

**A Study of the Opinions Toward Self and Task Performance in Childcare Centers
As Perceived by Caregivers Under Local Administrative Organization**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the opinions toward self and task performance in childcare centers as perceived by caregivers under Local Administrative Organization in 4 areas which were: characteristics of caregivers; task performance of caregivers; objectives of care giving and educating young children; and problems and obstacles in working. Samples were 885 caregivers from 74 provinces in 4 parts of the country. The research instrument was a set of questionnaire consisted of 5 sections which was constructed on the research framework. The data were analyzed by using frequency, percentage, mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D.). The meaning of 5 rating scale was identified and all analyzed data were presented in tables with description.

The research findings were as follows: The most caregivers (98.6%) were female. The highest level of education (40.8%) were Bachelor's Degree in Education, 94.7% had knowledge – based in early childhood education, by attending the in – service training program (89.9%). The most caregivers were 34 years old on average, there were approximately 30 children in each class, 91% decided to work at the present childcare centers because their houses were closed to the childcare centers.

Characteristics of caregivers. The caregivers perceived that their personality, teaching preparation, method of teaching, and human relations were in the high level. The evaluation after teaching was only one item which was in the middle level.

Task performance of caregivers. All activities operated were in the high level, 3 items in the highest level: taking care of children while having lunch / drinking milk, taking a nap and playing in the play ground. There were 5 items in the middle level which were: doing school – based curriculum, cooking, planting; raising animals and parent – orientation during the school year. For the activities did not operate; the highest level 48.2% were raising animals and doing school – based curriculum (45.8%)

Objectives of care giving and educating young children. The most frequency were 5 items: whole child development in physical, mental, emotional, social and intellectual (19.27%); promoting morality and ethics (13.20%), children could taking care of themselves during daily activities

(12.81%), helping parents who work during the day (12.41%) and developing children in the community (9.58%)

The problems and obstacles in working. All items were in the middle level. The highest mean score went to the shortage of budget and not applicable building ($\bar{X}=3.28$, S.D. = 1.38). The lowest ranking problem was pollution ($\bar{X}=1.20$, S.D. = 1.17).

Key Words: Task Performance, Caregivers, Childcare Centers, Local Administrative Organization

Introduction

When The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) was launched and enacted on 20 August 1999 as the first education law in Thailand, it alerted and made widespread movement led to education reform among organizations and stakeholders in education circle. Several sections of this Educational Act emphasizes the importance of preschool education (Kate et.al, 2006).

The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and Amendments (Second National Education Act B.E. 2545 (2002)) stated in Section 4 that “Basic education means education provided before the level of higher education”, which included early childhood education. Also this section stated that the “educational institute” means “early childhood development institutions, schools, learning centers, colleges, institutes, universities, educational agencies, or other state or private bodies with powers and duties or aims of providing education. Section 18 stated that “Early childhood and basic education shall be provided in the following institutions:

(1) Early childhood development institutions, namely: childcare centers; child development center; preschool child development centers of religious institutions; initial care centers for disabled children or those with special needs, or early childhood development centers under other names.

(2) Schools, namely: state schools, private schools, and those under jurisdiction of Buddhist, or other religious institutions.

(3) Learning centers, namely: those organized by non-formal education agencies; individuals; families; communities; community organizations; local administration organizations; private organizations; professional bodies; religious institutions; enterprises; hospitals; medical institutions; welfare institutes; and other social institutions.

For the education provision, as appears in Chapter 1 General Provisions: Objectives and Principle, Section 6, it stated that “Education shall aim at the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: Physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people.” Chapter 4, Section 22 National Education Guidelines stated that “Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being most important. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potentiality.” And Section 29 stated that “Educational institutions in co-operation with individuals, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, private persons, private organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, enterprises, and other social institutions shall contribute to strengthening the communities by encouraging learning in the

communities themselves. Thus communities will be capable of providing education and training; searching for knowledge, data, and information; and be able to benefit from local wisdom and other sources of learning for community development in keeping with their requirements and needs; and identification of ways of promoting exchanges of development experience among communities.”

Chapter 5, Educational Administration and Management, part 2 Educational Administration and Management by Local Administration Organizations, Section 41 stated that “Local Administration Organizations shall have the right to provide education at any or all levels of education in accord with readiness, suitability and requirements of the local areas. And Section 42 stated that “The Ministry shall prescribe the criteria and procedures for assessing the readiness of the local administration organizations to provide education. The Ministry shall be responsible for co-ordination and promotion of the local administration organizations’ capability to provide education in line with the policies and standards required. It shall also advise on the budgetary allocations for education provided by local administration organizations.”

Parts of details from the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) as mentioned above had clearly certified the significance and importance of the preschool education. Consequently, all organizations concerning education provision at this level were stimulated to systematically reform education in congruent with the descriptions stated in Section 6, 22, 29, and other sections concerning this areas. Although there were several organizations taking responsibility in providing preschool education, one of the most crucial organization in charge is the Local Administrative Organization. This organization is divided in to 4 main administrative sections i.e. the Provincial Administration Organization, the Municipal Administration Organization, the Tumbol Administration Organization, and the Special Local Administration of Bangkok and Pattaya.

Jamornmarn and Bulphat (2001) had studied the system, mechanic effectiveness, and efficiency of 149 public and private childcare centers and found out that the main policies and objectives of all those childcare centers were to (1) promote children’s readiness, (2) share responsibilities in childcare with the parents, and (3) enhance child development. Regarding the instruction, kindergarten schools manage the instruction based on the curriculum of The Office of Primary Education Committee and the curriculum of The Office of Private Education Committee. The task performance was mainly evaluated by using observation; and children’s problems were solved in cooperation with their parents. Main problems and obstacles were the lack of teaching materials. The amount of teachers and caregivers were enough but their qualification was ineffective because some of them had no degree in childcare study and had problems in cooperation with communities.

Most of caregivers in centers under jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization had no degree in preschool education and some of them had educational certification lower than bachelor's degree. Consequently, organizations in charge with this area had conscience on their main responsibility in developing professional qualification of those preschool children's caregivers. Therefore, the training programs and workshops for professional development have been set annually all over the country since The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) was enacted and implemented heading towards the whole-system education reform.

As regards the duties of caregivers in caring and educating preschool children they needed to understand the objectives of preschool education for children at the ages of 3-5, had knowledge in child development according to their ages and individual differences, understand the approaches of education management for pre-school children and be able to synthesized all their knowledge in education and core curriculum to develop school curriculum in congruent with the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999). Also they should be able to implement this developed school curriculum in order to set learning principles, manage learning experience, set activities enhancing child development, take care of children, evaluate children's learning development, and work cooperatively with children, other teachers, and parents to develop children as set in the objectives. To achieve all those professional qualification, caregivers must have good personality and human relation to work with others, be well-prepared in teaching and have appropriate teaching method suited to their working contexts.

The information reviewed from aspects of educational act combined with the responsibility childcare of the caregivers especially in their duties of pre-school childcare and education, and the research finding of Jamormmarn and Bhulpat (2001) gaining from administrators had raised the interest of researcher to study child caregivers' self-concept and self-efficacy of their performances in childcare centers under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization. The assumption of this investigate was that if the perspectives of child caregivers and administrators were congruent, the finding gained from this study will be fruitful and beneficial for organizations in charge to use to set pre-school education and professional development policies and plans in the future.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research was to investigate opinions toward self and task performance in childcare centers as perceived by caregivers under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization.

Research Procedures

1. The population of this study was 4,147 caregivers in child development centers under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization from 74 provinces in 4 regions of Thailand i.e. the North, the Center, the Northeastern, and the South. These caregivers had joined 12 training programs/workshops organized by the Local Administrative Organization in 2006.

2. The samples were 885 caregivers in the child development centers under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization from 74 provinces in 4 regions of Thailand i.e. the North, the Center, the Northeastern, and the South. Taro Yamane's reference table was used at the reliable level of 95%.

3. The research instrument was a set of questionnaire inquiring caregivers' self-concept and self-efficacy of their performance in childcare centers. The questionnaire was composed of 5 parts as followed:

Part 1: the demographic information of the sample i.e. sex, religion, age, education level, basic knowledge and its resources in pre-school education, recent position title, organizations, duration of working practice, number of children under their responsibility and reasons why working in childcare centers.

Part 2: the 5 Likert scale self-characteristics evaluation form i.e. personality, teaching preparation, teaching methods and human relations.

Part 3: the 5 Likert scale self-efficacy on working performance.

Part 4: the 15 items of rating scales analysis form of objectives of giving childcare and education to children in childcare centers.

Part 5: the 5 Likert scale problems and obstacles of childcare practices.

4. The data collecting: the questionnaires were distributed to all caregivers by hands of researchers and then collected them back directly while samples were in training programs/workshop. Then all questionnaires were stratified by regions and provinces. 885 of them were randomly sampled and the data gained from them were then analyzed.

5. The data analysis and presentation: the data were analyzed by using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The data were presented in form of tables and descriptions.

Research finding

The finding of this study on opinions toward self and task performance in childcare centers as perceived by caregivers under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization were as follow:

Part 1: The demographic information showed that 98.6% of caregivers were female, 91.6% were Buddhist, 40.8% had Bachelor degree, 94.7% had basic knowledge in early childhood education, 89.9% gained knowledge from training courses and 74.4% had position title as caregivers. The average age of caregivers was 34 years old, average working years in the preschool education area were 7 years and average years of working in childcare centers was 6 years. The average numbers of children in childcare centers were 71 persons and average numbers of children per class were 30 children. 91% of caregivers stated that they work in the childcare centers because the workplace was near their homes, 59.1% viewed childcare centers as a good place of child-inculcating. 58.1% of them views that the concerns of parents on their children were good and 77% planed to choose their workplace for their children education.

Part 2: The data on self-characteristics evaluation showed that most caregivers rated their characteristics, teaching preparation, teaching approaches and human relationship at the high level while the evaluation task was rated at the middle level.

Part 3: The data about task performance of caregivers showed that the activities they mostly performed were taking care children at the time of eating or drinking milk, sleeping and playing in the play ground. And there were 5 tasks that they performed in the middle level, which were developing school curriculum, cooking foods, growing plants, looked after pets and giving orientation to parents during school year. The activities that they hardly performed were pets' cares (42.8%) and school curriculum development (45.8%)

Part 4: The data on objectives of care giving and educating young children in childcare centers showed that the first 5 priorities were: 1) whole-child development in physical, mental, emotional, social and intellectual (19.27%); 2) promoting morality and ethics (13.20%); 3) children could taking care of themselves during daily activities (12.81%); 4) helping parents who work during the day (12.41%) and; 5) developing children in the community (9.58%).

Part 5: The data about problems and obstacles in childcare practices showed that the problems as a whole in the childcare centers were at the middle level. The highest mean score went to the shortage of budget and not applicable building ($\bar{X} = 3.28$, S.D. = 1.38). The lowest ranking problem was pollution ($\bar{X} = 1.20$, S.D. = 1.17).

Research Discussion

When caregiver's self-concept and self-efficacy could be blew cover, they realize the identities and natures of the caregiver work and develop readiness in work of themselves. From the finding of this study, the topics worth taken to discuss were as followed:

1. Most caregivers were female. Considering female as the representative of motherhood, it was rather appropriate to have female caregivers for they were warmth and secure to the children. However, considering on having appropriate gender-role model, male caregivers should be appropriate for the boys and female caregivers for girls. Therefore, both male and female caregivers should be employed to do daily activities in classroom or extra activities for children. Consequently, children could learn form adult role model according to their genders in terms of physical, verbal, mental, emotional, and aesthetical. (Chaiteeranuwatsiri, 2000)

2. The average numbers of children per class were 30 persons, which were too many for 1 adult to look after. For children at the age between 3-5 years old care, the appropriate proportion of children per adult is 1:10 (Decker and Decker, 2001). The organizations concerning childcare needed to take responsibility in this problem for the benefit of children as stated in The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999), section 10 that "...Education for the disabled in the second paragraph shall be provided free of charge at birth or at first diagnosis. These persons shall have the right to access the facilities, media, services, and other forms of educational aid in conformity with the criteria and procedures stipulated in the ministerial regulations..." According to those description stated in section 10, childcare centers had to have disable children learn in classroom inclusively according to the centers' efficiency. This means that the proportion of children per adult in classroom has to be set appropriate for each group of children will be cared equally.

3. The caregiver's characteristics as a whole were rated at high level. 4 sub-characteristics were rated at the highest level. There were 3 tasks they mostly performed as caregivers. The 7 items of caregivers' self-concept shown that their ethics and principles were high and suited to Thai social context, therefore, they can be role model for children. Also they can give warmly and securely cares to children. For their characteristics and task performance, the objectives of child care were attainable. This was in accordance with the National Educational Act, Part 1, Section 6 stated that "Education shall aim at the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people." Also the characteristics of the caregivers found in this research were congruent with those stated by Feeney and Christensen (1979), Elicker and Fortner-Wood (1995) and Watson (1998).

4. One of caregiver's characteristics was rated at middle level, which was having child appraisal regularly. 5 tasks performances were rated at medium level, which were developing school curriculum, cooking foods, growing plants, looked after pets and giving orientation to parents during the school year. The finding was congruent with other research results. School curriculum development was the most important task among those responsibilities. Educational institutions had to develop school curriculum as a guideline for caregivers in learning activities preparation for children. Information on teaching evaluation was necessary for caregivers in recognizing children development. Also this information can be used to plan and adjust their work to suit children's needs and used as information reported to parents.

The orientation for parents and guardians during school year was a good channel for centers to give information to parents and guardians and ask for their cooperation in childcare and child development. Also it was a good communication channel for parents and caregivers. These were congruent with the "National Education Guidelines" stated in Chapter 4, section 22, 23, 24 and 26 of The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999).

5. The data on objectives of care giving and educating young children in childcare centers showed that the first 3 priorities were: 1) giving whole-child development in physical, mental, emotional, social and intellectual development, 2) promoting morality and ethics, 3) encouraging children to do their daily activities on their own. This finding was congruent with the universal objectives of preschool education and The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999).

The other 2 objectives which were helping parents who work during the day and developing children in the community were also congruent with the objectives of the foundation of childcare center and child development center (Jamornmarn and Bhulpat, and The Department of Local Organization, 2004).

6. For the finding on problems and obstacles, the highest ranking problem were inadequate budget and unsuitable building, which were general problems for all agency, especially the inadequate budget. In case of unsuitable building, many childcare centers had to use classrooms in other schools while waiting for their own buildings. However the lowest ranking problem was pollution. This finding may be satisfied by stake-holders because it meant that childcare centers environment did not cause any effect to caregivers performances, also good environment brought good health and emotion to the children which then led to children's learning development.

Policy Recommendation

The findings of this study led to 7 recommendations for developing preschool education in childcare centers under the supervision of the Local Administrative Organization, as follows:

1. Since most caregivers were female, a campaign should be made to encourage male (good characteristics and personality) to work as caregivers in order to provide appropriate gender role models to boys.

2. Service training programs should be held annually, at least 20 hours per year, to develop caregivers and stakeholders in preschool education knowledge and skills. The training course/workshop will enable them to work with normal and special preschool children. The programs can be done by local, provincial, regional, or national agencies, in addition to giving permission to the caregivers to continue their education.

3. Government sectors should support good practice childcare centers to develop their administration and education management until they can be best practice childcare centers. Consequently, administrators, caregivers and all stakeholders can benchmark their performance and working procedure with those best practice childcare centers. Also the network of best practice centers should be set, then other centers can learn and receive amicable supervision in both teaching and working procedure from best practice centers in their regions.

4. School curriculum should be made and developed together with guidelines for providing children's learning experiences that suit the local context and be congruent with preschool education's objectives that aim at the full development of children in all aspects in accord with their competencies under the concerns on their individual capabilities and differences in order to raise them to become good citizens of their society.

5. The learning-facilitated environment and standard of learning building should be taken into account when establishing childcare centers and preparing the learning environment. Proper spaces should be provided for making both indoor and outdoor activities. Also the appropriate proportion of caregiver per children should be provided at the international standard level.

6. Parents and community cooperation should be encouraged in the childcare centers management. This can be done in the form of administration boards, special instructors or volunteer caregivers. Parents will understand the procedures of childcare correctly, and then can give support to serve the needs of childcare centers. In addition, public relations in various forms should be made to bring more cooperative working in preschool education from the local community.

7. Responsibility sharing plan among organizations under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization should be made clearly that which institute is in charge of 3-5 years old children care and education development. Then each institution in charge can set their working system to run their job according to their responsibilities of giving supervisions, developing staffs, and give supporting without work overlap between other offices.

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