by Azwan (2005) found that a teacher who is competent in teaching management is also a creative and innovative teacher. Innovative is the ability of a teacher to implement new endeavours in the classroom, whether it is the method, strategies and teaching approach (Hazri, 2003; Rozita, 2012). Teaching with creativity stimulates cognitive and emotional development, as well as students' behaviour and self-value. Lack of innovation and continuous improvement in classroom management and teaching easily bore the students, and simply not fun.

A research conducted by (Zulkiflie, 2004; Khairuddin, 2008) figured out that teacher-centred teaching still dominates the classrooms, although it was highly emphasized that encouragement on creativity development among pre-schoolers is crucial, as the foundation to formal education. Norsita's (2014) research found that stimulating materials are important to inspire students' creativity. However, there are loopholes in the actual implementation caused by the attitude of complacency among teachers, due to lack of monitoring by school management. Norsita (2014) also revealed that teachers preferred to ask 'closed-ended' questions and practised teacher-centred teaching approach.

Since the implementation of Preschool Guide Book (1986) until the recent curriculum, KPM reported that preschool teachers still practice direct teaching, instead of student-centred learning. This issue has been raised since the establishment of annex preschool in the year 1992 by Rohaty (1999); Sharifah Nor Puteh, et. al. (2011a) and JNJK (2013).

Methodology

This research was conducted to investigate the teaching approaches used by preschool teachers in the classrooms, focusing on teachers in the district of Jempol, Negeri Sembilan. Four (4) teachers participated in the research. Qualitative method was used in this research, as suggested by Creswell, 2012 – "Qualitative research design suits investigative research." Furthermore, case study method was being used, as it matches with the nature of investigative

research. Interviews, observations and document analysis were the tools used for data gathering (Othman Lebar, 2009; Creswell, 2012; Robson et. al, 2011).

On top of the above, approaches, methodologies, issues and researches conducted pertaining to teaching approaches of other subjects in Malaysia were being referred and used as guidance to the researcher.

Research Findings

Teaching approach is a strategic plan in conveying lessons in the classroom. There are many approaches that are commonly practiced in preschools, such as; (i) teacher-centred approach, (ii) student-centred approach, (iii) learn through play and (iv) thematic. Analysis of data derived from interviews showed that preschool teachers' understanding pertaining to teaching approach are at two levels, which are – beginner and advanced, as responded by P1: "Teaching approach at preschool is learning through play.. but I do not have the skill to plan lessons that incorporate play while learning." (PK1/tb-u3: 34 – 36).

P2's respond was more or less the same like P1, as she claimed, "...learning concept in preschool is through play, but I am not skilled to teach as such." (P2/TB/U1: 116 – 118). When further asked, her respond was: "...Ooo.. I am not good at this.. I rarely implement because it is difficult" (P2/tdk-u2; 13 – 15).

These feedbacks supported researcher's observational findings that the focus of research participants was to guide students in acquiring the three main skills, which are reading, writing and counting. Reasoning skill was not being exposed to children.

Observation on P1's teaching process found that majority of the teaching approach used was teacher-centred. 4 of 5 observations found that preschool teachers implemented 'formal' way of teaching. From field notes, it was discovered that P1 used worksheets in every lesson. When inquired, research participants responded, "... This way, I can easily control the classroom and students' discipline is under control" (P1/TB-U3: 65 – 68). She also added, "... Parents expected their children to master 4M. When that concern was recorded, I was worried if we can't achieve. Sometimes, I am being influenced by the style of teaching standard one students (P1/TB-U3: 79 – 84).

According to P1, it was difficult for her to implement teaching approach, just like previous years. She felt it was difficult to comply with what being recommended in the curriculum. The concern on students' acquisition of 4M skills, drove her to teach like Year 1 teachers. The same situation was being experienced by P2, P3 and P4, as per their responses, "... we understand that exposing students to child-centred learning is the foundation but parents understanding dominates." (P2/TB-U2: 33 – 34). P3 responded, "There are parents who warned me, by the end of the year, their children must be able to read and write." (P3/TB-U2: 33 – 38). While P4 responded, "... If not being trained since beginning of the year, for sure students will not be able to master 4M." (P4/TB-U2: 30 – 35).

These findings showed that research participants mostly implemented teacher-centred teaching approach and teaching concept was influenced by main stream education, as implemented in Standard One. From observation, the elements of learn through play approach were rarely implemented by research participants. Participants used teacher-centred approach.

Interviews with research participants revealed that they needed to ensure that their students will not be attending LINUS program when they enter Year 1. Here are their responses, “... If Year 1 students are not able to read and write, the headmaster and Year 1 teachers blame preschools.” (P1/tdk-u3: 50 – 52).

Whilst P2 responded: “... But when I fully complied with KSPK, students were not capable to acquire 4M.” (P2/tb-u3: 103 – 104). P3 claimed: “The headmaster would warn me if there is any preschool student would be needed to be intervened in LINUS program.” (P3/tb-u4: 91 – 92) and P2 mentioned: “... Due to LINUS... when students were to be filtered by Year 1 teachers... they figured out preschool students were not competent in 3M” (P4/tb-u3; 101 – 103).

Interviews and observations revealed that the expectation and demand on the acquisition of literacy and numeracy among pre-schoolers were the barriers for research participants to implement learning through play approach. Curriculum was not used as the guideline in teaching, but it was only referred as the guideline to write Daily Lesson Plan. In conjunction to this, analysis on documents discovered that the actual lessons in class did not match with Daily Lesson Plan. This shows that research participants did not execute lessons as per documented in Daily Lesson Plan. According to them: “... Curriculum is referred for the purpose of completing Daily Lesson Plan, but during actual teaching, I don’t have to refer to curriculum because I teach based on the ability of each student.” (P2/TB-U4: 101 – 103).

Whilst, P2 responded: “... It is breaking the law if Daily Lesson Plan is written without referring to the curriculum” (P2/tb-u4: 103 – 104). In addition, P3 claimed: “... LINUS is the reason why I teach differently from what I have planned” (P3/tb-u4: 101 – 102).

Responses from research participants discovered that they did not use thematic module in daily teaching plan. The assigned 340 minutes in KSPK for implementing thematic module was consumed to teach basic skills. The researcher also found that research participants did not comply with basic skills in teaching English as the second language, as outlined in KSPK. In an unstructured interview with a research participant, she mentioned: “... But I rarely implement, because I myself is not proficient in English” (P1/tdk-u4: 46 -47).

Whilst, the respond of P2 was: “... I am not proficient in English, then how do I teach?” (P2/tdk-u3: 74 – 75). And P4 claimed: “... only minor implementation is possible.. I am not good in English” (P3/tdk-u4: 56 – 57). Dan the replied from P4 was: “Sometimes I do include, but it is hard” (P4/tdk-u3: 59 – 60).

From unstructured interviews and observations, researcher discovered that the basic skills of 4M were given emphasis in preschool lessons as compare to thematic module. In addition, it was also observed that English basic skills were not being implemented, instead it was being replaced with basic skills of Malay language. Indirectly, this shows that teacher-centred approach is the dominating approach used in preschools.

Table 1: Comparison P's Response with Teaching Approach

Participants	Teaching Approach
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understood the appropriate and recommended approaches that shall be implemented at preschools. - Teaching using teacher-centred approach. - Did not implement student-centred approach. - Did not implement thematic module. - Focused on the module of basic skills.
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understood the appropriate and recommended approaches that shall be implemented at preschools. - Understood teacher-centred approach. - Understood student-centred approach. - Occasionally implemented thematic module. - Focused on the module of basic skills.
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understood the appropriate and recommended approaches that shall be implemented at preschools. - Teaching using teacher-centred approach. - Did not implement student-centred approach. - Did not implement thematic module. - Focused on the module of basic skills.
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understood the appropriate and recommended approaches that shall be implemented at preschools. - Teaching using teacher-centred approach. - Did not implement student-centred approach. - Did not implement thematic approach. - Focused on the module of basic skills.

In summary, it was found that all research participants do have knowledge and understanding pertaining to teaching approach in preschools. This was proven through interview responses. However, from observations on lessons conducted by research participants, the recommended approach was not appropriately being implemented at preschools. Teacher-centred approach was used instead of student-centred.

Two of four participants did implement thematic module during lessons. Whilst the remaining two failed to implement thematic module, instead, conducted lessons as per teaching Year 1 students. Although research participants did not comply with KSPK's recommended practices, research participants were committed in implementing teaching and

learning activities based on their experiences. Research participants were also observed to have the basic knowledge in preschool teaching and relied on their experiences in complying with previous curriculum.

Discussion

Research findings show that not all research participants implemented thematic teaching at preschool. Preschool teachers did not receive detailed exposure on KSPK. This finding is in line with Otto, 1980; Goh, Pauline; Wong, Kung Teck; Osman, Rosma; Lin & Chia Yin 2012 who claimed that such happened because not all teachers were exposed to the latest curriculum. This situation causes incompetency in teaching management.

Most of teaching approach used by preschool teachers is teacher-centred, without giving the opportunities to students to explore. This research also revealed that teacher-centred approach helped teachers to control students' behaviour in the class room. However, this finding is in contrast with Surayah (2003) and Norhashimah (2003) who stated that it is appropriate to implement student-centred approach in preschools to integrate skills, value of students, class activities and outdoor activities. This research finding also shows incompliance of KSPK's recommendation that teacher's teaching approach should be mostly student-centred.

LINUS has caused teachers' teaching approach to become formal. There is no element of learn through play being implemented. This research found that all research participants teach formally in order to achieve targeted acquisition of 4M, neglecting the physical, spiritual, emotional and social development of students. Having said this, this research does not agree with the research of Christidou et al. (2006); Aliza (2009) and Morrison (2011) who claimed that learning through play combines the skill of listening, speaking, read, write and reasoning.

Preschool teachers also need to be creative in their teaching. They must also be taught using the latest curriculum because not all teachers have the opportunity to attend courses organized by MOE. Administrator do not have to set a target of zero LINUS to preschool because they only learn basic skills and optionally preschool teachers are not in Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics. Specialization preschool when they are received teacher training. Therefore unfair to students in preschool filtered for LINUS program. They should be screened when entering year two because teaches Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics are teachers option. Even the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and mathematic is longer compared to the preschool. So these finding indirectly give reflection on teaching approaches preschool teacher.

Implication of Research

This research benefits preschool teachers, to understand about teaching approach in preschools. This research has identified the crucial aspects of teaching approach, in order to positively affect teachers' teaching quality in the classrooms. In Malaysia Educational Development Plan (2013-2025), the government has clearly outlined the aspiration to improve the quality of teachers' teaching management in the classrooms to increase the functional effectiveness of educational organizations.

Conclusion

Competent, high achieving teachers are those who are skilled in teaching management, taking into consideration the growth and development of students without being heavily influenced by expectations of parents and the management. The ability and capacity of teachers in teaching management contributes to a happy, conducive and enjoyable teaching and learning environment, while preparing preschool students for academic needs, prior to enter formal education in Standard

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