

Examination of Problems Facing Educational Management of Private Kindergarten Schools in Samutprakan, Thailand

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Abstract

Providing for the education of kindergarten students involves many requirements and challenges. In Thailand, while children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development is of great importance, problems exist to hinder how well schools are able to manage kindergarten education; policy is inadequate, teachers lack necessary skills, parents are disengaged, and even infrastructure can be an obstacle. This research aims to examine the problems relevant to management of private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan, Thailand, in order to find ways to improve how they can administer their processes and prepare their students for further levels of study. The research was conducted in 2 phases. The first phase synthesized documents relevant to private kindergarten management within the scope of the study and the second phase conducted a focus group consisting of managers of private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan, with open-ended questionnaires given to participants. Results revealed problems in the areas of curriculum content, teacher retention and parent participation. Attention needs to be paid to the development and implementation of kindergarten curricula, as well as the preparation of teachers and the education of parents. Clear standards and policies are needed to facilitate effective management of kindergarten schools, as are proper education of stakeholders and adequate support from governing bodies.

Keywords: Kindergarten Education, Pre-Primary Development, Teaching

บทคัดย่อ

หลักการจัดการศึกษาระดับอนุบาล เน้นที่การพัฒนาการทางร่างกาย จิตใจ อารมณ์ สังคม และสติปัญญา การดำเนินการจัดการศึกษาระดับอนุบาล ยังพบปัญหาสำคัญๆ เช่น ความไม่ชัดเจนของนโยบายของรัฐ ครูขาดทักษะจำเป็นและขาดการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ปกครอง ดังนั้นจึงมีความจำเป็นต้องศึกษา วัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาปัญหาในการบริการโรงเรียนอนุบาลเอกชนในจังหวัดสมุทรปราการ และนำผลการวิจัยไปใช้ในการพัฒนาการบริหารเพื่อเป็นการเตรียมความพร้อมของเด็ก สำหรับการศึกษาในระดับที่สูงขึ้น และการดำรงชีวิตในสังคมต่อไป การทำการวิจัยแบ่งออกเป็น 2 ขั้นตอน ขั้นตอนที่ 1 เป็นการศึกษา วิเคราะห์และสังเคราะห์เอกสารและงานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้อง และขั้นตอนที่ 2 จัดทำสนทนากลุ่ม (Focus Group) ผู้บริหารโรงเรียนอนุบาลเอกชนจังหวัดสมุทรปราการ เพื่อพิจารณาประเด็นปัญหาการบริหารโรงเรียนอนุบาลเอกชนในจังหวัดสมุทรปราการ ผลการวิจัย พบว่ามีปัญหาเกี่ยวกับเนื้อหาหลักสูตร ความคงอยู่ของครู และการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ปกครอง ดังนั้นจึงควรให้ความสำคัญกับการพัฒนาและการนำหลักสูตรไปปฏิบัติให้เหมาะสมกับเด็ก ควรเตรียมความพร้อมของครู และส่งเสริมให้ผู้ปกครองมีส่วนร่วมมากขึ้น สรุป การจัดการศึกษาระดับอนุบาลเอกชนในภาพรวม ควรจะมีมาตรฐานและนโยบายจากภาครัฐอย่างชัดเจน การมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องและได้รับการสนับสนุนอย่างเพียงพอจากภาครัฐ จึงจะช่วยให้การบริหารโรงเรียนอนุบาลเอกชนเป็นไปอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำสำคัญ: การศึกษาโรงเรียนอนุบาล การพัฒนาก่อนประถมศึกษา การสอน

1. Introduction

Management of children's education at the kindergarten level is of critical importance. It is at these ages where we lay the foundation in four essential domains of development:

1.1 Physical development- the domain wherein the ability to perform everyday tasks is developed, involving congenital characteristics, proper eating, and body management.

1.2 Emotional or spiritual development- the domain wherein the ability to control emotions and to be comfortable around people is developed.

1.3 Social development- the domain wherein the ability to interact with others and to build healthy relationships is developed.

1.4 Intellectual development- the domain wherein the ability to learn, to access information and to use said information is developed.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the investment we can make that bears the most valuable benefit for mankind is in the support and development of other human beings. In education, this applies especially to those students in the kindergarten level, as they are not yet capable of helping themselves (Office of the Education Council, 2014), and the Kingdom of Thailand has given substantial importance to their educational needs.

Following the use of a general guideline, the Seventh Economic and Societal Development Plan, which was in place from 1992 to 1996, The Thai Ministry of Education announced the Pre-Primary (or Preschool) Curriculum of 1997 as a standardized curriculum for all young children that are divided into three levels: newborn children up until 1 year old and 2 levels of pre-primary, pre-primary children 1 year old to three years old and 3 years old to 5 years old (Thebtien & Thragoonwong, 2007).

In 2003, the Thai Ministry of Education announced a new system, under the Prime Minister's office, for the development of students aged below six years old. A national board was established to oversee the education of students at the pre-primary level, charged with their development from birth and helping them, at these early stages to reach their fullest potential. An appointee of the Prime Minister, the board's president is responsible for the integration of policies promoting the comprehensive development of kindergarten students, from planning for their care, ensuring adequate nurturing and protection, and arranging for quality education including the amendment of laws, regulations and resolutions; and also the coordination of relevant government boards, and agencies in the pursuit of the board's goals pertaining to young children's developmental needs (Office of the Education Council, 2015).

In Thailand, formal kindergarten education includes children aged from three to five years old. As of 2013, the total number of schools, both government and private, having kindergarten, i.e. both dedicated kindergarten schools and other institutions where kindergarten levels are also taught, numbered 27,418 institutions. Of this number, 3,196 are private institutions (Office of the Education Council, 2014). Both government and private kindergarten schools operate within the Thai educational system using the 2003 kindergarten curriculum from the Ministry of Education.

Throughout the Kingdom, the Thai Ministry of Education administers basic education for students in every level, although some provinces do not have enough schools to fully service the entirety of their population. This is partly due to the fact that large cities such as Bangkok, Nakhon Ratchasima, Chiangmai and the like must account not only for children of citizens registered to their jurisdiction but also those of residents who remain unregistered.

Samutprakan is situated adjacent to Bangkok and the population of registered citizens residing in the province numbers 1,260,400, having occupations mostly in the agricultural, retail and business (including factory and assembly) sectors. Additionally, 64,900 unregistered people reside in the province working mostly in factory or retail jobs. Samutprakan is able to adequately meet the pre-primary needs of both its registered and unregistered population with 111 schools dedicated to primary levels, 36 schools dedicated to kindergarten levels and 143 schools having both primary and kindergarten levels (Samutprakan Provincial Office, 2014).

While Samutprakan schools have enough seats to accommodate the amount of pre-primary children in the province, many other problems still exist that hamper managing education at this level. For example, there are enough graduates with bachelor's degrees to fill jobs as caregivers and teachers, but few who specialize in kindergarten education, meaning that there is a significant lack in the knowledge, understanding and skills required for the proper nurturing and educating of students at the pre-primary level. Furthermore, there exists a retention problem for schools, with staff having a tendency to resign both during and outside of the school term.

Not only internal issues affect the smooth management of a school and its students. Some parents lack sufficient skills and know-how in matters pertaining to raising young children and need to be educated as such. Samutprakan is a largely industrial province with many factories requiring large numbers of workers to commute to and from work. This, along with the commute of other workers and students

themselves, makes travel to and from school somewhat time consuming and inconvenient for a large number of children attending school. Time can be wasted in congestion on the roads, and students are already tired from traveling before they even begin their school day.

These conditions, among others, are those currently faced by the management of private kindergarten institutions in Samutprakan province and attention is needed in addressing them if we are to facilitate young children's education and development.

2. Objectives

The research aims to examine issues affecting management of private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan, notably in the areas of curriculum, teacher recruitment and retention, and parent participation; and to ascertain possible avenues leading to viable solutions and developments in order to strengthen the systems within Thailand's kindergarten schools.

3. Materials and methods

For this study into the types of problems facing educational management in private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan, the research had 2 phases (Table 1). The first phase was the study, analysis and synthesis of documents and research relevant to the issues the research aims to examine. The second phase was the arrangement of a focus group consisting of 15 managers from private kindergarten institutions in Samutprakan Province, wherein open-ended questionnaires were used for random sampling.

This research utilized open-ended questionnaires concerning aspects of kindergarten school management with a focus on curriculum choice and implementation, teacher recruitment and retention and parent participation. The analysis of information was accomplished through Content Analysis.

Table 1 Components of the study

Research steps	Methodology	Result
Phase 1- study, analyze, synthesize relevant documents and research	Study, analyze, synthesize data by making an analysis table, then reach conclusions about issues to determine variables.	Variables to be used to determine questions for focus group in Phase 2.
Phase 2- study the types of problems facing educational management in private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan	Arrange a focus group of 15 private kindergarten school managers from Samutprakan for random sampling.	Knowledge of the types of problems facing educational management in private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan.

4. Results and discussion

The findings from the study are listed below in two sections:

4.1 Conditions in kindergarten school management in Samutprakan are as follows:

4.1.1 The curriculum used in Samutprakan kindergarten schools is that established in 2003, which is the current standard for the entire country.

4.1.2 Kindergarten schools in Samutprakan use similar methods to recruit teachers. Applicants are solicited through announcements made in daily newspapers, social media and universities as well as through both government and private job agencies.

4.1.3 Day-to-day teaching is consistent with the national curriculum but is adapted for actual practical implementation.

4.1.4 Fundamental materials and printed matter are chosen from those approved by the Thai Ministry of Education, but supplementary materials are determined by each school's specific needs.

4.1.5 The evaluation of each student's development must be done according to the standards and indicators prescribed by the Thai Ministry of Education. These include 18 standards and 32 indicators. However, there are many methods that can be used to assess students, such as observation, action, and follow-up, for example.

4.1.6 Kindergarten school facilities and environments have different arrangements according to the individual tastes and requirements of differing owners of differing schools, but must meet at least the minimum standards of the Thai Ministry of Education.

4.1.7 In matters of health and nutrition, including food services, kindergarten schools in Samutprakan mostly prepare their own food, with attention paid to having meals proportionately include all five food groups.

4.2 Problems facing educational management in Samutprakan's private kindergarten schools are as follows:

4.2.1 The 2003 kindergarten curriculum has too much content, and too much time dedicated to covering each topic, with the result being students getting tired or bored with the subject matter and becoming uncooperative (Table 2).

4.2.2 Teachers and caregivers in private kindergarten schools mostly did not train specifically for the care of students at the kindergarten level, so a good amount of time must be taken up by training before they can even start work. There are also still problems from the issue of teacher retention, where many teachers and caregivers resign from the school and more time is then spent in the search for, recruitment, and screening of new staff, negatively affecting continuity and young learners' familiarity with their teachers and caregivers.

4.2.3 In many cases, parent participation in the care and teaching of children, both at school and at home, can be lacking, making the responsibility for these matters solely that of the school's.

4.2.4 The relevant agencies and officials having authority over Samutprakan's kindergarten schools are not situated locally, but rather centrally located in Bangkok. Without a dedicated official to this province, there is no convenient avenue of communication for schools in Samutprakan with officials or agencies with jurisdiction over the province, especially for issues that are time sensitive. There is also very little direct supervision or guidance for private kindergarten schools.

Table 2 Problems facing private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan

Area	Issue
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has too much content • requires too much time
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack specialized training • tend to leave their positions
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not fully participate • have work commitments • lack proper knowledge
Governing bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inconveniently located • little direct guidance

5. Discussion

The findings from the study revealed that most problems in managing kindergarten education exist in three major areas: curriculum, teacher recruitment and retention, and parent participation.

There is too much mandatory content in the 2003 kindergarten curriculum, requiring too much time not only in teaching but that also spent on arrangement and practice of associated activities. From the research, there's no denying that content in the Thai educational curriculum, not only for kindergarten but for all levels all the way up to doctorate, is overstuffed with too much content. The primary purpose of education at the kindergarten level is to prepare students in the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual domains, so students graduating from kindergarten can enter the primary level. However, much importance is placed on kindergarten students' aptitude in reading, writing, and mathematical calculation; arguably, it is might not yet be appropriate for this age level. Good nurturing and gradual progressive development is required at this stage, and children who are given good physical, nutritional care in a good environment are well supported in the physical, emotional, social and intellectual domains. But if we push for too many academic concepts too soon, at the cost of letting children evolve naturally and in an age appropriate fashion, some may develop well; but other students may adversely develop a negative attitude towards education. It is a case of too much, too soon. Therefore, the curriculum should be amended to initially focus on level appropriate physical, emotional, social and intellectual domains, and making students ready to learn before moving on to formal academics.

Furthermore, much time is also wasted in matters of teacher recruitment and retention. Teachers in private schools often resign, causing time and effort to be spent on finding and training replacements. This is a problem not only for private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan, but also for private schools

nationwide. At the kindergarten level, teachers and caregivers do not only give knowledge to students but are responsible for many other things. Students at the kindergarten level are children who have yet to develop the basic skills necessary to help themselves, from eating, sleeping, going to the toilet, bathing (Office of the Education Council, 2014). For the most part, they are not ready to participate in many activities. Teachers and caregivers who lack education and training specifically for the kindergarten level will likely back away from the myriad responsibilities required of them. Private school teachers are also likely to leave their position because private schools are not able to give them the same perks as government schools or other less demanding careers; so many teachers, especially younger ones, will choose to leave the profession or gravitate towards a position in a government school. Therefore, private school teachers are less likely to stay in their job than teachers in government schools. However, some teachers in private institutions do stay in their jobs until retirement. Reasons for this may be due to the fact that they are able to supplement their income with earnings from other jobs, are independently wealthy, are locals who wish to look after and better their own community, or have a relationship with the school or other staff compelling them to stay and perform their duty until they retire.

Parents also have a low level of participation with schools in the care and education of their children, both at home and at school for many reasons. They may simply lack the knowledge or understanding about looking after and seeing to the development of children from birth to 6 years old, may have a low level of education, or do not have enough time because of time required for work or commuting to work. For example, if a parent must travel to work in Bangkok, the traffic conditions can make the commute time anywhere from 2 to 4 hours in either direction. Some parents may have the understanding that once they enroll their children in school, the school is responsible for the entirety of their children's care and will seldom get involved. However, parent participation is very important because children spend more time at home than at school and children at this age must receive care from their parents, especially in health and nutrition, so as not to risk hindering their development physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

6. Conclusion

In Thailand, the curriculum for kindergarten needs to be streamlined to reduce extraneous and inappropriate content which focuses on academic material too early. It is also essential that private kindergarten schools in Samutprakan, as well as in other provinces, have teachers who are ready to perform in their position, trained to have the proper knowledge and practical skills as a caregiver and educator at the kindergarten level. Kindergarten school principals should see the importance of properly training teachers who may have little competence and skill in the teaching of kindergarten students before they actually start performing their duties as a kindergarten teacher and create conditions which would encourage teachers to remain at their jobs. Last but not least, parents need to be educated and receive training about the developmental needs of young children in general and kindergarten aged students in particular, and be encouraged to more actively participate in their children's education. Working together with knowledgeable parents, kindergarten schools can more successfully tend to the education and development of children at that level so they will have the readiness to enter primary school and successfully advance forward in their lives. In this way, kindergarten education can play its part in meeting the economic and social needs of Samutprakan.

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