

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Level of Competencies in the Implementation of Music among Novice Preschool Teachers

**Dr. Kwan Shwu Shyan**

Lecturer, Teacher Education Institute Technical Education Campus, Malaysia

**Shahrul Nizam Salim**

Lecturer, Teacher Education Institute Technical Education Campus, Malaysia

### **Abstract:**

*This study examines the level of competencies among the novice preschool teachers in government preschool classrooms. This study utilized mainly the survey method to collect the quantitative data which involved 315 novice preschool teachers teaching in government preschool classrooms. Questionnaire was used for collecting the data. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics which were mean and standard deviation. In this study, the level of overall competencies was moderate. Although the majority of the respondents possessed overall competencies at a moderate level, about one-fifth of them still had a low level of competencies. Generally, the levels for the two main categories, namely music competencies and music teaching competencies were also moderate. The respondents had achieved a moderate level of both the music competencies and music teaching competencies. The findings showed that music teaching competencies were rated higher than music competencies by the novice teachers. Future research of competencies in the implementation of music can focus on case study which includes field observation and teachers' interviews as the investigation in this study was mainly utilized the quantitative approach.*

**Keywords:** *Competencies, music, preschool, curriculum, education*

### **1. Introduction**

Closely related to learning is teaching. Integral to teaching are the teachers themselves. As an important asset in any educational system, a quality teacher will realize an educational system and quality human being (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2009). Much work has been done by the Ministry of Education in the area of developing teachers' competencies in teaching. This competency-based approach focuses on the skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, and personal attributes as demonstrated through behaviors, which contribute to successful implementation of teaching in schools.

Examining teachers' competencies is a crucial factor in determining the quality of music education (Lee, 2006). By demonstrating high quality competencies, teachers can realize the objectives of the curriculum and reach their teaching goals. In the effort of the government to make sure that the teachers in this country achieve the standard, the aspects of training and teachers' professional development need to be given main attention. Teacher training institutions need to unite their efforts to provide quality teacher training programs as well as to upgrade the existing infrastructure and info structure.

### **2. Literature Review**

It would appear that childhood musical experiences have a powerful influence on the development of future adult attitudes about music and are predictive of musical involvement in later life (Kritzmire, 1991). Therefore, the teacher is an important source for early music experiences and has the potential to affect students' opinions about music (Verrastro & Leglar, 1992).

Lee (2006) conducted a study to investigate in-service preschool teachers' concepts of the competencies necessary for music teaching. A survey questionnaire collected the data from in-service preschool teachers to assess the perceptions of importance for both music competencies and music teaching competencies.

The findings from the study included: (a) rhythm and singing abilities were the most important music competencies for preschool teachers and singing and rhythm movement were also the most frequent activities in preschool, (b) general teaching ability was the most important music teaching competence for preschool teachers, and (c) teachers who taught different grades had different needs for instrument playing and activity designing abilities.

In Soderblom's study (1982), first-year teachers, experienced teachers, and college instructors considered the following competencies to be essential to the success of first-year elementary school general music teachers: conducting, singing, ancillary instruments, and lesson planning. Instructional planning was also viewed as very important by three-quarters of the respondents. The findings indicated that all respondents considered some music and music-teaching competencies to be essential to the success of first-year elementary school general music teachers. However, the first-year

general music teachers were concerned mainly with piano skills, knowledge of 'popular' types of music, and skills necessary to teach 'popular' types of instruments, none of which were considered essential.

Research findings indicate that isolation from other music teachers and resource staff is a significant problem for many beginning music teachers. Novice music teachers need to discuss their work, but they often do not have experienced people who have seen them teach (Conway, 2003).

Generally, it seems that, although music teachers view music skills as useful to their profession, they value content delivery or teaching skills more (Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Hamann et al., 2000). Similarly, Leong (1996) indicated that the competencies of novice music teachers most value involve music-teaching skills.

Ballantyne's (2005) analysis found that when discussing their ideal teacher education preparation, novice teachers in this study felt that pedagogical content knowledge and skills and professional knowledge and skills were most useful to them as teachers. However, their comments indicated that the structure of music coursework programs appeared to concentrate predominantly on general education knowledge and skills rather than the knowledge and skills specific to teaching music. This resulted in most teachers reporting that they felt unable to apply the knowledge and skills from general education subjects (where general pedagogical knowledge and skills were predominantly addressed) to the context of the music classroom. Consequently, they did not appear to value these subjects as highly as music curriculum subjects and the practicum (where pedagogical knowledge and skills were addressed).

Balancing music skills and pedagogy can be difficult. Subject matter pedagogy has been peculiarly and persistently divided in the conceptualization and curriculum of teacher education and learning to teach. This fragmentation of practice leaves teachers on their own with the challenges of integrating subject matter knowledge and pedagogy in the context of their work. Yet, being able to do this is fundamental to engaging in the core tasks of teaching, and it is critical to being able to teach all students well (Ball, 2000).

A project was undertaken by Stegall, Blackburn, and Coop (1978) to ascertain the competencies which music administrators believed teachers should possess. They devised a questionnaire using a list of 99 competencies derived from consultations with 30 professional music administrators from 11 different institutions. Of the 232 responses, most of the competencies were rated either 'of definite value' or 'of highest value'.

The top five music competencies, ranked in order of importance, were the following: (a) sings at sight common practice style melodies, which include major and minor, and modulations to closely-related and foreign key; i.e., sings at a tempo of one's choice and maintains key feeling even if errors are made; (b) defines the directional terms used, such as legato or allegro on any given musical score; (c) analyzes harmonic function (labels chords and non-harmonic tones) in compositions that include the full range of common practice harmonic vocabulary, and the works may employ any form or medium; (d) identifies harmonies written out or implied on any given printed score, or melody without printed chord symbols, from the common practice style; and (e) identifies incorrect pitches or rhythms in performed music of the common practice style by listening to a live or recorded performance while observing a score, out-of-tune notes, as well as 'wrong' notes.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method. The study utilized questionnaire as instrument for gathering data. Mail survey was administered in this study to obtain a variety of information or views regarding the competencies of novice preschool teachers.

The target population of the study was the novice preschool teachers who have taught five years or less in classrooms of preschools operating in the general National Primary Schools around central region of Malaysia. In this study, the central region consists of the states of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak and federal territories of Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur. A total of 390 sets of questionnaire sent to the subjects in this survey. There were 315 respondents or 80.77% retrieval of completed questionnaires out of the 390 sets sent.

The questionnaire was adapted and localized by the researcher based on the content of music courses offered by the Teacher Education Institute for early childhood education and through a review of the literature (Lee, 2006). Each item in Preschool Teachers' Competencies is measured on a 5 point Likert Scale: Very poor, Poor, Fair, Good, and Excellent. The choice of "1" means "Very poor" while the choice of "5" means "Excellent".

Reliability test for measuring homogeneity of the questionnaires' items were computed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The computed reliability coefficients were .985, .967 and .978 for overall competencies, music competencies and music teaching competencies respectively. As the reliability coefficients of the instrument were above .7, it can be concluded that the reliability of the instrument for the pilot study was acceptable according to George and Mallery (2003).

After actual data collection, the reliability test for the final questionnaire items was also carried out. The reliability scores provide evidence that the measures are internally consistent as shown in Table 1.

Research Categories	reliability ( $\alpha$ )	
	Pilot Study	Final
Overall Competencies	0.985	0.964
Music Competencies	0.967	0.942
Knowledge of music	0.949	0.895
Singing ability	0.965	0.916
Listening ability	0.900	0.899
Music reading ability	0.990	0.973
Rhythm ability	0.926	0.930
Instrument playing ability	0.992	0.906
Music Teaching Competencies	0.978	0.949
Teaching skills	0.964	0.894
Knowledge of music pieces	0.977	0.798
Activity planning ability	0.968	0.895
Professional teaching ability	0.975	0.905
Improvisation/composition ability	0.930	0.830
Evaluation ability	0.977	0.941

Table 1: Reliability of the Research Instrument

The data obtained from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS. Analysis of data was performed using descriptive statistics: frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations. The level of the variable was measured by using the mean average rating categories which were classified into low, moderate and high levels. To determine the level of the variable of competencies in the research, the mean score was used against the categories. The levels for the overall competencies and each category of the competencies (music competencies and music teaching competencies) are as follows:

Low	(1.00-2.33)
Moderate	(2.34-3.66)
High	(3.67-5.00)

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Competencies

The competencies were divided into two main categories, namely music competencies and music teaching competencies. The music competencies category was further divided into six sub-categories: (a) knowledge of music, (b) singing ability, (c) listening ability, (d) music reading ability, (e) rhythm ability, and (f) instrument playing ability. Similarly, the music teaching competencies category was divided into six sub-categories: (a) teaching skills, (b) knowledge of music pieces, (c) activity planning ability, (d) professional teaching ability, (e) improvisation/composition ability, and (f) evaluation ability.

### 4.2. Level of Music Competencies

In general, the novice preschool teachers indicated that they had a moderate level of music competencies ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ). Specifically, they indicated that they had a moderate level of singing ability ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), listening ability ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ), rhythm ability ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ), and knowledge of music ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ). However, they reported that they had only a low level of music reading ability ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) and instrument playing ability ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ).

The singing ability had the highest mean score. The lowest mean score was for the instrument playing ability, followed by the second lowest mean score for the music reading ability. Singing ability was the highest contributing factor and instrument playing ability was the lowest contributing factor toward a higher level of music competencies of the novice teachers.

The results of the current study are consistent with Lee's (2006) results which revealed a moderate level for rhythm ability, singing ability, knowledge of music, and listening ability among the preschool teachers in Taiwan. The low level of music reading ability in the current study is also parallel to Lee's (2006) finding. Moreover, the low level of instrument playing ability also supports Lucy Gawis' (2007) finding which indicated that preschool teachers did not have basic skills in music tools (keyboard, guitar, percussion).

### 4.3. Level of Music Teaching Competencies

In general, the novice preschool teachers indicated that they had a moderate level of music teaching competencies ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ). Specifically, they indicated that they had a moderate level in all the six sub-categories, namely teaching skills ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ), knowledge of music pieces ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ), professional teaching ability ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ), activity planning ability ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ), improvisation/composition ability ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ), and evaluation ability ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ).

The teaching skills had the highest mean score. The lowest mean score was for the evaluation ability, followed by the second lowest mean score for the improvisation/composition ability. Teaching skills were the highest contributing

factor and evaluation ability was the lowest contributing factor toward a higher level of music teaching competencies of the novice teachers.

In this study, evaluation ability and improvisation/composition ability may be related to teachers being less familiar with these music teaching competencies. If teachers have more education or higher levels of music familiarity, they tend to evaluate more fully children's learning in music (Lee, 2006); for example, detecting pitch in class singing and correcting pitch in group singing. A study done by Leong (1996) also indicated that music teachers did not rate highly the skills in improvising and composing. If preschool teachers have adequate music teaching competencies, they are able to increase the level of implementation of music for their preschoolers.

#### 4.4. Level of Overall Competencies

As a whole, the level of the respondents' overall competencies ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ) was moderate. Although the majority of the respondents possessed overall competencies at a moderate level, about one-fifth of them still had a low level of competencies. Generally, the levels for the two main categories, namely music teaching competencies ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) and music competencies ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) were also moderate.

The respondents had achieved a moderate level of both the music competencies and music teaching competencies. The findings showed that music teaching competencies were rated higher than music competencies by the novice teachers.

Based on the findings, the music requirements for teacher education programs whether in teacher preparation or professional development programs should include more specific, practical, and accessible competencies which applicable to the preschool classrooms (Kwan, 2015).

Level of Variable	Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Overall Competencies			2.77	0.45
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	61	19.4		
Moderate (2.34 – 3.66)	245	77.8		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	9	2.9		
Music Competencies			2.57	0.52
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	101	32.1		
Moderate (2.34 – 3.66)	202	64.1		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	12	3.8		
Music Teaching Competencies			2.96	0.48
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	27	8.6		
Moderate (2.34 – 3.66)	261	82.9		
High (3.67 – 5.00)	27	8.6		

Table 2: Level of Competencies

## 5. Conclusions

Generally, the levels for the two main categories, namely music competencies and music teaching competencies were moderate. The respondents had achieved a moderate level of both the music competencies and music teaching competencies. The findings showed that music teaching competencies were rated higher than music competencies by the novice teachers. The level of overall competencies was moderate. Although the majority of the respondents possessed overall competencies at a moderate level, about one-fifth of them still had a low level of competencies. This might be contributed by the lack of competence novice teachers have regarding their abilities to meet the demands and difficulties in real life teaching. Although the teachers were provided with comprehensive teaching preparation, the tasks of preparing teachers could not be accomplished solely through teacher preparation programs. Being new to the profession, most likely the novice teachers would encounter several problems either professional or personal. In the real context, novice teachers need to seek on their own the appropriate measures when confronted with problems and challenges. In addition, some of them might have difficulty in transferring the knowledge and skills they obtained during teacher preparation program into their preschool classrooms. Therefore, support for the novice teachers could be critical to the robust development of teachers' competencies. The data to determine the competencies in the implementation of music in this study can provide information on the quality of music education for young children in preschools. Future research of competencies in the implementation of music can focus on case study which includes field observation and teachers' interviews. The qualitative investigation and interpretive case studies could help to provide a better understanding of the opinions and identify further problems faced by novice teachers regarding their competencies in the implementation of music.

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