

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER PATHWAY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: MALAYSIA CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The educational sector plays an important role in delivering quality education in order to build better nations by striving for excellence. Career development is filled with many challenges encompassing financial, economic, logistical and social factors. The challenges are mainly on quality, qualification, language and ethnicity. Specifically, unclear career pathway, limited information, internet access and job positions, training, special needs training, policies, promotion, no funding, no standardized wage charter guidelines, pursue study and lack of support. This study focuses on the framework of the orientations and challenges related to career pathway faced by in-service educators namely edu-carer and assistant. Methodology used in this study are document analysis and thematic analysis of interview data from public and private Early Childhood Care and Education in Malaysia. The results show there are five important elements that contribute to the development of career path among the ECCE educators. These include the appropriate plan of career pathway for each individual, assessment carried out by the superiors to identify individual's performance and its implication to the children development, sufficient and appropriate trainings either skills or knowledge, requirement of incentives and reward for self-improvement and the support, encouragement and facilitation from the superiors. This study impact on individual growth and development not only professionally but also personally, by plotting a course for identifying occupational interests, determining education and training needs and verifying an action plan for reaching career goals. In sum, the standardize framework for EECE career pathway had been developed that is beneficial to all parties.

Keywords: early childhood care and education, challenges, career development, career pathway, framework, in-service educators

INTRODUCTION

Child Edu-care Centres (CECs) imply to any organizations that support child care provision or early childhood education for children aged between 0 to 6 years old (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2014). CECs can be allocated into three categories, which are the child care centre, kindergarten (Taman Didikan Kanak-kanak, TADIKA and Taman Bimbingan Kanak-kanak, TABIKA) and preschool. According to the fundamental and subsidiary jobs of

edu-carers, it is noticeable that edu-carers emphasis on teaching as well. This task involves broad range of knowledge related to the teaching content (Brookhar, 2011), as well as soft skills such as communication (Brookhart, 2011; Pachauri & Yadav, 2014), thinking skills, problem solving skill, team work force, life-long learning and information management, entrepreneur skill, ethics, moral and professionalism and leadership skills (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). The understanding on contents and the soft skills collectively support edu-carers to carry out teaching activities. The *first objective* of this study focuses on how the orientations of career for the in-service educators. *Second objective* focus on the related to career pathway faced by in-service educators and *third objective* is design the framework of ECCE career pathway for the in-service educators. In general, the core job of administrators is administrating the operations at the CECs, while the edu-carers focus on educating the children. The assistants, on the other hand, are mainly responsible for assisting the edu-carers. The educational sector plays an essential task in providing quality education in order to build better nations by striving for excellence. Education, either formal or informal, plays an important role to help the masses to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. A study by Selvaraj et al. (2014) indicate that there are four main factors that can help improve the Malaysian educational system, namely teaching and learning, governance, globalization and knowledge-based society. The main challenges of ECCE educators in educational field are mainly on quality, qualification, language and ethnicity or race (Md Nor, 2019). Staff improvement falls under quality which prompts proficient development and advancement and vocation improvement. Career development aids an individual growth not only professionally but also personally, thus it is one of the importance elements in professional growth and development. The framework is expected to offer and equip individuals to work well and be able to take responsibility for educating children holistically. The framework is needed to produce opportunities and values as a professional for early childhood educators.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Analysis

The document and thematic analysis of interview data were used for this study respectively. This study was conducted on qualitative method. Interviews are another approach to gathering qualitative data about users' thoughts and feelings but they allow a deeper understanding of these than can be captured through observation (Patton, 2005). According to Creswell and Miller (2000) supports this view that the method of interview can help researchers gather specific kinds of information and explore participants' thoughts more fully. The interviews were conducted by three experts from Sultan Idris Education University and the Institute of Teacher Education shared their reviews with two representatives from Department of Social Welfare about the interview practice. All the feedback were transcribed, coded and categorized using the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Experts from the Department of Social Welfare were recruited to validate the interview questions, which is important in the data collection phase of qualitative studies (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006).

RESULTS

Based on the findings of these studies, the suitable framework of ECCE career pathway had been designed. The findings suggested that the Career Development Program at TASKA and TADIKA in Malaysia are based on the abilities of the organizations involved. Employers are advised to offer a suitable career path for educators based on their experiences.

The analysis of data from interviews (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006), document analysis and survey has shown the elements required in developing the ideal framework for ECCE career pathway. Among them are academic qualifications and skills in ECCE qualification. All service providers in this study agreed to a certain level that academic and skills qualification become the top priority in recruiting ECCE educators. This will lead to the orientation career pathways of educators and other personnel in the organization. Each level is appropriate with its roles and responsibilities. Other than the academic and skills requirement for the appointment of educators at CECs in Malaysia, competencies of the personnel is also considered essential.

The study has revealed the disparity of orientations of career pathway for the in-service edu-carers and edu-carers assistant in ECCE centres. Career pathway refers to an organized approach towards career planning by plotting a course for identifying occupational interests, determining education and training needs and establishing an action plan for reaching career goals (Dupree, 2018). Findings show that the current minimum qualification required for edu-carers for entering the ECCE service varies among the service providers, which is from SPM to the bachelor degree of ECCE depending on the type of CEC. However, it was found that the competency level is similar between diploma and degree holders. Hence, it is suggested Diploma of ECCE is sufficient for the edu-carer level. On the other hand, the present minimum qualifications of edu-carers assistant are quite low such as PMR/PT3 or SPM. Therefore, to improve the quality of services, it is recommended that the minimum qualification of an edu-carer assistant is a certificate of ECCE. As revealed in the findings, career development is fraught with many challenges encompassing financial, economic, logistical and social factors, which have to be addressed effectively. Therefore, it is hardly surprising to note that most educators are stuck in their current positions for a long period of time. It is noticeable that these challenges can either be directly from the educators themselves or indirectly from the employers.

Thematic Analysis

Undeniably, employers should offer suitable career paths related to the current proficiencies as well as recommending career supervision in the field of administration. Hence, employers should always offer support to career enhancements as well as monitor and guide franchisee under employers. Based on the thematic analysis, the 12 (twelve) themes had been found as shown at the following Table 1.

Table 1
The summarization of ECCE educators' challenges (public sector) in career development.

No.	Code	Challenges
1	Unclear Career Pathway	Little exposure given to caregivers in improving children's knowledge and skills in ECCE.
2	Limited Information Dissemination	Limited dissemination of information regarding on career development and also the workshops or courses offered and formal opportunities from main sources.
3	Limited Internet Access	None or limited career pathway information due to limited internet access especially for educators in rural areas.
4	Limited Job Positions	Educators are given the opportunity to further their studies in the PAKK Diploma. However, there has been no increase in careers development despite the increase in academic level.
5	Training	As for the training, the challenges are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educators are required to attend seven (7) courses a year. 2. The course only offered in weekends (holidays). 3. The course will only be conducted if the number of participants meets the minimum number of participants. 4. Courses need to be taken at their own expenses, else if the courses are paid by the employers will give impact where trainees are bound to work with the employer for a period of time.
6	Special Needs Training	Not given formal courses/training on the latest children's education approach and to handle special needs students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to obtain information such as appropriate training, to handle students with special needs.
7	Policies	Rigid policies from agencies in terms of courses attended and fees.
8	Promotion/ Recognition	Opportunity to be selected into full-time positions. Promotion through SKT assessments into higher DG grades (earn high marks for 3 consecutive years of assessment).
9	No Funding Provided	Edu-carer have to bear their own money if they want to pursue higher education. Course fees were paid by teaching staff to relieve operators of additional financial strain.
10	No Standardized Wage Charter Guidelines	Payment of salary is inappropriate with educators' qualifications. Small increments of salaries and did not commensurate with teaching responsibility. he differences in salaries between government-run childcare centres and privately-operated childcare centres, with the latter having better pay.

11	Pursue Study to Higher Level	Lack opportunities to further develop their careers. For private childcare centres, only supervisors are given opportunities for career development.
12	Lack of Support and Encouragement from Employers	Operators are worried that staff who they have hired would quit, which would forfeit them the payments of (Kursus Asas PERMATA) KAP.

The findings indicate that some of ECCE educators misunderstood and left their career development to be accomplished by the employers. Many issues evolve in the implementation of ECCE at CEC. As for TADIKA employers, they highlight the need to support their staff in the form of motivation and the opportunity to gain experience. According to employers' standpoint, appreciation may also be given in the form of opportunities to attend courses that can recuperate job performance along with promotion opportunities.

Employers are advised to offer a suitable career path for educators based on their capabilities. Encouragement and support from employers for their staff to pursue studies in ECCE or into a higher level are important due to enhance their knowledge and skills. The findings propose that the Career Development Program at TASKA and TADIKA in Malaysia are accordance to the needs and capabilities of the agencies involved. The challenges related to career pathway confronted by the in-service edu-carers as well as the service providers are summarized in the below figure. There are five categories that contribute to the career pathway challenges.



Figure 1. The main challenges in career pathway of ECCE Educators.

Support, Encouragement and Facilitation

“we encourage her.. for the input, we send her to the course, if she doesn’t know how to teach, we give her info how to teach.. for effective education tu.. at the same time we bring her to any course..” (PENGUSHA10_R2/P21)

Plan for Educators' Career Path

“And then after they get diploma, what they want to do? What is my career path? Okay. You work for me a few months or years. We teach you admin. Administrative...” (PENGUSAHA12_P14)

Training and Courses

“If she obtain KAP certificate, we will increase her salary..”
(PENGUSAHA_11/R1/P13)

Incentive and Rewards for Educators

“I will observe the improvement in the children for the past three months ... if there are many (better changes) I will increase her salary..”
(PENGUSAHA_11/R1/P13)

Method for Promotion Assessment

“Arr ok. Here.... err we are contract staff... What do we call? (SKT)”
(PEGAWAI_13/1119)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings show there are five important elements that contribute to the development of career path among the ECCE educators. The analysis of data from interviews, document analysis and survey has disclosed the elements needed in developing the ideal framework for ECCE career pathway. Among them are academic qualifications and skills in ECCE qualification. These include the; (i) appropriate plan of career pathway for each individual; (ii) assessment carried out by the superiors to identify individual's performance and its implication to the children development; (iii) sufficient and appropriate trainings either skills or knowledge; (iv) requirement of incentives and reward for self-improvement; and (v) the support, encouragement and facilitation from the superiors. All findings have been analysed and simplified into career pathway framework for ECCE for better understanding, specifically early childhood educators (teachers, trainees, edu-carers). This framework is intended to provide and equip individuals to work well and be able to take responsibility for educating children holistically. The framework is essential to generate opportunities and values as a professional for early childhood educators. Each level is appropriate with its roles and responsibilities. Other than the academic and skills requirement for the appointment of educators at CECs in Malaysia, competencies of the personnel is also considered essential.



Figure 2. Career pathway minimum qualification orientation of career competency career management roles/ positions.

The proposed framework reveals three main points to be considered in developing the framework of career pathway ideal framework of ECCE career pathway for the in-service personnel. Firstly, the opportunities to improve the professionalism of ECCE educators that includes the professional development programs for each level of personnel which are administered by the employers. Trainings and courses to improve the knowledge and skills related to ECCE are provided by the CEC operators. Secondly the challenges faced by the both educators and operators that need to be addressed accordingly. Thirdly, the management of career pathway for each level of personnel to ensure appropriate qualified person at the appropriate position.

All findings have been scrutinized and streamlined into career pathway framework for ECCE for better understanding, specifically early childhood educators (teachers, trainees, edu-carers). This framework is intended to offer and furnish individuals to work well and be capable to take responsibility for educating children holistically. The framework is essential to generate opportunities and values as a professional for early childhood educators.

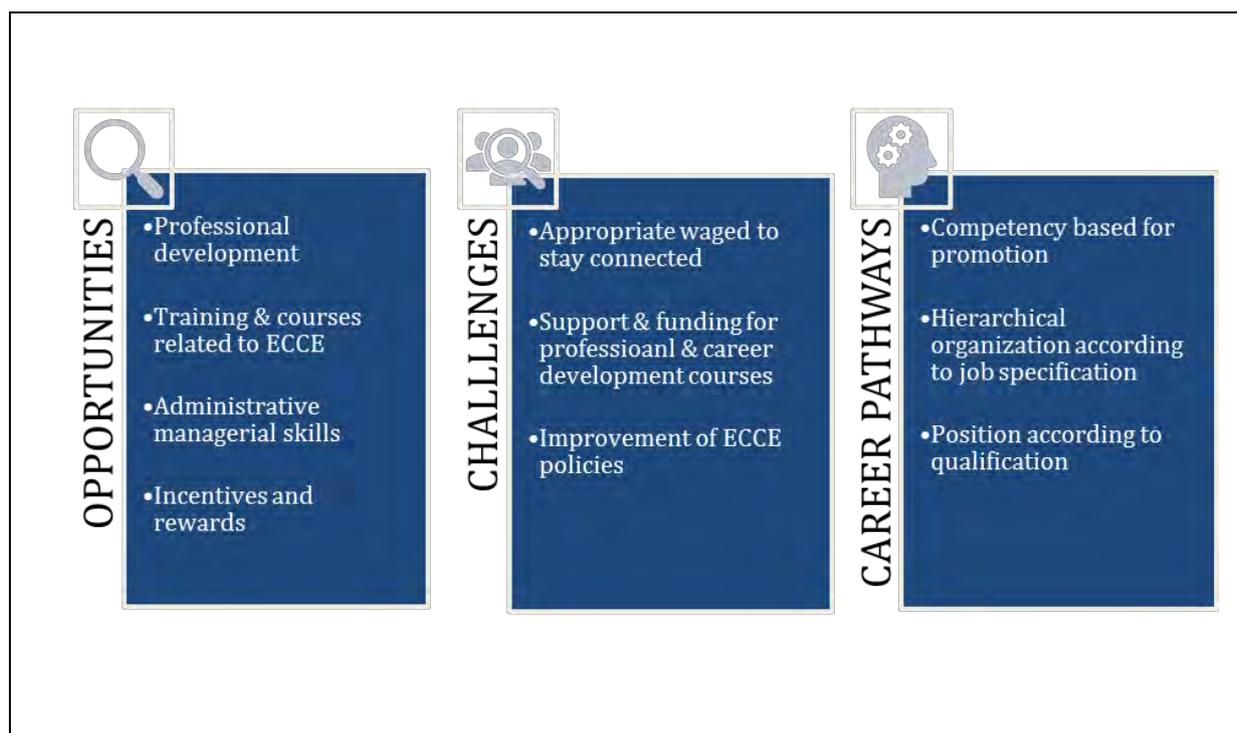


Figure 3. Track in developing the ideal framework of ECCE career pathway.

CONCLUSION

There are opportunities for career development for both educators and educators assistant however, they differ between agencies. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the educators, opportunities given for promotion are scarce regardless the types of CEC. The opportunities to improve the professionalism of ECCE educators that includes the professional development programs for each level of personnel which are administered by the employers. Trainings and courses to improve the knowledge and skills related to ECCE are provided by the CEC operators. Secondly the challenges faced by the both educators and operators that need to be addressed accordingly. Thirdly, the management of career pathway for each level of personnel to ensure appropriate qualified person at the appropriate position.

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