

The Survey of Pre-school's Teachers' Standards in Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

In an effective educational system, professional and competent teachers play a key role and we can not expect to achieve an effective educational system without teachers with standard and acceptable performance. This assumption is particularly valuable in pre-school education in which the role of teachers is more significant. This paper is resulted from a field survey. While reviewing the theoretical literature of pre-school education and standards and characteristics of pre-school teachers, it addresses the findings of a national research on determining the suggested standards of pre-school teachers and mentors. In methodology section, the community and statistical sample as well as the discussions related to research tools are explained. In findings analysis section, descriptive figures of studied community are firstly provided in statistical tables and, secondly, the results of various inference tests to determine the suggested standards in different aspects and by using the attitudes of various groups are explained by considering the study aims and objectives. Finally, determined standards for pre-school education's teachers and mentors appropriate with local conditions of the country are provided.

Keywords: Pre-school education, teachers' performance and behavioral standards, content knowledge, Iran Pre-schools

1. Introduction and Background

All preschools, whether profit-making or non-profit, are private. Most rely on fees for their funding (Oppen, 1992), so they are privately run and market-driven. In general, preschool teachers actively pursue in-service training for higher qualifications so as to be more competitive in the job market. Due to political support and the pressure of the job market, more and more preschool teachers have received

or are receiving advanced training in recent years (Choi and Dora, 2005). Around the world reforms in teacher education have been oriented towards making the preparation of teachers more functional for development of competencies they need in practice (Pantic and Wubbels, 2010).

The quality of the teacher is a subject of perennial concern in many developed countries (Smith, 2008). Teachers need to possess a body of knowledge and be able to apply that knowledge to a variety of situations within their professional setting. This body of knowledge involves knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy, including pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), as well as a philosophical, historical and sociological Framework for educational ideas (Cowen, 2002).

Accordingly, teacher assessment is now often based on instruments focusing on an inclusive view of teaching, for example portfolios (Andrews & Barnes, 1990; Delandshere, 1994). Depending on the content and form of the portfolio and on the integration of the portfolio with a teacher's working context, a portfolio may do justice to the fact that teaching is a complex activity and that teacher behaviour is inextricably bound up with teacher cognition and the teaching context (Bird, 1990; Lyons, 1998; van der Schaaf et al., 2008). In order to identify an appropriate direction of change in teacher education, one must start by considering what makes up teacher expertise and what the nature of good teaching is. These are seemingly simple and universal questions. Yet, it has proven to be intensely challenging to formulate satisfactory answers to guide teacher preparation policies and programmes. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) suggest that answers to these questions should be sought in the practices of educational research and inquiry. Extensive research on the problem has offered a variety of views and theories. Here, we will consider more closely one possibility suggested in the given context—the concept of teaching competence and its implications for teacher preparation (Pantic and Wubbels, 2010).

To decide beginning and finishing pre-school education, the frontier between pre-school education and kindergarten education is considered and following scales are introduced:

Major Scale

- Plans have educational traits. Schools are focal-orientation (that is, their activities differ with services provided in homes for children).
- There is minimum age for children. There is an age limit namely under 7-year-old.

Minor Scales (Teachers Competencies)

It consists of structured and organized training for children with certain educational needs. Such trainings are provided in special schools or training centers. Teachers and training centers should have the science and art of teaching (UNESCO, 1997, p 14-15).

According to figures released by UNESCO regional office in Latin America about pre-school education, the growth mean of pre-school education has increased to 15% in 1986 from 7.9% in 1980. Therefore, its 10.4% growth rate is higher than elementary schools (1.6%) or high schools (3.8%).

The 15% rate of pre-school education coverage is calculated by the number of participating children in 0-5 year-old population, while the major programs of pre-school education is concentrated on 3 to 5 or 6 year-old children that shows an important success in this field. Moreover, most statistics of pre-schools does not include those schools with unofficial programs or those schools who do not have an educational responsibility (Myers, 1992, p 8). The aim of education is to transform children's lives via preparing mentors with necessary knowledge and skills to support all students' learning. These skills include content knowledge, teaching and professional skills and knowledge, policies and the capabilities of performing professional activities that effect students positively (Idaho State University, 2000, p 2). There is a limited consensus about how children learn and how one can facilitate this learning. Edward Ziegler believes that "cognitive skills are very important and have close relationships with physical, social and sensational systems."

In a developmental research by Bowman and Donovan in 2001, they indicated that children learn cognitive skills by using integrated methods and their social and sensational growth in not separated from their health aspects.

What is considered for initial training is not wide application of recreations and toys and clear teachings but it is routine and daily interactions between children-adults which is more suitable to support children's growth and learning. For example, teaching the children to memorize alphabets is not sufficient for initial literacy. Rather, it is essential to consider their various developmental requirements. Every night, when a child listens to his/her father's stories, watches beautiful pictures and listens to surprising stories; he/she also learns words and phrases. We must prepare the environment for such children. Experts emphasize that without such supportive environments, children can not learn any skills especially when the conditions in schools are not incompatible with the conditions in homes.

To establish an effective pre-school education, policymakers should make following initiatives:

Creating and enhancing program standards: needed standards for pre-school education should be devised. They should be revised periodically in order to ensure that they are based on new studies about how the children are educated and how we can facilitate this process. Small groups of child-teacher should be respected. Experts suggest 2 teachers for groups with 16-20 members for 4-5 year-old children and 2 mentors for groups with 14 members for 3-year-old children. For smaller children, the group should be smaller.

Employing skillful teachers and creating a professional development system and compensating the suitable services of teachers and child educators: those pre-schools which serve children need supports for acquiring basic skills to perform their duties. These skills include scientific preparation for children promotion, social influence and training methods. Training methods and competencies should be defined and teachers should pass high education courses in social sciences colleges. Pre-schools should devise suitable programs and training motivations. It is needed to develop existing mentors and allocate necessary time. Legal and financial requirement should be met and special stimuli should be created. The salaries and training should be adopted with the situation of elementary school educators. When met, the educational quality is increased and mentor will remain in their careers in long-term.

Enhancing supportive interventions for parents and social service institutes: it may consist of parents' training activities who are their children's first mentors. It is vital to relate with social welfare, feeding agencies and social service organizations to support disabled children and meet other certain needs.

Developing the scope of evaluating pre-school education: like reports regarding the readiness of elementary schools educators, qualitative indicators are needed such as the appropriateness of the program with needs and the strength points of children and their families, education of training employees, employees' job stability and accessibility to services.

Providing a strategic and comprehensive training plan: initial care and initial training from born to 8-year-old children. (Committee for Economic Development , 2001).

There is an immediate need to provide the mentors in kindergartens and pre-schools with a set of literacy standards as well as information and guidelines for monitoring initial knowledge of their students (Bodrova et al, 2000).

Standards will be designed to facilitate the appointment of new teachers in their professional role and functions in order to get a common language and a new vision about the scope and complexities of education (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1997).

Each standard has four key components:

- Professional values and personal commitments;
- Professional apprehension and knowledge;
- Personal and professional traits;
- Professional actions.

Good teacher produces good student. This is the first aim of education and the teacher should be assessed on this basis. Good teachers need four kinds of knowledge and skills:

- Basic academic skills;
- Content knowledge about the issues to be trained;
- Knowledge about teaching art or teaching method as well as special teaching course;
- Hands-on training skills (Education Testing Service, 2004, p 10).

Researches about standard-based models in developing children's initial knowledge indicate three important preferred areas in learning and literacy:

- Knowledge and skills needed for reading prerequisites;
- Knowledge and skills needed for writing prerequisites;
- Basic lingual and cognitive skills (Bodrova et al, 2000, p 3).

Successfulness in managing the classroom depends on various related factors. The factors include:

1. Involvement in educational planning
2. Working in conditions with many disturbances and ups and downs
3. Students as responsible and responsive citizens
4. Teacher as a self-aware model
5. Classroom management skills
6. Working in conditions with barriers, stress and contingencies
7. Powerful teaching

The process will be endangered if even one item is neglected. So, punishment will be required (Hanson, 1998).

Teaching various methods include: Dynamic and proactive method, Qualitative rather than quantitative method, Targeted toward multilevel approaches for providing content, process and yields Student-centered and Educational method of combining class, group and individual. (Moghimi, 2003). Carol Cummings (2000) believed that dynamic and proactive method is the best way to manage the classroom. In this method, the teacher needs to predict students' needed skills and working behaviors in order to achieve a high performance based on national or local standards. A dynamic and proactive teacher will train self-control before content standards .Pre-school educators should be matured, patient, apprehensive, clear language, powerful body ad energetic. Skillfulness in art, representation and anecdotal are important and the teachers should have the abilities of business and management. Anyhow, this job needs integral trainings like BA or MA courses.

In general, pre-school teachers need patience, creativity, treatment ability, encouragement, training and influencing over children as well as organizational, managerial and leadership capabilities (Department of Labor, 2002). In most countries, applicants for teaching in pre- schools should have the necessary competencies based on defined standards in order to do their job namely effective training of students (Apple, 1999).

2. Research Methodology

In this field study, various aims and objectives are pursued. The main purpose of the research is to define national standards for pre-school education teachers.

Since the conceptual model of the research determines minor questions, this model is designed as an integration of models and local conditions and then minor questions are shaped with regard to the variables of conceptual model. This research tries to answer some fundamental questions. The main important questions include:

1. Which standards are suitable for pre-school education teachers?
2. What are the preferences and significances of national standards for pre-school education teachers?

This is an exploratory research and aims to discover teachers and principals' needed pre-school education. It is also descriptive because that it is designed to collect theories and related standards of pre-school education teachers. Meanwhile, surveys are used to collect the tools. Since this is a survey and fact-finding research, it required tools to acquire the related data.

In this research, questionnaire, interview, observation methods as well as reviewing documents and evidences are used and the questions were devised to collect the data.

To determine the standards for pre-school education teachers, local questionnaire, research literature and provisional interviews were designed. The questions include:

- a) Pedagogy elite's questionnaire for the standards of pre-school education teachers;
- b) Teachers' questionnaire for standards of pre-school education teachers;
- c) Parents' questionnaire for the standards of pre-school education teachers;
- d) School principals' questionnaire for the standards of pre-school education teachers;
- e) Training group supervisors' questionnaire for standards pre-school education teachers.

Therefore, in standardization phase, five questionnaires are used to design the standards of pre-school education teachers via the visions of teachers, parents, pedagogy elites, school principals and training group supervisors.

2.1. Data Analysis

In this research, various descriptive and inference statistics for data analysis and hypothesis test are applied. In descriptive statistics, the researcher describes the traits of studied sample via collecting and summarizing qualitative data of samples. In this research, the distribution rate, deviation or adoption of some individuals of the samples or characteristics of the samples are evaluated by statistical indices such as mean, mode, average, deviation, scale, etc.

In this research, descriptive statistics are used to review general situation and respondents' characteristics. Moreover, inference statistical tests are widely used. Variables average estimation was used to review the fact that whether standard indices are important or not. Freedman variance analysis test was used to identify and ranking the indices. Various analytical statistics methods were applied to review the significance degrees of attitudes of teachers, principals, parents, pedagogy elites and pre-school education experts.

3. Research Findings

In this section, the tables regarding the frequency and percentage of respondents in each province are represented to get familiar with respondents' statistics:

Table 1: Participants Education Level

Participants Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Less than diploma	30	2	2.1
Diploma	440	30	32.8
Associate of arts	406	27.6	61.1
MA	476	32.4	94.3
BA	73	5	99.4
PhD	8	0.5	
Overall	1433	97.5	
Unanswered	36	2.5	
Total	1469	100	

Table 2: Participants Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
< 20 year-old	12	0.8	0.8
25-30 year-old	398	27.1	28.8
31-40 year-old	557	37.9	68
41-50 year-old	400	27.2	96.1
> 50 year-old	55	3.7	100
Total	1422	96.8	
Unanswered	47	3.2	
Grand total	1469	100	

Table 3: Work experience in pedagogy

Years	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
< 3 years	127	8.6	9.5
3-7 years	214	14.6	25.4
7-12 years	194	13.2	39.9
12-17 years	270	18.4	60.1
> 17 years	535	36.4	100
Total	1340	91.2	
Unanswered	129	8.8	
Grand total	1469	100	

Table 4: Work experience in kindergartens

Years	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
< 3 years	368	25.1	36.9
3-7 years	329	22.4	70
7-12 years	108	7.4	80.8
12-17 years	60	4.1	86.8
> 17 years	131	8.9	100
Total	996	67.8	
Unanswered	473	32.2	
Grand total	1496	100	

Table 5: The type of educational degree

Educational Course	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Psychology and educational sciences	156	10.6	11.3
Elementary education	497	33.8	47.4
Pre-school education	266	18.1	66.7
Social and sociological sciences	31	2.1	69
Management	47	3.2	72.4
Other disciplines of scientific groups	179	12.2	85.4
Experimental sciences	96	6.5	92.4
Technical and mathematics	25	1.7	94.2
Others	80	5.4	100
Total	1377	93.7	
Unanswered	92	6.3	
Grand total	1496	100	

Table 6: Gender

Participants Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Female	1062	72.3	75.1
Male	353	24	100
Total	1415	96.3	
Unanswered	54	3.7	
Grand total	1469	100	

Table 7: Which group of respondents do you belong?

Participants	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Pre-school educator	647	44	47.8
Pre-school principal	221	15	64.1
Pedagogy elite	128	8.7	73.6
Pre-school students' parents	221	15	89.9
Pedagogy expert	137	9.3	100
Total	1354	92.2	
Unanswered	115	7.8	
Grand total	1496	100	

Proposed Standards for Pre-School Teachers

According to the results of this statistical research, suggested standards for pre-school teachers appropriate to our local conditions are provided:

Suggested standards	Sample size	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Confidence interval
Moral and religious	1440	4.53	0.50	(4.50, 4.55)
Content knowledge	1438	4.37	0.47	(4.35, 4.39)
Teaching method	1440	4.46	0.47	(4.43, 4.48)
Psychological	1441	4.54	0.45	(4.52, 4.57)
Beauteous	1435	4.18	0.59	(4.15, 4.21)
Classroom management	1436	4.50	0.44	(4.47, 4.52)
Technological	1437	4.05	0.67	(4.02, 4.09)
Professional development	1425	4.16	0.60	(4.13, 4.19)
Environmental communication	1424	4.39	0.58	(4.36, 4.42)
Evaluation	1423	4.28	0.58	(4.25, 4.31)

As seen in above table, all mean standards are over 4. Therefore, these 10 standards should be considered to select pre-school teachers and mentors. Meanwhile, the results of Freedman test and other integral tests about the importance of these variables show that their priorities differ from each other. The order of these variables is as follow:

1. "Moral and religious standard" and "psychological standard" variables
2. "Classroom management standard" variable
3. "Teaching method standard" variable
4. "Content knowledge standard" variable
5. "Environmental communication standards" and "Evaluation standard" variables
6. "Beauteous standard" and "professional development" variables
7. "Technological standards" variable

Initially, SPSS provides the following table for the average of variables' ranks:

Row	Variables	Average rank
1	Psychological standards	6.98
2	Moral and religious standards	6.89
3	Classroom management standards	6.59
4	Teaching method standards	6.23
5	Environmental communication standards	5.86
6	Content knowledge standards	5.46
7	Evaluation standards	5.04
8	Beauteous standards	4.26
9	Professional development standards	4.09
10	Technological standards	3.61

As shown, there is a high differentiate between top and down variables and we guess that based on the mean of all variables, H_0 will fail. Freedman's test results are shown in the following table:

Sample	Independence degree	χ^2
1405	9	2247.3

$\chi^2 = 2247.3$ which is highly greater than $\chi^2_{0.95}$. (Independence degree and test error = 5%). Hence, H_0 is strongly failed and there is a significant difference between at least two variables.

To determine the differentiation between variables mean and their ranking; it is needed to test studied variables called integral tests. We can state the importance of each variable after organizing such tests.

Finally, the results of Freedman's as well as integral tests about the importance of studied variables are summarized as follow:

1. "Moral and religious standard" and "psychological standard" variables
2. "Classroom management standard" variable
3. "Teaching method standard" variable
4. "Environmental communication standards" variable
5. "Content knowledge standard" variable
6. "Evaluation standard" variable
7. "Beauteous standard" and "professional development" variables
8. "Technological standards" variable

We successfully developed eight content standards and Most of these standards include several indicators (sub-standards), describing what teachers should know and be able to do in teaching pre-school students.

4. Conclusions

Regarding the importance of determining pre-school teachers in hiring and enhancing the qualitative levels of teachers and mentors, the results of this research show that from the viewpoints of various respondents (pre-school teachers and mentors, pedagogy elites, pre-school students' parents and pedagogy experts), we need to consider some standards for pre-school teachers in our country. Although the results of this research indicate some different attitudes in this field, there are ten standards as minor indicators that are necessary for pre-school teachers despite of their importance and priority. These standards are briefly explained.

In general, one could define confirmed variables for pre-school teachers in a 9-variable analytical framework as follow:

- **Moral and religious standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus on respecting moral rule and norms adopted with professional principles. Moreover, they also pay attention to pre-school teachers' beliefs.
- **Content knowledge standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus on the capabilities and skills of pre-school teachers in teaching what the children should learn.
- **Teaching method standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus on the way of transferring the concepts to children.
- **Psychological standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus on investigating children's affectionate psychological aspects by pre-school teachers.
- **Beauteous standards:** according to its indicators and determinants, it focuses on pre-school teachers' art and knowledge in using musical, anecdotal and theatrical activities.
- **Classroom management standards:** they are indicators and determinants that should be respected by pre-school teachers in order to motivate the children and to ensure pedagogy effectiveness.

- **Technological standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus on teachers' knowledge and skills in applying educational technology in children's education and training.
- **Professional development standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus on teachers' working skills progress and improvement through involving in professional development and similar actions.
- **Environmental communication standards:** they are indicators and determinants that address effective interactions between teachers and environmental factors such as parents and social organizations.
- **Evaluation standards:** they are indicators and determinants that focus not only on effective education evaluation but also on evaluation tools and methods as well as information resources and self-evaluation.

To apply any above standards, it is necessary to consider their indicators mentioned in descriptive and analytical tables in findings analysis section.

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