

# Identifying the Need of Early Learning Children Readiness among Standard one Teachers in School

**Haslina binti Hanapi**

Jabatan Penyelidikan dan Inovasi Profesionalisme Keguruan, IPG Kampus Sultan Mizan, Besut Terengganu.

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## **Abstract**

When children enter year one, teachers will administer the test whether the KIA2M (Early Reading & Writing Intervention Course) which was introduced in 2004 or LINUS (The Literacy and Numeracy Screening) which was introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2010. These two tests tend to be more focused on cognitive measurements of children ('Munirah, Nadirah, Fazielah, Hidayat, & Syafiq, 2009; Haslina, 2008). This method is differed from the concept of preschool education and the concept of school education, as it does not help the development of children as a whole which covers six aspects namely the development of communication, language, cognition, spirituality and morals, socioemotion, physical as well as creativity and aesthetics ('Munirah, et al ., 2009; Saayah Abu, Samsuri, & Zaidon, 2006). According to Janus and Offord (2007) the efficiency in all these areas will ensure that children are ready to benefit from learning activities conducted in the school environment. The study was initiated by analyzing the needs and domains of teachers who taught year one at the national school in Besut District. This study uses the Delphi Method entirely because the study related to the readiness of learning for year one children have not yet done in Malaysia. This study is a primary study to develop Early Childhood Preparation Instruments that will be implemented at the end of the year in preschools and will be used in schools by year one teachers for their students' excellence.

Keywords : Readiness of Learning, Delphi Method, domain, KIA2M, LINUS

## **Introduction**

The readiness of learning is an important construct to study as information about it is useful for determining the level of development and control of children at the beginning of the school year (Schonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shore, 1997). Studies show that teachers' failure to detect children's problems when they started school had limit children's chance to get the most out of the teaching and learning process implemented at school (Achenbach, 1991; Offord & Lipman, 1996; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). The difference in children in the first year at school has long-term impact on their progress in school and their future (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988). Little difference in academic achievement in Year One has a tendency to affect children for the next few years if there is no effort to identify the problems that arise and to implement the methods to overcome. Hence, attention needs to be given to the level of school readiness of children in the early years of primary school. Information on child readiness will provide

opportunities to ensure the success of the child and the school involved. Children's readiness report helps teachers identify the differences that children have, and develop appropriate expectations about what children can do when they go to school. The results of the children's readiness test can be used by teachers to avoid the problems that children face and are difficult to overcome. Then the teacher will be able to plan the best activities for children who have a learning willingness and who do not have it so that the teaching and learning process will take place more meaningfully. In the current era of education, the importance of identifying appropriate instruments is undeniably vital for measuring the readiness of children aged 6 years at the end of the year in preschools for the use of year one teachers at school.

### **Learning Children Readiness among Standard One Teachers In School**

When children enter Year One, teachers will administer a test called KIA2M (Early Reading & Writing Intervention Course) which was introduced in 2004. Its function is to enable pupils to master 2M. In the last few years, the teachers started to administer LINUS (The Literacy and Numeracy Screening) which was introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) in 2010. Its function is to ensure pupils master 3M (Malaysia, 2010a; 2010b). This requirement coincides with the Lower School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) which is the extension of the National Pre-School Standard Curriculum (KSPK).

Based on this information, Year One teachers tend to use a test that focuses on measuring the child's cognitive (Asma 'Munirah, Nadirah, Fazielah, Shamsul Hidayat, & Mohd. Syafiq, 2009; Haslina, 2008). This method deviate from the concept of pre-school education and in school, because it does not help a child's development as a whole, covering six aspects of the development of communication, language, cognitive, spiritual and moral, socioemotion, physical creativity and aesthetics (Asma 'Munirah, et al ., 2009; Saayah Abu, Siti Saleha Samsuri, & Surayah Zaidon, 2006). According to Janus and Offord (2007) the efficiency in all these areas will ensure that children are ready to benefit from learning activities conducted in the school environment. Learning readiness test is administered to measure children's readiness to learn when starting a learning process (Meisels, 1998). Children's learning readiness instruments are used to exhibit the level of child readiness to benefit from the program or curriculum provided. Measurement of learning readiness should include five things: (Farrar, Goldfeld, & Moore, 2007; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Ready for School Goal Team, 2000): (1) health and physical development; (2) Social and emotional development; (3) Approach to learning; (4) Language and communication development; And (5) cognitive and general knowledge. The study was initiated by analyzing the needs and domains of teachers who taught year one at the national school in Besut District.

### **Objective**

The purpose of this study is to identify the needs and domains of the Early Childhood Learning Readiness for Teachers. Specifically, this study attempts to:

1. Identify the need for Early Learning Children Readiness according to Year One teachers using the Delphi Method.

2. Identify the domain needed to build an instrument that measures the readiness of early children learning.

### **Literature Review**

Recent educational observations and studies provide a different view of the readiness of children to learn. The difference is from the point of view of the ever-changing approach according to current needs (Meisels, 1998; Phillips & Love, 1995, Wenner, 1995). For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, the measurement of learning readiness would determine whether individual children were eligible to enter or postpone admission to school (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Meisels, 1999). The tests used focus on reading and writing skills, and are intended to identify eligible children to start school learning. This trend can be seen based on the definition of learning readiness, which was initially formulated as the ability to demonstrate the skills that children have, basic cognitive skills, language skills and motor work requested by teachers (Meisels, 1999).

Various tests are administered to children whether new to preschools, to children at the end of preschool and to children entering the first year. The question is for what child is given a test? Many say that tests are given to children to learn about 3M (reading, writing and counting) (Haslina, 2008). Various test formats are administered and vary according to the type of preschool that children follow. The National Educational Goals Panel (National Education Goals Panel Early Childhood Assessments Resource Group, 1998) identified five main goals of measuring the readiness of children (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998), namely:

1. Improve learning
2. Identify the specific needs of children,
3. Assess the program,
4. Manage the pattern of knowledge and skills that children have in time, and
5. Basis for measuring accountability.

Two of the purpose of measuring children's readiness, were well-suited for this study. First, to improve learning outcomes, and secondly manage the patterns of knowledge and skills that children have in time to change. The need for data measurement of child readiness is increasingly important from year to year. Policy makers need this data to identify the characteristics of children who come to school and determine the difference in the child's experience before they set foot to school. Parents and teachers need accurate information about the strengths and weaknesses of children in order to plan the best activities to support children's learning. The school also needs an accurate picture of the child's skills and abilities as a basis for understanding and anticipating the results of the test in subsequent years (Scott-Little & Niemeyer, 2001). However, measurements made against children are feared to have negative impacted on them (Niemeyer, 2001; Scott-Little & Niemeyer, 2001). Then the selection of the type of measurement to be done needs to coincide with the child's natural state. Furthermore, the measurement results will be used to decide on individual children or children in groups (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). Therefore, the selection of tests that are really accurate and standard is required. All study readiness

instruments were administered to measure the readiness of children at that time (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Saluja, et al., 2000).

The Delphi method is chosen to collect data from teachers in schools. Methods involve the process of collecting repetitive information and providing expert opinion and using a series of quoted data, intermittent analysis techniques (Gregory, Francis, & Jennifer, 2007). The Delphi method is a measure of a study, when there is incomplete knowledge about a problem or phenomenon. The Delphi method is a repetitive data collection process and issues expert decisions using a series of alternate questionnaires with feedback. Questionnaires are designed to focus on problems, opportunities, solutions or create any previous questionnaires. This process will end when the research question has been answered. For example, when a consensus is reached, a complete theory has been found, or when complete information exchange has taken place. The Delphi method is widely accepted in many industrial sectors, including healthcare, control, business, education, information technology, transportation and engineering. The Delphi method can be variable and evidenced by its use. This method is also used to make judgments, additional decisions or predictive tools and can be used to plan and administer the program. The Delphi method can be used when there is incomplete knowledge regarding a problem or phenomenon. The Delphi method is also used to investigate something which is still not known (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2002).

### **Result and Analysis**

Preliminary studies are initiated by implementing the Delphi Method. In the first round, a piece of blank paper was distributed to 10 pre-school teachers around the Besut District. They are asked few questions about understanding of early childhood learning readiness. More information on this teacher's understanding is given in Table 1.

Table 1

*Teachers' Background Knowledge on Children's Readiness*

<b>Nu m</b>	<b>Pre-school</b>	<b><i>Teachers' Background Knowledge on Children's Readiness</i></b>
1.	School A	The Child's Readiness is the willingness of the child to be in the class and supposed to get the benefit of the activities being carried out.
2.	School B	The Child's Readiness is based on three aspects namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor as suggested in the National Pre-School Curriculum.
3.	School C	The Child's Readiness is a when a child is prepared to engage in all activities conducted in the classroom.
4.	School D	The Child's Readiness is based on social and emotional aspects so that children can associate with friends and be relieved of parents or guardians with good emotions to continue learning in the classroom.
5.	School E	The Child's Readiness is determined from child's readiness of three aspects namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor to get the most from the activities conducted in the classroom.
6.	School F	The Child's Readiness is a when a child is prepared to engage in all activities conducted in the classroom.
7.	School G	The Child's Readiness is a primarily cognitive, child-readiness to get the most out of the learning process in the classroom.
8.	School H	The Child's Readiness is the readiness to engage in and benefit from the learning process in the classroom.
9.	School I	The Child's Readiness is the willingness of the child to be in the class and supposed to get the benefit of the activities being carried out.
10.	School J	The Child's Readiness is based on three aspects namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor as suggested in the National Pre-School Curriculum.

Based on Table 1 most of them understand the readiness of learning is the aspect that a student needs, to prepare for the educational environment in the classroom. The second round was carried out by distributing the paper on the scale of the children who had studied at preschool to the same 10 teachers. The scales listed are listed in the National Pre-School Curriculum, such as: (a) Malay Language Curriculum; (B) English Language Curriculum; (C) Cognitive Development Components; (D) Islamic Education Curriculum; (E) Moral Education Curriculum; (F) Component of Socio-Economic Development; (G) Physical Development Components; and (H) Creativity and Aesthetics Components. Teachers are asked to choose which scale is appropriate to assess in determining the readiness of early childhood learning to enter Year 1. Appendix H shows the scores listed in the sheets given to teachers. Refer to Table 2 for further details.

Table 2  
*Summary of Scale Selection by School Teachers*

<b>N u m</b>	<b>Preschool</b>	<b>Scale Not Selected</b>	<b>Scale Selected</b>
1	Preschool A	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.
2	Preschool B	Moral Education Curriculum; And Creativity and Aesthetics Components.	Malay Language Curriculum; "English Language Curriculum"; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; And Physical Development Components..
3	Preschool C	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.
4	Preschool D	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.
5	Preschool E	Creativity and Aesthetics component.	Malay Language Curriculum; "English Language Curriculum"; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; And Physical Development Components.
6	Preschool F	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.
7	Preschool G	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development

			Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.
8	Preschool H	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.
9	Preschool I	Component of Socioemotion Development; And Creativity and Aesthetics Components.	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; and Physical Development Components.
10	Preschool J	None	Malay Language Curriculum; English Language Curriculum; Cognitive Development Components; Islamic Education Curriculum; Moral Education Curriculum; Component of Socioemotion Development; Physical Development Components; and Creativity and Aesthetics Components.

Table 3 shows most teachers marked all the listed scales. The needs of preschool teachers concur with the readiness of children to study in five areas (Farrar, Goldfeld, & Moore, 2007; Scott-Little & Maxwell, 2000), namely:

1. Health and physical development,
2. Social and emotional developments,
3. Approach to learning,
4. Language and communication development, and
5. Cognitive development and general knowledge.

Researchers have identified a child readiness instrument that contains the five scales described. Once identified, the researchers chose the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) as an instrument that contains all the stated scales. Furthermore, measuring the readiness of children to learn should involve the five scales described. These five areas are interconnected with each other. Information about one of the scales, does not necessarily reflect the readiness of children attending school (Farrar, et al., 2007; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; National Education Goals Panel, 2002).

Once the researcher finds the need for the Early Childhood Preparation Instrument for first-year students at the school, researchers will identify the appropriate instruments and perform an item analysis to adapt the instruments for current use. This study is expected to assist the Malaysian Ministry of Education and teachers in schools.

### **Corresponding Author**

Haslina binti Hanapi

Jabatan Penyelidikan dan Inovasi Profesionalisme Keguruan. IPG Kampus Sultan Mizan, Besut. Terengganu. haslinahanapi@ipgmksm.edu.my

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