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EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY AND EFFICACY OF TEACHERS: PRESCHOOL EDUCATION EXCELLENCE INDICATOR IN MALAYSIA

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss emotional competency and self efficacy of preschool teachers as an important indicator of preschool educational excellence in Malaysia. This paper also discusses the difference between emotional competency and self efficacy of national preschool teachers and private preschool teachers in terms of demography factors (age, gender, teaching experience) and identify main dimensions in emotional competency that influence self efficacy of research respondents. The research implemented is in quantitative form, using cross-sectional survey approach to collect data related to current situation of emotional competency and self efficacy of research respondents. Research population involved national preschool teachers and private preschool teachers in the state of Kedah. Stratification random sampling technique was used to select sample from the research population. Research instrument used was Emotional Competence Inventory questionnaire (ECI-2) (Boyatzis, 2001) and Teacher Self Efficacy (Mohd Zaaba Ismail and Zurida Ismail, 2002). Descriptive data analysis which involved respondent description such as frequency and percentage, Pearson correlation test, t Test, ANOVA and MANOVA. Research findings show that there is a positive and significant relationship between emotional competency of national preschool teachers and private preschool teachers and self efficacy. There is also a significant difference between age and teaching experience between national preschool teachers and private preschool teachers. Research outcomes show that emotional competency play an important role in improving self efficacy levels among preschool teachers in national schools and private schools. In view of that, the self awareness, social awareness, self management and relationship management groups should be considered as important elements in planning for programs to upgrade the level of skills and reinforcing teaching and learning qualities of national and private preschool teachers which directly contribute to raise the level of excellence on preschool education in Malaysia.

Keywords: Emotional Competency, Efficacy of teachers, Preschool education, Excellence indicator.

INTRODUCTION

The government under the leadership of Prime Minister YAB Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has taken a right move by placing preschool education as part of national education system. The purpose of taking this action is to achieve its goal which is at least 80 percent of children have access to preschool education by year 2012 compared to 60 percent only at present. Besides that,
the prime minister also guarantee that through the third National Key Result Area which is to widen access to quality education and affordability which is to provide opportunity to the people of Malaysia from all walks of life to enjoy and get quality education, especially for normal children whereby they will be able to read, write and count when they enter year 4 (four) before the end of 2012.

The main objective of preschool education is to develop the potential of children in all aspects, enable them to master basic skills and nurture positive attitudes as a preparation to enter primary schools. Among others the objective of preschool education is to enable students to have positive personal attitude, character and self concept to become patriotic citizens; guide and educate them to use Bahasa Melayu correctly and develop their skill to use the language to communicate; use Chinese Language and Tamil correctly to communicate in schools using Chinese language and Tamil as medium of instructions; use English in daily interaction in line with its status as a second language; practice Islamic values in daily lives for Muslim students; practice moral values in daily lives; have cognitive skills, thinking and problem solving skills; have emotional maturity and social skills; have good characters; creative and have esthetic values to appreciate the beautiful world and cultural heritage.

Children’s development is closely related to their experience at the early education stage and shaped through neural relationship (Flavell, 1992). Preschool education is the basic for change and development in children which is very important before they approach schooling age. In this matter, Trostle and Merril (1986) think that development of preschool programs must be emphasized and the quality of service to the society must be upgraded. In general, the quality of teaching and learning that children go through at the early stage of education will influence development and improvement of learning achievements later on (Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Families, 2001). Therefore, according to Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Families, (2001), studies related to improving quality of preschool programs, especially roles of teachers which have significant relationship with children and community development should be given due attention. It should be studied from the aspect of effectiveness of the preschool teachers’ role itself in developing confidence and social skills which should be instilled in children before they enter the school later on (Flavell, 1992).

In view of that, to study the effectiveness of teachers, an understanding of effectiveness criteria of teachers need to be identified and they are related to self efficacy of the teachers themselves (Hughes, Abbott-Campbel & Williamson, 2001). This is because, it will have a significant effect on the learning process of children. Effective teachers are more confident with methods and processes applied to improve achievements and changes in children (Gibbs, 2002). Sutton and Wheatley (2003) saw that the quality level of the self efficacy of teachers resulted from various emotions in the teachers themselves.

**Teachers Efficacy and Preschool Education**

Children’s development is closely related to their experience at the early education stage and shaped through neural relationship (Flavell, 1992). Preschool education is the basic for change and development in children which is very important before they approach schooling age. In this matter, Trostle and Merril (1986) think that development of preschool programs must be given attention and its quality of service to the community must be upgraded. In general, the quality of teaching and learning that children go through at the early stage of education will influence development and improvement of learning achievements later on (Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Families, 2001). Therefore, according to Governor’s Cabinet on Children and...
Families, (2001), studies related to improving quality of preschool programs, especially roles of teachers which have significant relationship with children and community development should be given due attention. It should be analysed from the aspect of effectiveness of the role of the preschool teachers itself in building confidence and social skills which should be instilled in children before they move on to school level. (Flavell, 1992). In view of that, in order to analyse the effectiveness of teachers, an understanding of the criteria of teacher effectiveness need to be identified and they have to be related to self efficacy of the teachers themselves (Hughes, Abbot-Campbel & Williamson, 2001). This is because, it will bring a big impact to the children learning process. Effective teachers are more confident with methods and processes applied to improve achievements and changes in children (Gibbs, 2002). Sutton and Wheatley (2003) saw that the level of self efficacy of teachers resulted from various emotions in the teachers themselves.

Efforts to strengthen and improve the achieveability of preschool children depends on the effectiveness of the teachers' roles in the learning process and while interacting with the children (Anderson, 2004). The process of teachers communicating and solving daily routines of preschool children specifically, need a high level of emotional competency (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Emotional competency is viewed as an important element in influencing individuals in controlling their emotions as well as others' in an organisation (Goleman, 1998). According to Darling-Hammond, (2000), the effectiveness of teachers' teaching process is related to their level of emotional competency which is a determinant of the difference in student achievements. This is because individuals who have positive emotions and attitude contribute a lot to organisational excellence, able to interact easier, less aggressive, more inclined to help others (Samsudin Osman, 2005). In this matter, teachers who have close relationship with students other than their parents need to understand the attributes, needs and emotions of their students. This is so because teachers nowadays need to connect with various human attributes and characters which is difficult to be learned, and furthermore are often challenged by changes in responsibilities, hope and direction of education in a country (Restine, 1997; Forsyth, 2000). This phenomenon clearly shows that continuous changes and efforts to achieve preschool educational excellence require quality teachers who are able to influence and motivate students to enhance academic achievements, moral and social skills.

Teachers are individuals who play the main role as variables in the process at school level. According to Creemer (1991), Scheerens (1992) and Van Der Sea and Schakel (2002), lecturers’ teaching practice factor in lecture hall such as the need to create effective learning environment is a challenge that is getting more and more complex in the teaching profession now. This is because post modernisation teachers have to face various discipline problems such as sexual harrassment, drugs, personality problems, family problems and so on (Abdul Shukur, 2000).

Effective teachers are associated to their self efficacy level (Gibbs, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998). According to the Department of Education and Training (2005), the impact of teachers’ efficacy on students’ achievement quadruple and consequently will be able to increase the efficiency of a school. However, what is causing the improvement of teachers’ level of self efficacy still remains a critical issue? (Gibson, 1985)? In fact, the lack of empirical studies to support non-observable variables such as feelings and emotional issues makes discussions on quality improvement in education today difficult (Barent, 2005). Therefore, Sutton and Wheatley (2003) saw that the improvement of efficacy of teachers might be caused by their own emotions. Therefore, a study to analyse the emotional influence on the teachers’ efficacy should be looked into.
METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study is to clarify the influence of emotional competency on the self efficacy of teachers in preschools as an indicator in the achievement of preschool education excellence in Malaysia. The focus of this discussion is related to the emotional competency and self efficacy of Ministry of Education and private preschool education teachers.

This descriptive research involves collecting data for the purpose of hypothesis testing or answering questions related to the current situation of emotional competency and efficacy of teachers and assistant manager of preschool students besides using correlation technique to identify the relationship between two or more variables and using this form of relationship to make predictions. The quantitative study applies cross section survey based on questionnaires answered by respondents.

The sample for this study consists of 580 preschool teachers in national and private schools in Kedah. Respondents were randomly selected according to zones (northern zone, central zone, eastern and southern zones) in the state of Kedah. Respondents involved comprised of preschool teachers from national and private schools in the whole of Kedah. The instrument used to measure the study variables was standard instrument which was designed, accepted and used in western countries. This instrument was divided into three sections which were Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI-2) (Boyatzis, 2001) questionnaire, Self Efficacy Of Teachers questionnaire was measure by using twenty three items developed by Mohd. Zaaba Ismail and Zurida Ismail (2002) and questionaires related to demography information of respondents.

All data in this study was analysed by using SPSS (Statistical Package For The Social Science) version 12.0. The data analysis was divided into two parts which were, first conducting normality test for the purpose of reviewing and filtering data for all test items. After that, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis was also conducted on all questionnaires by presenting the reliability especially for each scale dan subscale in the questionnaire.

RESEARCH FINDING

Pearson correlation analysis finding shows that there is a significant relationship between emotional competency and self efficacy of national and private preschool teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Self Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Competency</td>
<td>0.767**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self awareness</td>
<td>0.656**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>0.745**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Management</td>
<td>0.779**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05

Based on the results in Table 1.1 above, it was found that there was a significant and strong relationship at level p < 0.05 between emotional competency and self efficacy ($r = 0.767$; $p < 0.05$) for national and private preschool teachers.

The rest of the findings were related to two demographic variables used in the study which were age, and teaching experience. Four respondent age groups were used in the MANOVA analysis which were preschool teacher and preschool student management assistant groups aged between 20 to 29; 30 to 39; 40 to 49 and 50 and above. MANOVA analysis has to be conducted
in two stages whereby in the first stage, emotional competency as a whole and competency subscale were made to be dependent variables. Whereas in the second stage, all emotional competency subscales were made to be dependent variables.

The results of Multivariate test indicated that there is a significant difference between age group and emotional competency of respondents, whereby the value of Pillai’s trace was 0.171 (F = 7.237, p < 0.05) and the value of Roy’s Largest Root was 0.179 (F = 21.462; p < 0.05). In general, Multivariate test shown in Table 1.2, indicated that there is a difference in the aspect of respondent emotional competency as a whole (F = 23.45; p < 0.05); self awareness group (F = 20.40; p < 0.05); social awareness group (F = 14.20; p < 0.05); self management group (F = 16.35; p < 0.05); and relationship management group (F = 26.13; p < 0.05).

**Table 1.2**: MANOVA Analysis For Differences In Emotional Competency Of Respondents Based On Age For National Preschool Teachers and Private Preschool Teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Group</th>
<th>20-29 Years Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>30-39 Years Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>40-49 Years Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>50 Years and above Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>Value of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Competency</td>
<td>3.53 (0.24)</td>
<td>3.70 (0.37)</td>
<td>3.85 (0.35)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.35)</td>
<td>23.45**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self awareness</td>
<td>3.57 (0.22)</td>
<td>3.75 (0.31)</td>
<td>3.88 (0.32)</td>
<td>3.91 (0.32)</td>
<td>20.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>3.50 (0.34)</td>
<td>3.64 (0.53)</td>
<td>3.80 (0.51)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.49)</td>
<td>14.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Management</td>
<td>3.55 (0.38)</td>
<td>3.71 (0.43)</td>
<td>3.86 (0.40)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.38)</td>
<td>16.35**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Management</td>
<td>3.51 (0.31)</td>
<td>3.68 (0.40)</td>
<td>3.86 (0.39)</td>
<td>3.98 (0.38)</td>
<td>26.13**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05**

The findings clearly showed that the older the age of a respondent, the higher the level of emotional competency. This is clear when the increase of the mean score based on age is referred. The findings from MANOVA analysis for the respondent group having experience less than five years; five to ten years; and more than ten years are shown. In general, the multivariate test as shown in Table 1.3 below shows that there is no difference in terms of emotional competency on the whole (F = 0.275; p > 0.05); the self awareness group (F = 1.883; p > 0.05); social awareness (F = 0.242; p > 0.05); self management (F = 0.225; p > 0.05) and relationship management (F = 0.265; p > 0.05).

**Table 1.3**: MANOVA Analysis For Differences In Emotional Competency Based On Teaching Experience of National and Private Preschool Teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Competency Group</th>
<th>Less than 5 Years Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>5-10 Years Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>More than 10 Years Mean (S.D)</th>
<th>Value of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Competency</td>
<td>3.79 (0.37)</td>
<td>3.82 (0.38)</td>
<td>3.81 (0.31)</td>
<td>0.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self awareness</td>
<td>3.80 (0.32)</td>
<td>3.86 (0.32)</td>
<td>3.79 (0.31)</td>
<td>1.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>3.77 (0.51)</td>
<td>3.76 (0.52)</td>
<td>3.91 (0.43)</td>
<td>0.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Management</td>
<td>3.80 (0.42)</td>
<td>3.83 (0.43)</td>
<td>3.75 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Management</td>
<td>3.80 (0.41)</td>
<td>3.83 (0.42)</td>
<td>3.79 (0.36)</td>
<td>0.265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05**
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The research outcomes give an important contribution to the pool of knowledge especially for the preschool education practitioners and the policy makers of preschool education in Malaysia. This can be seen from the angle of the role of teacher emotional competency on self efficacy. On the whole, the results of the study showed that emotional competency plays an important role in improving the level of self efficacy among preschool teachers in national and private preschools. In view of that, the self awareness, social awareness, self management and relationship management groups should be considered as important elements in planning for programs to upgrade the level of skills and reinforcing teaching and learning qualities of national and private preschool teachers.

This study also described emotional competency subscales that are influential and effective as the source of teaching and learning reinforcement of preschool students in Malaysia. The knowledge of emotional competency subscale which is influential makes it possible to improve and maintain the quality of preschool teachers in national and private preschools which is of higher quality and effective. Nevertheless, at the same time, other competency subscales also need to be improved. Among them are emotional awareness, empathy, organisational awareness, achievement orientation, optimistic attitude, initiative, inspirational leadership, catalyst of change, conflict management and group work-collaboration subscales. Research outcomes have shown that the emotional competency subscales also need to be enhanced especially among preschool teachers. Other aspects that need to be emphasized are demographic aspect which includes age of national and private preschool teachers. This is because the research outcomes showed that the factor is different in the emotional competency level among the national and private preschool teachers.

Findings associated with the importance of emotional competency of leaders make it possible for activities and exercises that can increase the level of emotional competency level among teachers from national and private preschools to be conducted. Clarke (2006), Mayer and Salovey (1999), and Caruso and Salovey (2004) pointed out that emotional competency aspect is something that can be learned and the mastery and skills of practising it can be improved.

Summary

Research findings have proven that emotional competency plays an important role in the teaching and learning of preschool children nowadays. The importance of emotional competency is viewed from the aspect of its influence on preschool teachers that can improve the skills and mastery in self efficacy and consequently increase the number of more quality teachers in preschool education in Malaysia. The influencing aspect of emotional competency on the self efficacy dimensions can be further enhanced through subscales in emotional competency, age factor which is also identified to be playing a role in the variable.

REFERENCES


