

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES OF CHILD-CENTRED LEARNING AT PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN CENTRAL REGION, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Preschool education is an essential early learning experience in the world of education. It has been recognized as the most critical period in child development as quality preschool education makes significant contribution for the development of the whole child. Malaysia preschool education is always emphasizing on the holistic approach with developmentally appropriate preschool programme. The mission is to bring about a paradigm shift from 'teacher-centred' to "child-centred" education to promote active learning in the 21st century classroom. Classroom practices are the educational process for effective teaching and learning. It is the fundamental to young children's learning. Therefore, teachers' beliefs and practices are crucial for improving the educational processes. The objectives of this study are to explore the preschool teachers' beliefs and classroom practices for child-centred learning in preschool education, as well as to investigate the relationship between teachers' practices and beliefs. This study adopted the quantitative approach. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlational analysis were used to analyse the data collected. The participants involved 580 preschool teachers of the private sectors in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur areas. A questionnaire of 52-item was used. This tool was administered to measure preschool teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. In conclusion, the result reported that teachers' beliefs and classroom practices showed high degree of practices. However, the findings revealed that the reciprocal relationship with parents needs to be enhanced. Further findings indicated that there is strong relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, child-centered learning

INTRODUCTION

Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing individuals in a holistic and integrated manner. The National Preschool Standard-based Curriculum

(Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan-KSPK) 2017 serves as guideline for pedagogy used in public and private preschools in local context, Malaysia. KSPK provides comprehensive curriculum guidelines for educational practitioners teaching in the preschool classrooms for uniformity and better organization. Child-centred learning is considered as one of the most important teaching and learning strategies that bring effective and meaningful learning in the preschool setting. It is an approach, where young children are in the centre of the learning process in classroom.

Teachers' beliefs' can be defined as a strong feeling or thinking that teachers have, whether it is true or right for the best outcomes in the children's learning and development. The teachers' beliefs in education can be modified from time to time to accept multiple understanding and perspectives to engage in quality practice with young children (Griffith University, 2010). Many teachers stand firmly for what they believe to be worthy philosophy and goals and to advocate the best practices for excellence in early childhood education.

Every teacher has a particular vision, knowledge, and beliefs, assumptions and values about preschool programme which are reflected in what he/she does every day. The desired supportive facilitation and contribution in class will strengthen daily teaching and learning in the classroom settings. Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the factors that influencing the pedagogy in the classroom, such as beliefs that related to values, expectations and decision making by the teachers. It is also crucial to explore and examine the instructional practices that relate to the teachers' beliefs. Teachers' beliefs, practices and attitudes are important factors for understanding and improving educational process, as they shape children's learning environment and influence motivation and achievement. This study explores the preschool teachers' beliefs and classroom practices for quality child-centred learning in early years. It also examines the relationship between teachers' beliefs and perceived classroom practices that shape the learning environment of young children in schools. It is hoped that this study will provide insights and understanding how teachers' beliefs influence their classroom practices.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study which is an adaptation of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (1979). The framework describes how the teachers' beliefs and classroom practices are impacted by the various contexts. Bronfenbrenner's theory in the final version (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) revealed that person and context are two of the important concepts which called "proximal process" in his process-person-context-time (PPCT) model. He regarded the proximal processes are the everyday activities and interactions which are likely to influence the ways in which teachers think about raising and/or educating their young children.

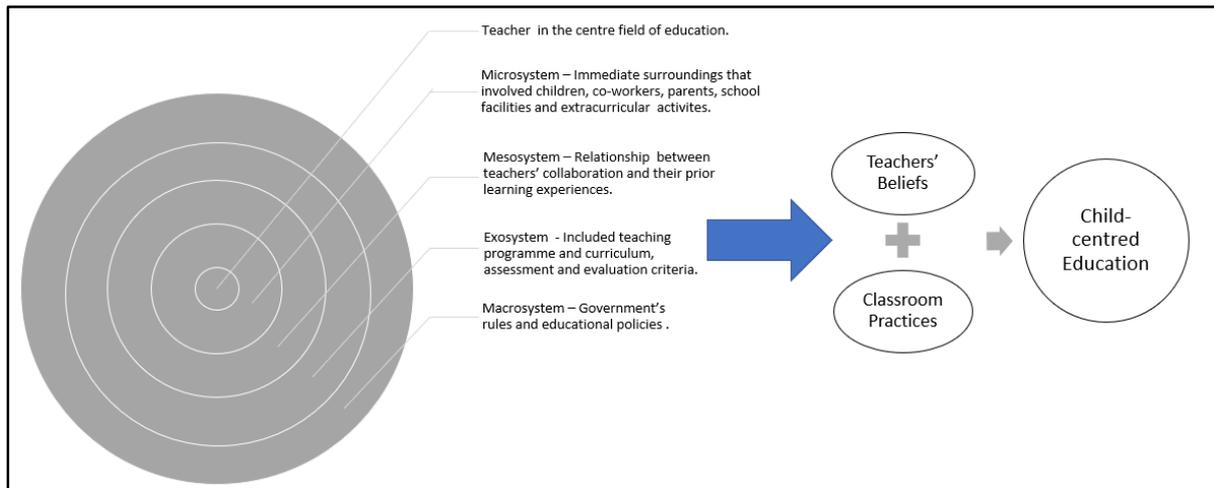


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: The Ecological Context of a Teacher

The above conceptual framework (Figure 1) is developed to show the importance of teacher awareness that the school-related activities (proximal processes) that involving the child, and that workplace, parents and families, school curriculum and programme as well as the educational policies are the important factors for good classroom practices in the early years of schooling. How these activities and interactions unfold is depending on the individual preschool teacher, who involved by the ecological context of a teacher in the school and classroom.

International History of Child-Centred Education

The child-centred Education principles were found in the discipline of learning models in many parts of the ancient world. And philosophers such as Plato and Socrates envisioned those teachers are the voices of the young children, the interlocutor guiding children's own reasoning process. However, in recent centuries child-centred learning becoming more significant as an educational philosophy on how children learn and grow (Linda, 2006). And continuously, Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Frobel (1782-1852), Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Susan Isaacs (1885-1948), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) to Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934); who have a strong influence on the development of current educational theories had built on child-centered ideas on how children learn. From the history perspective, these theories provide insight about children's growth, development, and learning. These educational theories and approaches emphasizing on critical thinking skills for active participation and making learning more practical to children's real-life needs and situations based on stages of development, arouse learning interest that motivate children to discover and explore the natural world around them.

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Pajares (1992) revealed that teachers' beliefs are the thoughts to be intertwined with their personal beliefs and have greatly influence their instruction practices, impacting how and why they use teaching methodologies in class, including decision making and use of technology in instruction. Another study reported that self-efficacy is an important predictor

of people's behaviour and wellbeing (Reyhing et al., 2021). It was revealed that the role of preschool professionals' self-efficacy delivering high-quality child-centred education in early childhood. The result suggested that promoting knowledge of teaching approaches may be a promising way to promote child-centered educational practice through increasing of self-efficacy. Likewise, a comparative case study that explored the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of preschool education (Cobanoglo et al., 2018) had almost the similar results, which indicated that the teachers with a higher level of support to developmentally appropriate practice and efficacy had more positive relations with children in their classrooms because of their beliefs considering productivity, support for cognitive development, knowledge acquisition method and teacher feedback.

Chou (2008) concluded the research based on the assumption that teachers are highly influenced by their beliefs. It was further supported by Elicker and McMullen (2011) in their study on preschool teachers' curriculum beliefs and their consistency with observed classroom practices revealed that teacher preparation programme must be simultaneously stress on educational theory and evidence-based content and relate this in a meaningful way with teacher attitudes and beliefs, as well as to fostering developmentally appropriate programme, positive and healthy learning, and development outcomes for young children. And that professional development should focus productively to integrate across all areas such as skills, knowledge, and dispositions.

Another study analyzed on the beliefs and self-reported practices of preschool teachers were done in regard to the concept of child-centered education, as well as the consistency between the beliefs and practices (Ramazan et al., 2018). The resulted reported that the preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to developmental domains were not consistent with child-centered education. Beliefs and practices go hand-in-hand in an ECCE classroom setting whereby teacher's belief would most often influence the implementation of lesson plans.

Developmentally appropriate practice

A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) revealed that preschool teachers and school administrators in early childhood education play a significant role to establish strong foundation of early learning. This is the ethical responsibilities for all the early childhood professionals to practice according to the standards of their profession in providing high quality preschool education and provide developmentally appropriate practice and learning experience for young children. Guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice including creating a caring community of learners; teaching to enhance development and learning; planning curriculum to achieve important goals; assessing children's development and learning; and establishing reciprocal relationships with families. NAEYC regularly provides information to inform advocators and policy makers in their effort to establish sound policies in these areas. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a need for competent workforce, a more inclusive and contextually relevant early childhood framework will be necessary for teachers being more policy-literate. Those involved would be better able at making informed decisions about quality classroom practices in the best interest of young children. Published resources and continuous programme on a variety of development and culturally appropriate approaches and practices are necessary (Kilderry, 2016).

Objectives

This study aims to investigate the beliefs and practices of child-centered learning among the preschool teachers, looking at the relationship between the teachers' beliefs and practices of child-centered learning in the preschool classrooms. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) What are the beliefs and practices of child-centred Learning among the preschool teachers?
- (ii) What is the relationship between the teachers' beliefs and practices of child-centered learning in classroom?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative approach and descriptive statistics were used to analyse data. The questionnaire would be coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation in the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to investigate the relationship between the variables in this study. The questionnaire on teachers' beliefs and classroom practices were examined by frequency estimations on a five-point Likert Scale Questionnaire with 52 questions, ranging from "Not at all important" to "Extremely important". There are 28 questions on "Beliefs and Practices, 24 questions on "Classroom Practices". The questionnaire was adapted and modified from the previous on Teachers' Belief and Practices Survey: Operationalizing the 1997 NAEYC Guidelines (Kim, 2005).

The reliability coefficient of .75 for teachers' beliefs and reliability coefficient of .72 for practices were found to be reliable. In examining validity of this study, content validity was measured. The revised and modified questionnaire was submitted to a panel of lecturers in the Education Faculty who are professionals in this field for reviews and comments before the data collection process began. The relative importance of the categories was measured to reflect the good practices in early childhood settings. This survey is to closely reflect the NAEYC guidelines with developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), the items in the Teachers' Belief Scale and instructional Activities were compared to the guideline categories. Among the categories were teaching to enhance development and learning; adhering to appropriate curriculum; assessing children's learning and development; and reciprocal relationship with parents. The researcher had included a category named 'awareness of multicultural diversity' in the data analysis to reflect on the local educational context in Malaysia.

Participants

The samples are 580 teachers from the private preschools which are located in central region, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur areas. The questionnaires were given to the principals to distribute to the teachers in schools. The questionnaires were collected from the principals or the head of schools upon completion. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, the information and contents were merely used for the research study only. All the participants with questionnaire were identified and labeled with numbers to protect their personal details and responses from the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Based on the mean score interpretation (Moidunny, 2009), a detailed analysis of preschool teachers' beliefs and classroom practices is presented in Table 1 – Table 10.

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.20	Medium
3.21 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

Source: Moidunny (2009)

Teachers' Beliefs

The results in Table 1 show that the teachers' beliefs in terms of category "Adhering to appropriate curriculum" came high. The highest beliefs in this category were the belief in item No. 2 "Activities to be responsive to individual differences in children's levels of development.", and it ranked first with mean of 4.16 ($SD = 0.664$). The last ranking was item No.12 "Follow a prescribed curriculum plan without being distracted by children's interests or current circumstances" with mean of 3.57 ($SD = 0.935$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs Scale

Adhering to Appropriate Curriculum			
	Item	M	SD
1.	Activities to be responsive to individual children's interests.	4.13	0.673
2.	Activities to be responsive to individual differences in children's levels of development.	4.16	0.664
3.	Teacher to provide a variety of learning corners with concrete materials (Writing corner, Reading corner, Science corner, Math corner, etc.).	4.15	0.752
4.	Teachers to allocate extended periods of time for children to engage in play and class projects.	3.83	0.823
5.	Children to write by inventing their own spelling.	3.62	1.022
6.	Children to have colouring and craft activities to enhance hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills development.	3.70	0.921
7.	To provide many daily opportunities for developing social skills (cooperating, helping, talking) with peers in the early childhood classroom.	4.12	0.713
8.	Planned activities for outdoor time.	4.02	0.732
9.	Use strategies like setting limits, problem solving, and redirection to be used to help guide children's behaviour.	4.05	0.667
10.	Teachers to integrate each child's home culture and language into the curriculum throughout the year.	3.87	3.87
11.	Teachers to modify, adapt, and accommodate	4.11	4.11

specific indoor and outdoor learning experiences for the child with special needs as appropriate.		
12. Follow a prescribed curriculum plan without being distracted by children's interests or current circumstances.	3.57	0.935

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 2 show that the teachers' beliefs in category "Assessing children's learning and development" reported to be high. There are only two items to compare. The highest belief in this component was the belief in item no.13 "Evaluation of children's progress, readiness and achievement tests." and it ranked first with mean of 4.02 ($SD = 0.749$). It is competitive with item no.14 "Evaluation through teacher observation." with mean of 4.15 ($SD = 0.66$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs Scale

Assessing Children's Learning and Development			
	Item	M	SD
13.	Evaluation of children's progress, readiness, and achievement tests.	4.02	0.749
14	Evaluation through teacher observation.	4.15	0.66

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 3 show that the teachers' beliefs in terms of category "Teaching to enhance development and learning" came high. The highest beliefs in this component were the belief in item No.15 "Teacher-child interactions to help develop children's self-esteem and positive feelings towards learning.", and it ranked first with mean of 4.24 ($SD = 0.673$). The last ranking was item No. 23 "Children to dictate stories to the teacher to write" with mean of 3.57($SD =0.96$).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs Scale

Teaching to Enhance Development and Learning			
	Item	M	SD
15.	Teacher-child interactions to help develop children's self-esteem and positive feelings towards learning.	4.24	0.673
16.	Teachers to provide opportunities for children to select many of their own activities.	4.02	0.787
17.	Instruction in letter and word recognition is important in early childhood education.	4.03	0.754
18.	Children to create their own learning activities (e.g., cut their own shapes, decide on the steps to perform an experiment, plan their creative drama, art and computer activities).	3.99	0.758
19.	A structural reading or pre-reading programme is for all children.	3.95	0.793
20.	Teacher to move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions, asking questions, and facilitating children's involvement with materials, activities, and peers.	4.09	0.739

21. Teachers to develop an individualized behaviour plan addressing severe behaviour problems.	3.89	0.738
22. To read Stories daily to children, individually and/or in groups.	3.89	0.804
23. Children to dictate stories to the teacher to write.	3.57	0.960

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 4 show that the teachers' beliefs in terms of category "Reciprocal relationship with parents" was high. The highest belief in this component was the belief in item No.24 "Parents/guardians to be involved in their children's learning in ways that are suitable for them.", and it ranked first with mean of 4.11 ($SD = 0.711$). The last ranking was item no.25 "Teachers to solicit and incorporate parent's knowledge about their children for assessment, evaluation, placement, and planning." with mean of 3.93 ($SD = 0.724$).

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs Scale

Reciprocal Relationship with Parents			
	Item	M	SD
24.	Parents/guardians to be involved in their children's learning in ways that are suitable for them.	4.11	0.711
25.	Teachers to solicit and incorporate parent's knowledge about their children for assessment, evaluation, placement, and planning.	3.93	0.724
26.	To establish a collaborative partnership or relationship with parents of all children, including parents of children with special needs and from different cultural groups.	4.08	0.713

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 5 show that the teachers' beliefs in component "Cultural diversity" came high. There are only two items to compare. The highest belief in this component was the belief in item No.28 "Have books, pictures, and materials in the classroom include people of different races, ages, and abilities, and both gender in various roles." and it ranked first with mean of 4.10 ($SD = 0.739$). It is competitive with item No.27 "Activities to be responsive to the cultural diversity of children." with mean of 4.05 ($SD = 0.708$).

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Beliefs Scale

Awareness of Multicultural Diversity			
	Item	M	SD
27.	Activities to be responsive to the cultural diversity of children.	4.05	0.708
28.	Have books, pictures, and materials in the classroom include people of different races, ages, and abilities, and both gender in various roles.	4.10	0.739

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

Classroom Practices

The results in Table 6 shows that the teachers' classroom practices in category "Teaching to enhance development and learning" came high. The highest classroom practice found in this component was item No.2 "Sing, listen, and/or move to music." and it ranked first with mean of 4.15 ($SD = 0.783$). The item No.1 "Explore science materials (animals, plants, wheels, gears, etc)." ranked last with mean of 3.68 ($SD = 0.914$).

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of Classroom Practices

Adhering to Appropriate Curriculum		M	SD
	Item		
1.	Explore science activities through investigation of the living world, material world and physical world.	3.68	0.914
2.	Sing, listen, and/or move to music.	4.15	0.783
3.	Do planned movement activities using large muscles (balancing, running, jumping).	3.97	0.793
4.	Use manipulative/concrete materials (pegboards, Lego, and Unfix Cubes).	3.82	0.911
5.	Practice handwriting on guided dotted lines.	4.11	0.859
6.	Colour, cut, and paste pre-drawn forms.	4.02	0.826
7.	Solve real-life math problems using concrete materials in the classroom.	3.78	0.931
8.	Do activities that integrate multiple learning areas like reading, mathematics, science, social studies and art.	4.01	0.831

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 7 shows that the teachers' classroom practices in category "Teaching to enhance development and learning" came high. The highest classroom practice found in this component was item No.15 "Use flashcards with ABCs and sight words." and it ranked first with mean of 4.10 ($SD = 0.819$). The item No.17 "Have the opportunity to learn about people with special needs (e.g., a speaker or a character in a book)." ranked last with mean of 3.28 ($SD = 1.171$).

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics of Classroom Practices

Teaching to Enhance Development and Learning		M	SD
	Item		
9.	Building work with blocks.	3.87	0.878
10.	Select from a variety of learning areas and projects (dramatic play, construction, art, music, science experiences, etc.).	3.75	0.901
11.	Have their work displayed in their classroom.	3.94	0.853
12.	Experiment with writing by drawing, copying, and using their own invented spelling.	3.94	0.926
13.	Play with games, puzzles, and construction materials (Lego, Blocks).	4.04	0.882
14.	Work in assigned ability-level groups.	3.92	0.838
15.	Use flashcards with ABCs and sight words.	4.10	0.819

16. Provide early mathematics experience on number concepts, number operations, shapes, and space.	3.94	0.813
17. Have the opportunity to learn about people with special needs (e.g., a speaker or a character in a book).	3.28	1.171
18. Receive rewards as incentives to participate in classroom activities in which they are reluctant to participate.	3.63	0.97
19. Engage in child-chosen, teacher-supported play activities.	3.73	0.92
20. Draw, paint, work with clay, and use other art resources.	3.83	0.867
21. Engage in experiences that demonstrate how they value each other like sending a card to a sick friend.	3.32	1.156
22. Children work with materials that have been adapted or modified to meet their needs.	3.78	0.88

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 8 shows only one item that the teachers' classroom practices in category "Awareness of multicultural diversity" came with moderate degree of practice. The item ranked with mean of 3.62 ($SD = 1.024$).

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics of Classroom Practices

Awareness of Multicultural Diversity		
Item	M	SD
23. See their own race, culture, language reflected in classroom activities.	3.62	1.024

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

The results in Table 9 shows only one item that the teachers' classroom practices in category "Reciprocal relationship with parents" came with moderate degree of practice. The item ranked with mean of 3.19 ($SD = 1.315$).

Table 9
Descriptive Statistics of Classroom Practices

Reciprocal Relationship with Parents		
Item	M	SD
24. Experience parents reading stories or sharing a skill or hobby with the class.	3.19	1.315

Note. Total number of participants. N=580

Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices

Correlation is an effect size and therefore the researcher can describe the strength of the correlation using the guide that Evans (1996) suggests for the absolute value of r , in which the value (.60 -.79) is considered "strong". To interpret the correlation coefficient, the coefficient, and its associated significance value (p) was examined. The output confirms that a "strong positive correlation" exists between the teachers' beliefs and classroom practices ($r = .626$, $p < .01$). In short, the result indicated that teachers' beliefs are strongly related with

classroom practices in the current settings.

Table 10

Correlations between Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices

(n = 580)		Teachers' Beliefs	Classroom Practices
TB	Pearson Correlation (sig. (2-tailed))	1	.626**
CP	Pearson Correlation (sig. (2-tailed))	.626**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Beliefs and Practices of Child-Centered Learning among the Preschool Teachers

Data relevant to this question were obtained by analysing teachers' responses to the beliefs and practices questionnaire. Through this study, it was found that the teachers' beliefs and practices were more inclined to the child centered approach, which is developmentally practices rather than the traditional practices.

The analysis of data from Table 1 to Table 5 reported teachers' beliefs in regards of categories: adhering to appropriate curriculum, assessment, learning and development, parental involvement and awareness of multicultural diversity showed high degree of practice. This result indicated high degree of practices which denotes that holistic approach was taking place in the early childhood classrooms. It was supported by the National Preschool Standard-Based Preschool Curriculum and Assessment Document (2017) which has been developed based on the developmentally appropriate practices and child learning theories working towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner in order to produce children as individuals who are competent in physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects (Suppiah et al., 2018).

The analysis of data for classroom practices presented from Table 6 to Table 9 in regards of categories: adhering to appropriate curriculum, teaching to enhance development and learning, awareness of multicultural diversity and reciprocal relationship that seek to maintain balance learning without only focusing on academics showed positive degree of practices. However, further finding reported that the reciprocal relationship with parents in classroom practices was at medium level as showed in Table 9 with $M=3.19$ (1.1315). This is the indicator that there is a need to improve on partnership with families in school, for instance the experience of family involvement in classroom activities such as storytelling, sharing a skill, or hobby.

Overall, preschool teachers play an important role in nurturing children based on developmentally appropriate practice with child-centered learning approach during their early years. The previous study (San et al., 2021) revealed that letting the children be in touch with natural materials which are easily accessible in their environment can enhance their sense impression. Choosing the right materials for the children according to their developmental needs can truly support their overall development. The child-centered

approach should focus on developmentally appropriate activities and materials that including active learning, active classroom participation that adhering to the appropriate curriculum to enhance teaching and learning in the classrooms. Teachers should acquire the skills and knowledge of handling the children. Besides, it is important to inculcate awareness of multicultural diversity among children and build positive relationship with parents. These findings also supported by researcher (Sharkins et al., 2017) who revealed that good practices in early childhood classrooms can provide the means for learning and development, where a teacher uses developmentally appropriate practices for young children in their classrooms.

In general, it can be concluded that preschool teachers in this study do practice developmentally appropriate practice with child-centered approach in the classrooms.

The Relationship between the Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Child-Centered Learning in Classroom

The result reported that teacher' beliefs in regards of categories: adhering to appropriate curriculum, assessment, learning and development, parental involvement and awareness of multicultural diversity showed high degree of practice. Further findings revealed that preschool teachers' beliefs showed strong correlation ($r = .626, p < .01$) between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in Table 10. This result revealed that teachers' classroom practices indeed are the reflection of their beliefs. This indicated that teachers' beliefs were aligned to child-centered approach and were related to their actions in their classrooms.

The requirement by Ministry of Education (2016) for all preschool teachers to possess at least a Diploma in early childhood education by year 2020, shows that the government has realized the importance of having qualified teachers to teach the very young in our society (Foong et al., 2014). This implementation plays significant role of the emerging policies, driving the preschool private sectors forward. This could be one of the reasons why the current survey revealed strong relationship between both teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. The 'push factor' for professional development is the evidence of the Malaysia government's intent to keep up with the worldwide trend for quality education. This education transformation from preschool to post-secondary education as espouse in the system aspiration (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025) has driven for better preschool programmes with quality teaching and classroom practices.

In this study, the researchers found that the ecological context of a teacher (Figure 1) supported the teachers' beliefs and classroom practices with the concept focuses on the context (Schunk, 2016), therefore teachers and school administrators can use this concept to increase children's academic achievement and education attainment by involving parents that may help or inhabit child-centred education. Initially, the Ecological System Theory (EST) was used in human development and children's development studies to describe their development in their early stages influenced by the person, social, and political systems. Currently, EST is broadly applied in educational fields. Schools can use EST to improve children's achievement and well-being. Interaction between the family, parents, teachers, community, and political system will determine children's development outcomes. In the field of preschool education, the microsystem as the most innermost system included a direct influence on teachers' immediate surroundings, such as children, co-workers, parents, school facilities and extracurricular activities. The mesosystem defined interconnections between the teachers' collaboration and their prior learning experiences that involved between the parents

and children in the new setting/scenario, which also including the relationship between the schoolteachers and the parents. The ecosystem included the teaching programme and curriculum and teachers' assessment and evaluation criteria, while the macrosystem addressed the government's rules and educational policies. In short, the overall ecological context can impact all the systems such as human and child development in many aspects.

In summary, beliefs and practices go hand-in-hand in a preschool classroom setting whereby teachers' beliefs would most influence the implementation of level appropriate lessons and child-centred learning activities. Teachers' beliefs will make an impact in their classroom practice because the applied instructional practices are connected between children, teachers, and the school curriculum based on the ecological context of the particular preschool teacher.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provided evidence that Malaysian preschool teachers do have beliefs that aligned to developmentally appropriate towards classroom practice with child-centered approach. To improve on the effective teaching and learning towards child-centered education, there is a need for teachers to ensure that the young children are active participants in classroom, and to adopt appropriate behaviour management and consider teacher-child interaction for active learning. However, the results revealed that family's involvement in school and maintaining reciprocal relationship with parents should be further enhanced. This study further suggested that to enabling the preschool teachers' beliefs to be aligned with child-centered learning, then their context need to be conducive to enact their beliefs towards child-centered learning into practices. It is important for the preschool teachers to be professionally trained and continued to upkeep their skills and knowledge to enable them to adopt more effective instructional practices in their lesson planning, curriculum implementation and pedagogical practice towards child-centred approach and learning. Ongoing professional development is important for maintaining as skilled and capable workforce as well as professional standards needs to be developed for affective and effective preschool teachers.

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