PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES RELATED TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore preschool teachers' beliefs and practices relating to classroom management at the selected public and international private preschools in Mandalay. A total of 38 preschool teachers from six chosen preschools, which include three public preschools and three international private preschools were invited to participate in this study. A mixed research method (both quantitative and qualitative methods) was used in this study. In order to collect and analyze the quantitative data, one instrument was constructed by the researcher based on the result of pre-interviews and literatures. There were four dimensions for classroom management, namely organizing of physical environment, management of planning and programming activities, management of relationship and communication, and management of children's behaviours. There were ten items for each dimension. The purpose of the instrument was only used to collect data for preschool teachers' beliefs related to classroom management. For qualitative analysis, observation, and interviews were performed on six teachers from public preschools and four teachers from international private preschools from Mandalay. According to the results of quantitative analysis results, preschool teachers from the selected preschools possess high beliefs concerning to classroom management. When observing and interviewing preschool teachers, some of their practices were inconsistent with their beliefs, therefore, our results show that there were consistency and inconsistency between their beliefs and practices.

Keywords: Classroom Management, preschool, preschool teachers, teachers' beliefs

Introduction

Children play a vital role in every aspect of the world to forge a beautiful and better society for every living. If one does good deeds during his/her childhood life, the person has a potential to benefit the world when he/she is grown into an adult. A good education can shape a person into a better person in the future (Samaulla, 2018). Preschools are the important places where children are learning the basic skills to harmonize with environmental factors and society (Yasar, 2008, as cited in Karakaya & Tufan, 2018) and they are also the first place where children firstly encounter social rules outsides of their families (Akduman, 2013, as citied in Karakaya & Tufan, 2018). Preschools are also the first learning places for children to adapt many social skills, such as forming friendships, acclimate to various environments and communicating with others (Topaloglu, 2013, as cited in Karakaya & Tufan 2018).

Preschool teachers could face many challenges as teaching preschoolers can be more difficult than teaching older children. In order to overcome this crisis, effective classroom management plays a vital role for teachers. Classroom management can be considered as a multifaceted activity and it extends beyond the traditional behavior management techniques advocated concern with students' disruptive behaviors (Chandra, 2015). If a teacher establishes a clear and consistent standard of behaviors in the classroom, a fight or harm to other children will be decreased. Without classroom management, children will feel unsafe, insecure, and not able to freely speak their emotions or participate. The benefit of having a positive classroom environment will be effective on children to work more effectively and openly share their feelings. Furthermore, poor classroom management could lead the children to have a feeling that their peers may make them unwelcome of unworthy (Ministry of Education, Ganyaupfu, 2013). Therefore, in this paper, the author focuses on preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to classroom management.

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Purpose of the Study

To examine the preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay.

The specific objectives

- To explore the preschool teachers' beliefs related to the four dimensions of classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay,
- To explore the ways the preschool teachers' beliefs consistent with their practices in relation to four dimensions of classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay, and
- To determine the reasons for chosen classroom practices of preschool teachers at selected preschools in Mandalay.

Research Questions

This study will seek to answer the following research questions:

- What are preschool teachers' beliefs related to the four dimensions of classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay?
- In what ways are the preschool teachers' beliefs consistent with their practices in relation to four dimensions of classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay?
- What are the reasons for chosen classroom practices of preschool teachers at selected preschools in Mandalay?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Based on the related literature, the theoretical framework for this study is established. Preschool teachers' beliefs and practices in this study were based on four dimensions of classroom management. They are: (1) Organization of Physical Environment, (2) Management of Planning and Programming Activities, (3) Management of Relationship and Communication, and (4) Management of Children's Behaviours.

In organization of physical environment, there are five sub-dimensions. They are (a) Indoor Space, (b) Outdoor Space, (c) Furniture, (d) Learning centers/areas, and (e) Child-related displays. In management of planning and programming activities, there are two sub-dimensions: (a) Daily Schedule, and (b) Teaching Methods. In management of relationship and communication, there are three sub-dimensions: (a) Supervision of Children, (b) Teacher-Child Interaction, and (c) Interactions among Children. In management of children's behaviours, there are two sub-dimensions: (a) Rules, and (b) Discipline. Based on this theoretical framework, this study was designed to investigate the preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to classroom management.

Definitions of Key Term

The term used throughout the current study are identified as below for clarity and understanding.

Classroom Management: Classroom management is the process by which teachers and schools set up and maintain appropriate behavior of students in classroom settings (Kratochwill, DeRoos, Blair, n.d). In this study, preschool teachers' classroom manyagement beliefs and practices were studied.

Preschool: Preschool is a school for children usually younger than those attending elementary school or kindergarten (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Preschool Teachers: Preschool teachers are teachers who are motivated by a desire to deliver a well-rounded curriculum that provides a solid foundation for primary school (Meier, 2018).

Teachers' Belief: Teacher belief is defined broadly as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught (Kagan, 1992, as cited in Sahin, 2013).

Operational Definitions

- **Preschool Teachers:** In the study, this refers to teachers who teach to 3 to 5-year- old children.

- **Public and Private Preschools:** In this study, public preschools refer to preschools that are opened under the Department of Social Welfare. Private preschools refer to preschools that teach children by using the international curriculum.

Review of Related Literature

Organizing of Physical Environment

The majority of children spend most of their time in a classroom. It is a place where they can learn different skills considered to be essential and proper for them to gain success in their global association (Hannah, 2013). The quality of the classroom climate is based on a variety of aspects and one of these is the physical aspect in the classroom. Physical features in the class should provide various teaching-learning strategies (Ahmad & Amirul, 2018). Therefore, colorful classroom is necessary for creating a sense of belonging (Read, 2007, as cited in Ahmand & Amirul, 2018), transmitting information (Dudek, 2000, as cited in Ahmad & Amirul, 2018), guiding a piece of spatial information (Acredolo, 1979, as cited in Ahmad & Amirul, 2018) and promoting collaborative behavior (Read et al., 1999, as cited in Ahmad & Amirul, 2018).

Organizing the desks as a circle around the class is the proper way to adjust the seating plan. This will be appropriate in small class sizes, but this method is often used for all types of classrooms. This kind of setup also allows performing good public speaking and class debate, so all students can become a member of the same group. Teachers need to create an environment where students feel welcome to share their views without fear of judgement by permitting students one's peaking to grab more own ideas (Ahmad & Amirul, 2018). Inadequate facilities and spatial equality directly influence teachers' motivation and obliquely influence children's education (Salleh, Kamaruzzaman & Mahyuddin, 2013, as cited in Ahmad & Shaari, 2016). Moreover, physical weakness obstructs children's development because it makes undesirable behavioral barriers, causing disengagement and absence of integration with their surroundings (Gurkaynak, 1996, as cited in Ahmad & Shaari, 2016).

Management of Planning and Programming Activities

In this study, management of planning and programming activities is focused on teaching methods and classroom design and routines. In child-centered approach, the teaching method is more effectual because it does not centralize the flow of knowledge from the instructor to the children (Lindquist, 1995, as cited in Ganyaupfu, 2013) and it inspires goal-oriented behaviour among students (Slavin, 1996, as cited in Ganyaupfu, 2013). Furthermore, traditional teacher-centered approach is based on selected activities and arranged by the instructor and there is a great emphasis on the development of basic academic skills in children (Pianta et al., 2002; Stipek, 2004, as cited in Celik & Acar, 2018). So, this approach is the least practical, more theoretical, and

memorizing (Toe & Wong, 2000, as cited in Ganyaupfu, 2013), therefore, this kind of teaching method could lead students to lose interest and understanding in their school activities (Ganyaupfu, 2013).

Moreover, children's learning and developmental processes include a variety of play activities. Learning must be associated with the curriculum and the real word in consequential paths while experiencing the outside world (Kindergarten Curriculum Guide, n.d). Teachers should prepare a variable daily schedule and a variety of teaching methods rather than focusing on a fixed one (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005, as cited in Sahin, 2013). Moreover, a classroom should have a teacher and an assistant who support children's play, working in the centers, monitoring children and encouraging supportive friendship behaviors. Outdoor play activities are also an opportunity to engage children in a passionate and expensive release of energy. Additionally, providing books in the outdoor climate is also crucial to ensure some quietness and calm activities are available for children who need a break from active play. Furthermore, a well-planned schedule can encourage children to be more actively participate in their play (Knopf & Welsh, 2010).

Management of Relationships and Communication

Mashburn et al. (2008, as cited in Early, Maxwell, Ponder & Pan, 2016) stated that educational support or the quality of teacher-child interactions particular to instruction was a more powerful predictor of children's academic outcomes at the end of preschool than structural characteristics of quality like teacher education, class size, teacher-student ratio and provision of comprehensive services. Next, the classroom emotional situation involves the moment-to-moment verbal and non-verbal conversation between teachers and individual or every child, and it is normally measured at the classroom level (Lippard, Parp & Rouse, 2017). Then, a well-organized classroom allows more positive relationships between teachers and students, decreasing the probability of challenging behaviors to happen (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 2003, as cited in Guardino & Fullerton, 2010).

In early childhood settings, teachers can utilize various kinds of strategies to children such as listening to them, making eye contact with them, participating in one-to-one or face-to-face interconnection with them, and establishing positive relationships with them. In the preschool classroom, teachers must construct mutual respect with children and adults by waiting for other children to ask questions completely and encouraging children to pay attention to others speeches. Children who only get insecure relationships with teachers had more hardship interrelating with peers and engaged in more quarrel with teachers (Ostroksy & Jung, n.d.).

Young children are extremely interested in peers (Singer, 2010). Playing with peers are vital for a child from the very start of their preschool life (Lojk, 2017). Children who do not have a friend in preschool were having difficulties dealing with peers at the age of 10 (Woodward & Fregusson, 2000, as cited in Lojk, 2017). Hence, teachers should create opportunities such as taking boys and girls together to communicate, cooperate, and learn with one another. It is important for children not only to feel welcome and accepted by everyone but also to gain a supportive positive classroom climate (Manaster & Jobe, 2012). Moreover, the parent-teacher partnership has been recognized as a crucial role in children's development (Pirchio, Tritrini, Passiatore, & Taeschner, 2013). Children will alter their knowledge and practice into the knowledge and skills which is necessary to exist in the society if they make peer cultures (Corsaro and Rizzo, 1988, as cited in Aschermann, 2001). Moreover, community participation is important and it would help in better understanding children and their families (Senapaty, 2018).

Management of Children's Behaviours

Classroom behaviour is one of the difficult matters that teachers are facing every day because more students come to school with more complicated behavioural problems than they were in the past years and teachers confront the challenges of managing their behaviours (Eleftheria, Kafenia & Eleni, 2013).

Rules and routines prohibit problematic behaviours by providing students with specific, appropriate behaviours to engage in (Colvin et al., 1993, as cited in Oliver, Wehby & Reschlym, 2011). Many students believe that if they do disruptive behaviours, they will get attention. So, children who want to get attention do not have to do bad things. To reduce disruptive behaviours, a teacher can organize a classroom where children can communicate with one another and stay focused on the content at that time. Thus, children can know their own desire while staying engaged in the curriculum and disruptive behaviours will go to a lesser extent (Hannah, 2013). Therefore, preschool teachers should construct understandable and simple rules, and provide the children with the chance of discussing the rules (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005, as cited in Sahin, 2013).

For the development of the children behaviour, discipline becomes a foundation because it is very effective to create a moral behaviour. So, discipline should be instilled at the early stage of children's lives because it may affect the moral development of children. Discipline directs the children to learn about good things which comes their preparedness for their adult lives later on (Rahayuningsih & Sholikan, 2016). Many teachers assume that a discipline is a punishment. But discipline and punishment are not the same. Punishment is controlling children's behaviour whereas discipline is meant to develop the behaviour of children, especially in matters of conduct (UNESCO, 2006). However, at the preschool stage, positive discipline is not permitting children to do whatever they desire because they do not have the autonomy to do their own decisions and they do not know which things are correct or wrong. For constructing positive classroom discipline, teachers should be a role model of appropriate behaviour (Jesenia & Paola, 2015).

Methodology

Research Method

Quantitative and qualitative research method (both observation and interview) were used in this study to explore preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to four dimensions of classroom management.

Population and Sample

As sample schools for the main study, three public preschools under the Department of Social Welfare and three international private preschools from Mandalay were selected. The sample schools were selected by using the cluster sampling method. Therefore, 38 preschool teachers participated in this study.

For qualitative study, two public preschools and two international private preschools among six selected preschools in Mandalay (highest mean scored preschools and lowest mean scored preschools) were selected to conduct observations and interviews. From selected preschools, six preschool teachers from selected public preschools and four preschool teachers from selected international private preschools were selected to conduct interviews and observations about their classroom management.

Data Collection Procedure

The set of questionnaires was developed by the researcher after reviewing the related literatures and doing pre-interviews. For content validity, the questionnaire was evaluated and revised by the panel of experts who were well-experienced in Educational Administration and Leadership. Based on their reviews, comments, and suggestion, the instruments were modified again. This panel included eight experts: a professor (Head of the Department of Educational Theory, Sagaing University of Education), four associate professors, three lecturers who were well-versed in the Educational Administration field. Based on their reviews, comments, and suggestion, the instruments were modified again.

To collect the required data from the selected public and international private preschools, the researcher had to get permission from the responsible person of the Department of Social Welfare, Mandalay. Pilot study was conducted with preschool teachers from one public and one international private preschool. After collecting the data, the researcher reviewed and revised items included in the questionnaire. The modified questionnaires were distributed to teachers from six preschools (three public preschools and three international private preschools) in Mandalay. A valid response rate was 100%. Finally, the obtained data were analyzed.

For qualitative study, all instruments were simultaneously reviewed by the panel of experts who were well-experienced in Educational Administration and Leadership for content validity. After analyzing the quantitative data, the qualitative data concerning with the preschool teachers' practices related to four dimensions of classroom management were collected.

(a) Observations: Firstly, the selected classrooms from selected preschools were observed by using observation checklists to examine the preschool teachers' practices related to four dimensions of classroom management. Before making classroom observations, two MEd candidates were requested to participate as observers in this study. They were offered observation checklists and instructed how to observe and record behaviours of teachers and children. All observers, the researcher and two MEd candidates observed the one classroom and compared the findings. It was found that above 90% of findings were consistent with each other. Then, observations were conducted by the researcher, and two MEd candidates in selected preschools. Only each classroom was observed in one day to study preschool teachers' practices about classroom management.

(b) Interviews: In the interview session, the participants were encouraged to describe their management practices in their classroom. Moreover, they were requested to present why they use those practices in their classroom clearly. Informal interviews were frequently conducted with teachers after making observations. The researcher wrote detailed notes during interviews or just after finishing each informal interview. The formal interviews were carried out by using the interview questions which consisted of 3 items. The data from formal interviews were recorded with the audio recorder.

Findings

The main purpose of this study is to examine the preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay. To study the preschool teachers' beliefs related to classroom management, forty five-point Likert-type items developed by researcher was used. The mean values of preschool teachers' beliefs related to four dimensions of classroom management are described in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean Values for Preschool Teachers' Beliefs Related to Four Dimensions of Classroom Management

Schools Dimensions	Public	Private
Physical Environment	**4.75**	**4.70**
Planning and Programming Activities	**4.63**	**4.80**
Relationships and Communication	**4.73**	**4.82**
Behaviour Management	**4.36**	**4.48**
Overall Teachers' Beliefs	**4.62**	**4.70**

Note: 1.00-2.33=low level   2.34-3.67=moderate level   3.68-5.00=high level

According to Table 1, all teachers from 6 preschools perceived that they had a high level of beliefs in four dimensions of classroom management. In other words, teachers from public preschools and international private preschools perceived that they had high levels of beliefs in "Physical Environment", "Planning and Programming Activities", "Relationships and Communication", and "Behaviour Management". Similarly, when studying the mean values for overall teachers' beliefs related to the four dimensions of classroom management between public and private schools, high levels of teachers' beliefs were found in two types of schools.

In order to analyze the differences in four dimensions of classroom management between public preschools and private preschools, independent samples *t*-test was calculated.

Table 2 Mean Values and   Independent   Samples *t*-Test Results of Preschool Teachers' Beliefs Related to Four Dimensions of Classroom Management

Dimensions	Schools	N	Mean	*t*	MD	*df*	P
Physical Environment	Public	17	4.75				
	Private	21	4.70	4.20	0.42	36	.472
Planning and Programming Activities	Public	17	4.63				
	Private	21	4.80	-1.533	-.175	36	.146
Relationships and Communication	Public	17	4.73				
	Private	21	4.82	-.791	.090	36	.456
Behaviour Management	Public	17	4.36				
	Private	21	4.48	-1.211	-.117	36	**.001**
Overall Teachers' Beliefs	Public	17	4.62				
	Private	21	4.70	4.20	0.42	36	.472

Note: 1.00-2.33=low level   2.34-3.67=moderate level   3.68-5.00=high level

According to findings shown in Table 2, there was a significant difference in perceptions of teachers on only one dimension, "Behaviour Management" between public preschools and private preschools. There was no significant difference in perceptions of teachers on the other three dimensions between public preschools and private preschools.

Table 3 Summary of Qualitative Research Findings for Preschool Teachers' Practices Related to Four Dimensions of Classroom Management

Public	Private
1. There was child-related furniture in the classrooms	
2. Not appropriate teacher-child ratio: 1:25	2. Appropriate teacher-child ratio: 1:4
3. Large outdoor playground	3. Small outdoor playground
4., Teach by using various kinds of age-appropriate teaching methods	
5. Not enough teaching aids	5. Enough teaching aids
6. Prepare lesson plans a month ago	6. Prepare lesson plans a week ago
7., There was a close relationship between teacher and children, and between peers	
8. Sometimes gave age-appropriate punishment to children if they broke the rules	
9. Give specific feedback to children for their performance	
10. The monthly schedule was schemed by the Department of Social Welfare	
11. Teach children to have good manners by using various kinds of methods	

Discussion and Conclusion

Analyses of quantitative and qualitative data collected from the study attempted to answer the three questions.

Research question 1 studied the preschool teachers' beliefs related to four dimensions of classroom management. When studying the preschool teachers' beliefs related to four dimensions of classroom management, it was found that all the mean values were above 3.68. This means that all preschool teachers from selected schools had high levels of beliefs related to four areas of classroom management. In order to analyze the differences in four dimensions of classroom management between public preschools and private preschools, there was a significant difference in perceptions of teachers on only one dimension, "Behaviour Management" between public preschools and private preschools. There was no significant difference in perceptions of teachers on the other three dimensions between public preschools and private preschools.

Research question 2 studied the ways the preschool teachers' beliefs consistent with their practices in relation to four dimensions of classroom management at selected preschools in Mandalay. According to the results of a qualitative study (observations and interviews), it was found that preschool teachers' beliefs and practices are consistent in three dimensions "Management of Planning and Programming Activities, Management of Relationships and Communication, and Management of Children's Behaviours." However, their beliefs concerning "Organizing Physical Environment" dimension were high in quantitative findings, their actual practices are not as high as their beliefs because of the characteristics of their schools such as insufficient movement area, high class size and some deficiencies related to learning areas.

To sum up, according to both the quantitative and qualitative research findings, it could be concluded that preschool teachers' beliefs and practices are not consistent in some dimensions. Moreover, public preschool teachers' practices have also differed from those of private preschool teachers depending on the organization of physical environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of our study, some recommendations for responsible persons under the Department of Social Welfare, parents and teachers are presented as follows:

More teachers should be employed in public preschools by the Government and training courses or refresher courses concerning early childhood education and classroom management for teachers should be arranged. Age-appropriate teaching aids should also be provided for public

preschools. Similarly, the teacher-child ratio should be optimal in order to ensure that children get all the care and attention that they need from the teachers.

Parents should study about early childhood education. They should make contact with teachers every day to know about their children's daily routines in schools if possible. They should also cooperate with schools to manage their children's inappropriate behaviours. Again, they should use gentle and polite words in front of their children and try not to use rude words and act bad behaviour in front of their children. They should observe their children's behaviours in order to know about them completely. In addition, they should participate actively in school meetings and workshops.

Teachers should learn about classroom management for preschool children and early childhood education to improve their professional development. They should attend professional development programs such as ECCD programs or workshops. They should cooperate with parents to manage students' behaviours. They also should explain to parents about early childhood education and give advice on them how to behave in front of their children.

This study was conducted with a small sample size. It is not enough to represent the overall determents of preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to classroom management. Hence, further research needs to be conducted with a larger sample size in order to broaden the generalizability of the results.

Acknowledgement

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