



GLOBAL READINESS AMONG PRESCHOOLS CHILDREN IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

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One of the most important tasks of educationists from preschool centers in Malaysia is to prepare the young child for global readiness. This study involved (N=529) preschool children in Malaysia. The main objective was to gauge the level of global readiness of children aged (5-6 years old) according to several dimensions of global readiness namely (a) diversity and multiculturalism (b) use of ICT (c) communication and multiple language ability (d) problem solving and (e) environmental awareness. Responses to the Global Readiness Scales were recorded and analyzed using One Way ANOVA. The main findings indicated that (a) a generally high level of global readiness in diversity dimension (b) high level of global readiness was found in usage of ICT and problem solving dimension (c) moderate level of global readiness were found on communication and environmental awareness (d) all types of preschool scored high level of global readiness except in Islamic based preschool which scored moderate (e) significance differences were found according to the types of preschools in all dimensions except cause and effect. The findings suggest that (a) there is need to conduct qualitative study on the implementation of global readiness in the preschool centers (b) there is the need to develop global readiness curriculum modules to be integrated effectively in teacher training (c) a cross-cultural comparative study should be conducted across preschools at the regional and international level to gain wider perspective on the implementation of global readiness.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of the few studies which studied the effect of early childhood education on the global readiness of preschool children in Malaysia. Hopefully this study will create greater awareness among curriculum developers on global readiness as well as enhance teacher's knowledge and competencies on global readiness.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia elementary school readiness is an important social and educational agenda (Rohaty, 2013; Malaysian Education Development Plan, 2013-2025) Early childhood Education or preschool for the children aged 4 to 6 years old have been recognized as the vehicle to prepare a child to Year One of the elementary school. Early Childhood care and Education has been prioritized and seen as the antidote against poverty and as a mean to climb up the social ladder. The Malaysian government stressed upon the need to give quality early childhood care and education to ensure that the positive impact of preschool education is obtained. Thus the Malaysian government has since 1980s developed the National Standard Preschool Education Curriculum (2017) that favored the total and balanced development of the young child. Such balanced development can be seen cognitively, socially, physically,

emotionally, spiritually and creatively. Such all-round development has been acclaimed to give the head start for kids to enter Year One. Although the National Standard Preschool Curriculum has been stated to be favoring the holistic development of the child, due to the emergence of globalization and advance in ICT there is the urgent need to redefine school readiness and add input to total development of the child who is facing the demands of the 21st century. This necessitates looking into the implementation of global readiness (Carnoy, 1999). This is to ensure that the future generations have the skills to adapt and adjust to the ever-changing scenario globally. The need to develop global players in the long term begins at the early years. Educators stated the need to achieve progress which is consonant with the revolving world (Kate and Cuthbert, 2014). What then should be the missing link to help children adjust effectively in meeting the demands of the 21st century? The preschool years are the foundation years which need to be optimized to prepare the young child to be the future global players (David, 2010). Global readiness which has been more popularly recognized at the tertiary level involving college or university students now will be center stage at the early childhood level

Several important aspirations were mentioned in the MEDP (2013-2025) namely, the need for quality education at both local and international level, the need to acquire additional language efficiency and the need to integrate ICT to improve quality in learning, multicultural awareness which depict aspirations for global readiness. These aspirations have also been reiterated in the NSPEC (2017). Truly these aspirations indeed prepare the young child to become the 21st century global players as the playing field is no longer restricted to the geographical boundaries of a certain country. The need for inter-connectedness in the new world demands knowledge of global readiness which encompasses multicultural differences, technology, competency, thinking skills environmental awareness and emotional intelligence (Puchta, 2012). Multiculturalism has often been expressed in the anti-bias curriculum. Banks (1994); Derman-Sparks (1989). The most important question is whether preschool children have the knowledge of global readiness and at what level? Subsequently do they have the competencies to be future global players?

School readiness is a critical component of success in the elementary school years of a child's life. The preschool years form the basis of further child success and development. Quantitative meta analyses showed that preschool enhanced child development cognitively, socially, physically, morally and emotionally (Schweinhart *et al.*, 1993). Studies showed both short term and long term positive effects of early childhood education. Since early childhood education is of critical importance therefore there is the ever pressing need to provide quality education for preschool children. Understanding of child development have since changed considerably in terms of the child's developmental domains and school readiness. With emerging 21st century skills the curriculum set for the young child has to be addressed accordingly. Thus in addition to the traditional curriculum which encompasses the physical, social, emotional, moral, and creativity dimensions there is needed the component of global readiness (Rohaty, 2013; Rohaty and Hamidah, 2014). The twentieth century skills has been mentioned to be including (a) resilience (b) ICT and communication skills (c) thinking skills (Beyer, 1984) (d) teambuilding skills (e) Curiosity (f) and creativity. The importance of global readiness can be understood in terms of the expanding borderless villages, the great usage of ICT and the overwhelming communications that have shaped the world, which becomes more interactive and interdependent in nature.

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- a. To gauge the level of global readiness of children (4-6 years of age) according to several global readiness dimensions.
- b. To gauge whether significant differences in global readiness levels are found according to types of preschool children attended.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample of Study

The target population of the study included all preschoolers enrolled in approximately 800 preschool centers in Malaysia. This research is a descriptive study involving (N=529) preschoolers in Malaysia. The preschoolers were stratified according to the types of preschools which are both government based as well as private sector preschools, namely (a) Ministry of Education (MOE) (b) KEMAS (Ministry of Rural and Community Development) (c) Ministry of National Unity (Perpaduan) (d) Private sector preschools (e) Jabatan Agama Islam (religious preschools). These government agencies and private sector preschools form the largest providers servicing 910,378 preschoolers. Stratified random sampling is chosen because the preschool centers have different service providers with different curriculum orientation and different priorities (Creswell, 1994). The private sector preschools especially in the urban areas stress on literacy skills reading, writing and arithmetic and reasoning while the government agencies preschools focus on total child development as advocated in the National Malaysian Standard Preschool Curriculum.

2.1 Instrument used for the study

The instrument used for this study was essentially the Global Readiness Scale (GRS). The GRS has been developed by experts, teachers and researchers who have both professional training and practical experiences in early childhood education. The battery of tests of the GRS encompasses dimensions such as (a) Diversity and multiculturalism (b) Communication and multiple language ability (c) Usage of ICT (d) Problem solving skills (e) Environmental awareness. Earlier a focus group discussion was conducted with the above relevant resource persons to discuss on the components of global readiness. The theoretical perspective and sources of constructs or dimensions for the GRS (Global Readiness Scales) were obtained from several sources namely (a) the literature on global readiness (b) the National Standard Preschool Curriculum of Malaysia (c) The MEDP (2013-2025) (d) Experts and practicing teachers opinion and the (e) Developmentally Appropriate Practices as propagated by (NAEYC). Diversity and multiculturalism refers to the differences and similarities among people with different religions languages and cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1999). It points to how differentiated people and society really are. Understanding multiculturalism is considered important for peace and harmony in the world (Robinson and Jones, 2006). Communication skills and the ability to speak in more than two languages is the gateway to understand the globalized world (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 1997a). Multiple language abilities would mean the opportunity to live and work in other parts of the world other than ones' own country and culture. Usage of ICT is rampant in this era and generation alpha is particularly adept at using ICT gadgets (Knapp and Glenn, 1996). It is a vehicle for communication around the world to locate knowledge of other countries as well as gauge happenings and world event. Creative usage of ICT gadgets enable innovativeness amongst youngsters (Rohaty and Julianty, 2014). In order to ensure positive cognitive development thinking skills are required such as critical and creative thinking abilities. Finally the issue of environmental awareness is a globalized phenomenon. Young children should know the causes and consequences of natural hazards occurring in other parts of the world

The items on the GRS were used to collect information on young children's' knowledge of aspects or dimensions of global readiness. Each dimension of GRS consists of several items. Each item is measured by either a YES or No answer as the question seeks to verify whether the child knows the correct answer or not through verbal interactions or prompts with the teacher or enumerator.

The Global Readiness Scale has both English and Bahasa Malaysia versions to accommodate both government agencies whose medium of instruction are basically Bahasa Malaysia and private sector preschools where the medium of instruction is mostly in English. To ensure the translation is viable the processes of back to back translation was used. The booklets derived were developed using simple language easily understood by preschoolers.

The GRS was tested with a sample of 30 preschoolers for each version. Reliability coefficients for the GRS established for the Bahasa Malaysia version was (.80) and for the English version was (0.78) Based upon the reliability estimates and expert validation the GRS seemed to have the desired reliability

2.2. Data Collection

The Global Readiness Scales were tested among preschoolers in the classroom with the guidance of the preschool teachers. Permission from the Ministry of Education, Department of National Unity, Ministry of Rural and Community Development and the Private Sector Section of MOE were obtained. Teachers were selected because they know the children well and the children are more comfortable with them. This arrangement is to ensure test anxiety of young children was kept to a minimum during the testing sessions (Mukherji and Albon, 2010). The tests were carried out both individually and in small groups of six children. The preschool teachers received (a) both written instructions through mail as well as(b) verbal clarifications through the phone on the procedures and ethics to be followed in administering the tests. Additionally, a video describing the tests and procedures for testing was forwarded to the respective teacher in charge of the preschool centers specified. Testing ethics and procedures include recognizing the child's mood, following the warm up sessions, supporting and prompting the child throughout the tests. Responses to the items were recorded on the GRS booklets by the preschoolers and transferred to the Response Summary Sheets by the teachers with the accompanying scores for each item and total scores for the dimensions. The scale of global Readiness was derived by interpreting the scores and the intervals needed to describe (a) high (b)(moderate) and (c) low-level of readiness

2.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the result sheets were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 23. ANOVA was used for the statistical analysis with $p < 0.05$. the levels of global readiness were as follows;

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Table-1. The Level of Global Readiness among Preschoolers in Malaysia.

Types of Preschool	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Status
Prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM)/(Ministry of Education (MOE) Preschools)	191	69	20.74316	1.50092	High
Tabika KEMAS (Ministry of Rural Development Preschools)	55	79	19.95131	2.69023	High
TABIKA PERPADUAN (Department of National Unity Preschools)	179	66	27.22865	2.03516	High
Tadika Swasta (Private Sector Preschools)	57	71	26.46582	3.50548	High
Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri (State Religious based Preschools)	47	57	20.27945	2.95806	Moderate
TOTAL	529	68	24.11591	1.04852	High

Table 1 indicates that five types of preschools in Malaysia. Four out of the five types of preschools scored high level of global readiness except in Islamic based preschools which scored moderate. KEMAS preschool children scored the highest ($X=79$) followed by private sector preschool ($X=71$), MOE ($X=69$), PERPADUAN ($X=66$) and Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam ($X=57$).

Generally, a high level of global readiness was found (Table 1) because most probably the concept of global readiness was indirectly integrated in the dimensions of preschool curriculum such as in communication, early science and mathematics. This is especially probable because the National Preschool Standard Curriculum which is recommended by the Ministry of Education to be used in all types of preschools contains elements even if not in totality of global readiness. Although the topic of global readiness is not particularly stated as a definite component

educators such as preschool teachers are probably more aware of the demands for education related to 21st century skills and they regard global readiness skills as desirable to become potential global players. Additionally, through workshops and the messages given by social media such as TV shows stress on Global Readiness.

Table-2. The Mean Scores for Global Readiness among different types of Preschool.

Types of Preschool	Diversity Multiculturalism	Communication	Usage Of ICT	Problem Solving skills	Environmental Awareness
Prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM)/ Ministry of Education (MOE) Preschool	76	63	70	80	59
Tabika KEMAS (Ministry of Rural Development Preschools)	95	31	91	89	74
Tabika Perpaduan (Department of National Unity Preschools)	78	44	76	77	56
Tadika Sektor Swasta (Private Sector Preschools)	87	82	88	75	49
Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri (State Religious Based Preschools)	82	34	34	80	40
TOTAL	80	53	73	79	57

Table 2 shows that a very high level of global readiness occurs in the dimension of diversity and multiculturalism with Tadika KEMAS leading ($\bar{x} = 95$). Generally, global readiness in this dimension is found in all types preschools. The private sector preschool children attained the **highest** in communication and multiple language ability ($\bar{x}=82$) with low level of readiness among preschoolers of Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam ($\bar{x} = 34$) and children of Tabika KEMAS ($\bar{x} = 31$).

For the dimension usage of ICT, preschoolers of Tabika KEMAS achieved a very high level of global readiness ($\bar{x} = 91$) followed by private sector preschoolers ($\bar{x} = 88$) and the lowest amongst preschoolers of Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam ($\bar{x} = 34$). For problem solving skills, a high to very high level were found with MOE preschool ($\bar{x} = 80$), Tabika KEMAS ($\bar{x} = 89$) and Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam ($\bar{x} = 80$). For the environmental awareness a moderate to high level of global readiness was found with high mean for Tabika KEMAS ($\bar{x} = 74$) and the lowest mean ($\bar{x} = 40$) for Tabika Jabatan Agama Islam.

Related to global readiness dimensions (Table 2) the high level of readiness found in diversity and multiculturalism can be attributed to the fact that such dimension is integrated in the KPSK (NSPEC, 2017) of the Ministry of Education. In fact, the National Unity Department has designed multicultural activities to promote national unity and solidarity. This include topics embedded in the curriculum such as ethnic festivals, customs, religion and languages. However, the balance of three ethnic groups is slowly eroding at the National Unity preschool centers' which explain the lower mean of national unity preschoolers. Noticeably the efforts of the government at stressing multiracial unity and integrity in Malaysia has been implemented since independence taking into account the multi-ethnic background of the population in Malaysia which include the Malays, Chinese,

Indians and other minorities such as immigrants. Malaysia can be regarded as a model of national unity and solidarity in the world today.

The highest level of global readiness in the dimension of communication and multiple language ability for the private sector preschoolers can be explained by the fact that private sector preschoolers learnt more than just Bahasa Malaysia and English. Being either Chinese or Indians or even Malays in rich urban preschool centers would mean they know their own mother tongue plus two other languages. The trend today is that parents want to ensure that their children know multiple languages to survive the demands of the global world.

The high to very high level of global readiness in the usage of ICT among all preschools except Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam can be attributed to advanced and popularity of ICT gadget among children in Malaysia. Modern parenting styles include giving their kids accessibility to handphones and desktops and iPads. These generation Alpha children are becoming more conscious and adept at using ICT gadgets. The latter is the window to the international scenario to the world without boundaries. The high level of global readiness on problem solving skills can be attributed to the fact that preschools integrate elements of such dimension through the early science and mathematics curriculum. Scientific inquiry is much addressed in early science curriculum through the study of plants, animals, cooking, experimenting with colors, waterplay and Lego design reinforced through field visits and projects involving higher order thinking skills popularly known as HOTS.

The environmental awareness dimension generally has lower scores ($X=57$) compared to all the other dimensions except communication and multiple language ability ($x=53$) which has the lowest score. This can be attributed to the lack of consciousness of preschoolers to the environmental issues both near and far. Preschoolers in Malaysia most probably have not been oriented to whatever calamities that happen in other countries such as earthquakes in Japan or tsunami in Sri Lanka or even cyclones for although they have smartphones, but the latter are being used for participating in games or listening to their favorite songs or watching their favorite Aesop Fables stories. As for environmental protection such as ensuring a cleaner physical environment in the preschool center or neighborhood in which they live, they may be less directed to participate towards a clean environment. Unlike Japanese preschool centers, which emphasize kids' discipline in cleaning the preschool centers, the Malaysian preschool parent does not like such culture or discipline imposed at the preschool center. Except for the international preschools in Malaysia which emphasize the occurrence of international disasters, the preschoolers here most probably do not learn about natural hazards in other parts of the world.

Table-3. One-way ANOVA Indicating Differences in Global Readiness Dimensions between Types of Preschool.

Dimensions		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Diversity and Multiculturalism	Between Groups	4	4908.633	5.977	.000
	Within Groups	524	821.308		
	Total	528			
Communication and Multiple Language Ability	Between Groups	4	32378.922	14.269	.000
	Within Groups	524	2269.103		
	Total	528			
Usage of ICT	Between Groups	4	26112.821	14.572	.000
	Within Groups	524	1791.964		
	Total	528			
Problem Solving Skills	Between Groups	4	1754.720	1.645	.161
	Within Groups	524	1066.455		
	Total	528			
Environmental awareness	Between Groups	4	8415.831	5.277	.000
	Within Groups	524	1594.800		
	Total	528			

Table 3 shows One-way ANOVA based on the differences between types of preschools and the five dimensions specified earlier. Significance differences were found on all dimensions except the dimension of *problem solving skills*. The Tukey pairwise comparisons was initiated to determine the greatest differences between which particular pairs in the sample involved.

With regard to differences in dimensions between types of preschools (Table 3) the only dimension which has no significant differences is on problem solving skills. This may probably be due to such skills being taught in all types of preschools.

Table-4. The Tukey Table of Types of Preschool and Global Readiness Dimensions

Dependent Variable	(I) Type_of_Kindergarten	(J) Type_of_Kindergarten	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Diversity and Multiculturalism	TABIKA KEMAS (Department of Rural Development)	Prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM)/ Ministry of Education (MOE) Preschool	19.53832*	.000
	TABIKA PERPADUAN (Department of National Unity)	TABIKA KEMAS	-17.24225*	.001
Communication and Multiple Language Ability	Prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM)/ Ministry of Education (MOE) Preschool	TABIKA KEMAS	32.44169*	.000
	TABIKA PERPADUAN	Private TADIKA	-38.88072*	.000
	Private TADIKA	TABIKA KEMAS	51.54705*	.000
Usage of ICT	TADIKA JABATAN AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI	Private TADIKA	-48.41359*	.000
	Prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM)/ Ministry of Education (MOE) Preschool	TADIKA JABATAN AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI	36.11451*	.000
	TABIKA KEMAS	TADIKA JABATAN AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI	56.86654*	.000
	TABIKA PERPADUAN	TADIKA JABATAN AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI	41.93510*	.000
Environmental Awareness	Private TADIKA	TADIKA JABATAN AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI	53.67675*	.000
	TABIKA KEMAS	TADIKA JABATAN AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI	33.51386*	.000
	TABIKA PERPADUAN	TABIKA KEMAS	-17.88725*	.031
	Private TADIKA	TABIKA KEMAS	-25.40138*	.007

Table 4 depicts the pairs of preschools where the most differences in the dimensions of global readiness occur. For *diversity*, the most significant differences occurred between MOE preschool and Tadika KEMAS (MD =19.53). For *communication and multiple language ability*, the most significant differences occurred between private sector preschools and Tadika KEMAS (MD =51.54). For the *usage of ICT*, the most significant differences occurred between Tadika KEMAS and Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam (MD =56.86). For *environmental awareness*, the most significant differences occurred between Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam and Tadika KEMAS (MD =33.51).

Looking at the results of the Tukey (Table 4) differences where they occur may point to the differences either in the orientation and priorities as well as effectiveness in implementation of the particular curriculum according to the types of preschools. For example, the private sector preschool centers prioritized the teaching and learning of more than two languages compared to the government agencies preschool centers which focused mainly on the teaching and learning of Bahasa Malaysia. Prioritization on the teaching of whatever dimension would influence the learning outcomes related to children's' knowledge and abilities. Stark differences if exist would demonstrate to

parents on the likely choice of preschool centers they would prefer as parents have the freedom to choose where to educate their preschoolers. In the dimension of diversity the KEMAS preschoolers attained the highest level compared to MOE because the former is a community based preschool. The teachers in KEMAS preschools are not only preschool teachers by vocation but they are also community developers. They are trained to be community leaders to promote harmony through multicultural activities. For the dimension of communication and multiple language ability, as explained earlier the private sector preschoolers are more urban based mixing with more ethnic groups learning other languages through social interaction compared to KEMAS which has more Malay preschoolers set in the rural areas. In terms of ICT usage the most significant differences occurred between TABIKA KEMAS and Tadika Jabatan Agama Islam ($D=58.66$). KEMAS being a government agency provides computers in their preschool centers and the teachers use the computers for teaching and learning. Children from KEMAS preschools view songs and games through the programs on You Tube. Similarly, for environmental awareness KEMAS preschool teachers involve children in field visitations in the community neighborhood.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study shed light on the status of global readiness amongst preschool aged children in government agencies preschools and private sector preschools. The study represents a quantitative study and bears several limitations. The qualitative aspect of the implementation of the teaching of global readiness was not obtained. Interviews with stakeholders such as preschool directors and teachers need to be conducted to gain more insight into the topic of global readiness. Preschool children need to be observed in the classroom settings and outside the classroom to gauge the level of global readiness they comprehend. Although the level of global readiness shown was generally high there is need to document the teaching of global readiness at the preschool centers in order to capture the weaknesses and strengths. As global readiness seemed to be more indirectly embedded in the preschool subjects or domains, there is need to develop a more substantive global readiness curriculum. As changes in the world occur exceedingly fast newer inputs has to be added regularly to educate the young child. Futuristic orientation is needed in curriculum design and development. There is also the need to develop global readiness training and modules to be integrated systematically and effectively in teacher training colleges and universities. A cross cultural study on global readiness is imperative because there is need to gain a comparative insight into global readiness across the globe in order to establish benchmarking with best practices. Global readiness curriculum and teaching need to be re conceptualized to accommodate emerging needs and demands.

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