

# Governance of Education Related ECCE Policies in Malaysia

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Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Malaysia is catching much more limelight now than in the past. In a country where governance is very centralized, such attention has given rise to more quality preschool classes and initiatives. Comprehensive policies have been developed and implemented, however studies have shown that there are gaps between the aspired and the implemented. Good governance ensures successful implementation of policies. Good governance requires the authority and other stakeholders to focus on the vulnerable population including the indigenous people, children with special needs and refugee. Providing effective dissemination of policies, maintaining a sustainable mechanism of monitoring, attention to coordination and integration are tasks at hand to ensure successful implementation of policies. The ECCE Policy Implementation Review initiated by UNESCO and UNICEF has provided much evidence-based input to tackle these issues. This paper provides a situation analysis of the status of ECCE in Malaysia based on the findings of ECCE Policy Implementation Review.

Key words : governance, early childhood policy, Malaysia

## Introduction

In the traditional multiracial society of Malaysia, children though expected to be submissive to their elders are always treated as jewel of the community who would carry on the culture and collective wisdom of the people as well as propel the country to greater heights. As such, education plays a major role to mould and prepare these children. The field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Malaysia has in the past prospered mainly through

the effort of the local communities, religious bodies, private entities and also charitable organisations. However in the last two and a half decades more regulatory measures and rigorous initiatives in the form of policies or programs have been taken up by the government. There is also a progressively increasing amount of funding given to ECCE each year either from the public or private sectors. Milestones that have been achieved in ECCE includes the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC), the enactment of Child Act, the inclusion of preschool education (4-6 years old) as part of the formal education system through the Education Act 1996. A much awaited milestone that is acoming is the admendment of Education Act to include

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childcare and education for 0-4 years old within the national education system.

There are four main areas in the policy process; these are policy planning, policy development, policy implementation and evaluation of policy implementation. Among all these, policy implementation has been generally accepted as the most critical area in the field of ECCE especially in developing countries such as Malaysia. Three major concerns in policy implementation are governance, finance and costing. In many countries including Malaysia, many comprehensive policies are in place. However the implementation of these policies is less than satisfactory. This paper focuses on issue of policy implementation specifically on the governance of policies for care and education of the 4-6 years old.

### Current Status of ECCE in Malaysia

ECCE in Malaysia is broadly divided into two main groups, the 0-4 years old and the 4-6 years old. ECCE for the 4-6 years old group falls under the responsibilities of three Ministries, i.e. Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Rural and Regional Development(MRRD), as well as Department of National Unity and Integration(DNUI). ECCE for the 0-4 years old currently is mainly the responsibility of Ministry of Woman, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) and MRRD.

MRRD is the pioneer in setting up preschools in Malaysia (beginning early 1970's), these preschools are commonly known as the KEMAS preschool. KEMAS preschools are located in rural or suburban and are set up based on request by the local community. In the late 1970's DNUI set up preschools in the urban areas where there are 'Rukun Tetangga', a

Table 1  
Types of Public Preschools in Malaysia (2010)

Types of preschool	MOE	KEMAS	Private	PERPADUAN
Enrolment of children age 5+	156192	84548	81078	20888
Percentage (%)	45.58	24.67	23.66	6.10

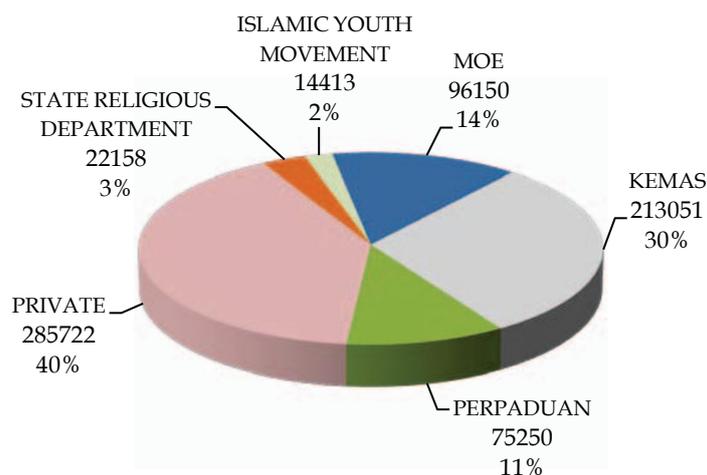


Figure 1. Number of preschool students (4-6 years old) in the various providing agencies as of 2007 (CDD, 2007b)

friendly neighborhood scheme, these preschools are generally known as the PERPADUAN preschools, PERPADUAN preschools accept students from the different races into a class and parents from different racial background form the board of governance. MOE is the latest in setting up preschools. In the year 1992, 1131 preschool classes were set up by MOE in the form of pilot project as an annex to the existing primary school. Beginning from the year 2003, MOE preschool project rolled out to whole nation, increasing 500 to 1500 classes per year in the primary school. Other providers of preschool education include religious bodies and private sectors. Various names are given to preschool education in the local language such as *tadika*, *tabika*, *prasekolah*. To facilitate discussion, all would be known as preschool in this paper. Table 1 and Diagram 1 provide an overview of number and percentage of preschool students enrolled in the various types of preschools.

## ECCE Policy Implementation Review

*ECCE Policy Implementation Review* is a UNICEF and UNESCO initiated research project with the broad aim of bringing forth the message of the importance of ECCE and the need to further develop and streamline ECCE related national policies. The main objectives of ECCE Policy Implementation Review are to assess how well the existing policies are being implemented and to find out gaps of implementation.

This research used both quantitative and qualitative methodology. While the quantitative data provided a comprehensive situation analysis of the current status of ECCE policies implementation, the qualitative data seek for explanations and reasons for certain performance revealed through the quantitative data. Questionnaires were administered, interviews conducted, focus group discussion conducted, classroom teaching observation made and analysis of documents conducted.

Table 2

*Overview of recently completed studies on ECCE in Malaysia*

No.	Research/Study	Overview of the research/study
1	Mid Decade Assessment of Education for All - Goal 1: Expand early childhood care and education - <i>A UNESCO project.</i>	All stakeholders involved with ECCE in Malaysia cooperated in this project. Data was collected extensively from existing documents and focus groups discussions.
2	Evaluation of Preschool Program - <i>conducted by Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD), MOE in 2007/8</i>	Areas of concern: Enrolment of children, quantity and quality of basic facilities, implementation of National Preschool Curriculum (NPC) Respondents: 890 respondents from various public and private preschools Instrument: Questionnaires
3	Implementation of National Preschool Curriculum in MOE preschools - <i>conducted by Curriculum Development Division (CDD), MOE in 2007/8</i>	Areas of concern: Implementation of NPC Respondents: MOE preschool teachers Instruments: Questionnaires (3700 respondents), classroom observations (28 observations), interview (28 interviews)

*Note.* From "Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Implementation Review," by CDD, 2007b, Malaysia: Ministry of Education Malaysia

Table 3

*Additional studies conducted to supplement data obtained from research conducted in Table 2*

No.	Studies	Overview of the research/study
1	Participation and implementation of NPC by private preschools	Areas of concern: Understanding of NPC, issues faced by private preschools Respondents: Private preschools teachers and operators, government officers, members of ECCE related NGOs Instruments: Questionnaire (22), interviews (4), school visits (2), focus groups discussions (3), document analysis
2	Participation of indigenous children in MOE preschools	Visits to three centers
3	Teaching and learning in MOE Special Education Preschool - <i>conducted by Special Education Preschool Unit in collaboration with CDD</i>	Questionnaires were filled up by teachers teaching in Special Children Preschools Observations and interviews on 4 teachers conducted by Special Education Preschool Unit officer
4	Coordination and integration in ECCE - <i>conducted by CDC</i>	Respondents: officers from various departments and Ministries involved in ECC, NGOs, private preschools operators Methodology: Focus group discussions (2 sessions), interview (6 persons), questionnaire (11 answered)
5	Visit to KEMAS preschool	One KEMAS preschool was visited 2 KEMAS teachers and 1 district supervisor were interviewed
6	Visit to PERPADUAN preschool	One PERPADUAN preschool was visited

*Note.* From "Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Implementation Review," by CDD, 2007b, Malaysia: Ministry of Education Malaysia

The ECCE policies in Malaysia especially those related to the preschools have been implemented for at least 5 years. Related government agencies have already embarked to study its implementation. *ECCE Policy Implementation Review* did not intend to reinvent the wheel but rather consolidate and build on findings from the on-going or just completed studies as shown in Table 2. Brief overview of each of these studies is provided in the same table.

From the findings of the above studies, various issues of concern were discovered. More in-depth data was deemed as necessary in order to shed lights onto these issues. The following smaller scale studies as listed in Table 3 were then conducted.

### **Issue of Governance in ECCE Policy Implementation**

Govern in a legal sense and from a nation's perspective carries the meaning of 'controlling' the people through the introduction of constitution, laws, and regulations using the mechanism of organized public services. The reason for control is usually for a particular noble purpose. Governance lays out roles and responsibilities of each stakeholders as well as line of authority (Britto & Ravens, 2009). Policy implementation depends on this mechanism of governance; good governance always leads to effective implementation of the policy. Issues related to governance of policy include sustainability of

policy, inclusiveness in planning and implementation of policy, attention to vulnerable population, dissemination of policy and program, accountability in governance, coordination of policy implementation and funding. The following sections will deliberate on some of these issues using findings from the ECCE Policy Implementation Review as well as other sources of information.

### ***Attention to Vulnerable Population***

Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November, 1989 places the care and protection of every child as a priority for everyone especially government. CRC has indicated that all children should be treated equally, thus policies on children are mostly universal, standardized throughout the population and non-discriminative against children from different geographic location, social economic status, physical and mental abilities. From a purely governance perspective, often it is these vulnerable populations which contribute to factors causing the ineffective implementation of a particular policy. However from a humanistic perspective often it is also because of this vulnerable population that a particular policy was drafted.

Much has been done in the field of ECCE since Malaysia achieves independence in 1957. Today only about 10% of the 5+ children do not have preschool education (CDD, 2007b). Almost 100% of school going kids has access to primary school education (MOE 2008). Almost 100% of children have access to health care services too (CDD, 2007b) The vulnerable populations who do not have equal access to ECCE have been identified through the ECCE Policy Implementation Report (2007) as the indigenous children, refugee children, as well as children with disabilities.

***Indigenous Children.*** Indigenous children in Malaysia are categorized into two major groups, orang asli in the peninsular of Malaysia (West

Malaysia) and other indigenous children in East Malaysia (the states of Sabah and Sarawak). In fact, indigenous people form the major population of East Malaysia, they are made up of the ethnic groups of Iban, Dayak, Kadazan, Penan, Bidayuh etc. Though many of these indigenous people are already living in towns and cities, there are still many who are leading a more nomadic life in the interior of Sabah and Sarawak. Indigenous people in peninsular of Malaysia are known as the '*orang asli*'. Many of them still stay in remote and interior areas of Malaysia. Feedback obtained from Curriculum Development Division's visit to the indigenous schools in 2007 indicated that generally the orang asli has their ways of life and are reluctant to leave their home in remote area. Many of their children either do not go to school or dropped out from school during their primary school years.

***Preschool Education (4-6 years old).*** Since 1992, KEMAS has set up dedicated kindergartens to cater for the needs of orang asli children. Indigenous children in Sabah and Sarawak however, attend preschools operated by the Ministry of Education, KEMAS, PERPADUAN and private kindergartens. In areas, especially in remote areas that do not have preschools, NGOs such as PACOS or local communities provide some form of preschool education to help children acquire language skill as well as develop motor and social skills.

Table 4 shows the number of indigenous children of 4-6 years attending preschool from 2000 to 2006. There is a sudden increase in children's enrolment in 2003 and also 2006. This jump in number is due to the policy of the MOE to build more preschools in Sabah and Sarawak. At the end of 2009, the government of Malaysia announces another initiative to expand ECCE through National Key Result Areas (NKRA). One of the measures is to increase the number of preschool classes in remote area; more preschools are to be built in the interior of peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak within the next two years. The steady increase in indigenous children population in

Table 4

*Number of Indigenous Children Attending Preschools by The Different Agency and Year*

Year	Number of indigenous children in preschools operated by							
	KEMAS in peninsular Malaysia		MOE in Sabah		MOE in Sarawak		Grand Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2000	1896	1907	1668	1615	1837	1802	5401	5324
2001	1939	1887	1691	1549	1862	1836	5492	5272
2002	2027	2015	1766	1626	2073	1847	5866	5488
2003	2078	2135	3590	3434	3762	3416	9430	8985
2004	2097	2236	4061	3952	4253	3868	10411	10056
2005	2135	2188	4806	4773	4822	4683	11763	11644
2006	2408	2498	5306	5238	7274	6999	14988	14735

*Note.* From “Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Implementation Review,” by CDD, 2007b, Malaysia: Ministry of Education Malaysia

preschool as well as the NKRA initiative is proof of good governance as well as good planning for the fulfillment of the policy to provide each child in Malaysia with opportunity to preschool education.

Merely providing the physical facilities of preschool classes is not enough as even in existing classes absentees of the indigenous children is rampant. A team from the CDD, MOE has visited the

indigenous primary schools for a curriculum project in the year of 2007, one of the member of the team is a preschool officer. As part of the data collection for the ECCE Policy Review she visited the preschool classes in these schools. The box below is one of the excerpts providing glimpses of life and difficulties faced by the indigenous children and their teachers. Names given in the boxes are fictitious but the story is true.

*Jimmy, a five years old Penan boy from Sarawak wakes up in the morning and happily walks with his mother to go to his preschool class in SK Kapok, Miri - a national primary school with a population of slightly over 100. The school caters for those from age 5+ to 13, from preschool to grade 6. Jimmy’s class has 25 children, more children than each of the other grades (1 – 6) which has less than 20 in each class. All the children from grade 1 to grade 6 are staying in the school hostels. Jimmy’s parents could send him to preschool because the school is near their home, There are many other Penan families who stay far away do not have these opportunity because they need to take a few hours to brave the rough terrain to come to the preschools. They would love to have their children in the hostel, however, regulations state that those in preschool cannot stay in hostel. .... Jimmy has a sweet smiling teacher who stays in the school, she comes from another community and for her to reach the school, she has to endure 5 to 6 hours of rough red granite road, and only the good old truck can bring her there. SK Kapok is lucky, they have electricity using generator and water supply. There is a large community of Penan around the school, there are some schools with only two students. SK Kapok is among many schools open by the government of Malaysia to bring the indigenous people to the mainstream, equipping them with proper education.*

*(as told by Shima, MOE, 2007)*

*(Source: CDD, 2007b)*

There are other stories besides Jimmy reported in the ECCE Policy Implementation Review (CDD, 2007b). A few key issues emerged from these qualitative data, among these is the physical distance to the schools and the policy of disallowing preschool children to stay in school hostels due to their tender age. The ECCE Policy Implementation Review has been presented at different administrative levels, national and international and at various occasions to different audiences. It is heartening to note that either as a direct or indirect consequence, under the most recent NKRA initiative, MOE is opening the first preschool classes in long houses (found in interior) by middle of 2010.

Another factor highlighted was the ignorance of parents concerning the value of education. Parents are also afraid their children learning a new mainstream culture and losing their indigeneous cultural identity (CDD, 2007b). These factors need to be dealt with in a delicate yet convincing manner in order to reach every child of the indigenous community.

Other than the government sectors, NGOs are also contributing towards providing quality ECCE programs to the indigenous children. As an example, in the state of Sabah, PACOS, a community-based organization runs seven ECCE centers in the interior of Sabah involving 2020 children and 71 teachers and caregivers (CDD, 2007b).

**Refugee Children.** The number of refugee children in Malaysia is quite substantial as shown in Table 5.

The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) has begun towards the end of 2006 sourcing for information on refugee children, children of asylum seekers, and undocumented children who are school-going age and but not in school. This information is to enable SUHAKAM to plan its programme for promoting the right to education of these disadvantaged children.

Issues of refugee are complicated and controversial. The general feeling is that based on humanitarian ground, help should be given. However, the government and the public is also weary that as more programs are formulated for the refugee, would it cause an influx of refugee and create financial burden to the country, this then is also detrimental to the established social structure of the country. It might be the right of the refugee for care and education, but it is also the right of the citizens of Malaysia to obtain the best care and education which might be in jeopardy if too much of resources are allocated for the refugee.

**Children with Disability.** One of the biggest gap identified by the ECCE Policy Implementation Review (2007) is related to children with disability. Children Act 2001 provides that every child is entitled to protection and assistance in all circumstances without regard to distinction of any kind. However, issue of accessibility, quality as well as lack of data for children with special needs still plagued the country. The feeling of helplessness and ignorance among

Table 5  
Number of Refugee Children of Preschool Age (4-6 years) according to UNHCR's record (2006)

Nationality	Male	Female	Total
Muslim from Myanmar (including Rohingya)	456	440	896
Other Ethnic Minorities from Myanmar	148	161	309
Acehnese	307	266	575
Other Nationalities	42	40	82
Total	953	909	1862

Note. Information obtained from <http://www.unhcr.org.my>

ECCE educators and carers are apparent when issue of children with disability is brought up. There is a general complain of ‘do not know where to refer to’, and ‘do not know what to do with these children’. This arises because in many cases preschools or childcare centers operators are being approached by parents to care and educate their special needs children.

Early childhood care and education for the special children is offered by two ministries that is MOE and MWFC. Policies related to the provision of education for the special children are enacted in the Education Act 1996 (Special Education Regulation - 1997). Education for special need children who are having mono disability, such as children with hearing impairment, visual impairment and learning disability, are under the care of MOE whereas those with multiple disabilities are taken care by MWFC. However changes are being made currently so that MOE too takes care of children with more than one disability. Children who are physically handicapped but their cognitive is at par as normal children are in mainstream program, together with normal children. Besides these two ministries, early childhood education for special children is also under the care of non-government organizations and association such

as Down Syndrome Association, National Autistic Society of Malaysia, Spastic Centre and many more. These associations receive some form of assistance from the government.

As for 2006, MOE has set up 28 preschool classes in special schools and 72 classes in integration program (CDD, 2007b). The classes in special schools cater for the children with hearing impairment and visual impairment whereas the classes in integration program cater for the children with learning disabilities (LD). The goal of integration program is to enhance the integration between the special need children and the normal children. Students in these schools have to share the area for outdoor play and this is the time where they can play together. Enrolment of special needs children in preschool classes according to categories of disabilities is shown in Table 6.

The enrolment of hearing impaired children increased sharply in 2004 when MOE officially set up preschool program for these special children. However, this is not so for the visually impaired. The possible reasons are these visually impaired children need more assistance to travel to school and the schools are either too far or parents are unable to send them, parents are also not willing to let these children

Table 6  
*Enrolment of Special Needs Children in Preschool Special Education Programme under MOE based on Category*

Year/ Age	Hearing Impaired				Visually Impaired				Learning Disability			
	4 yr	5 yr	6 yr	Total	4 yr	5 yr	6 yr	Total	4 yr	5 yr	6 yr	Total
2000	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	5	0	0	0	0
2001	2	10	37	49	1	2	5	8	0	0	3	3
2002	1	22	33	56	0	3	5	8	0	0	0	0
2003	3	6	32	41	1	3	12	16	0	5	10	15
2004	8	15	78	101	1	5	10	16	0	9	22	31
2005	3	48	76	127	0	4	15	19	0	33	101	134
2006	4	18	122	144	0	3	13	16	2	26	170	198
Total	21	119	378	518	4	22	62	88	2	73	306	381

Note. From “Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Implementation Review,” by CDD, 2007b, Malaysia: Ministry of Education

stay in the hostel. Enrolment for children with learning difficulties increased in 2005 when the 32 preschool Learning Disability, LD programs were set up throughout Malaysia. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, more preschool programs for special need children will be set up. These data indicated the importance of government intervention in special needs program. With more commitment from the government more children will have better access to special classes.

Lack of national population database on the number of children (0-6 years old) with special needs has made it difficult for Malaysia to gauge how far the country has achieved its target in education for special needs children. This has affected future planning. At present, population data provided by Department of Social Welfare is for children below 18 years old in general and not segregated into the various age groups.

One problem faced by the Department of Special Education, MOE is mismatch between supply and demand. As an example, in the 5 programs for the visually impaired, although the maximum capacity is 32 students, in 2006, there were only 16 children registered by their parents for these classes (CDD, 2007b). The same is happening to the hearing impaired program. Although outwardly it could be interpreted as lack of participation from the special needs children and their parents, more indepth study need to be conducted to eliminate factors deterring parents from sending their children to such schools. One problem uttered by these parents is transport and location, another problem is the stigma the society placed on these special needs children.

### ***Dissemination of Policy and Program***

The prerequisite for effective implementation of policy is obviously the accurate, clear and systematic dissemination of information concerning the particular policy and program. Very often, ineffective implementation of policy is retrospectively blamed on this process of dissemination. Stakeholders always lament that they did not get the correct and updated

information. Policy makers would always insist that they have disseminated information concerning the policy to all stakeholders and it is often the refusal of the stakeholders to implement the policy. An example is the implementation of National Preschool Curriculum (NPC) by private preschools.

It is a requirement for all preschools, public or private to use the NPC prepared by MOE. Failing to do so could mean the withdrawal of the private preschool licence as stated in the Education Act 1996. However, the Preschool Curriculum Implementation Study (CDD, 2007a), ECCE Policy Implementation Review (CDD, 2007b) as well as the periodic School Inspectorate report indicated that a sizeable private preschools were still found not adhering fully to this policy. Findings from these studies revealed that a portion of the private preschools do not understand the NPC even after 5 years of implementation. Findings through interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussion, and observations indicated that some of these private preschools may possess the document but do not fully utilized it in their daily teaching. In the questionnaire distributed to 51 preschools teachers by Malaysia Professional Early Childhood Education (MAPECE), a mere 13.7% said that they know NPC very well and use it, a whopping 31.4% have seen NPC but not used it and a similar percentage of these teachers have not seen NPC but have heard about it (CDD, 2007b). Comments such as below were recorded:

“We use the NPC, it is good, the learning outcomes, objectives, only thing the words. Is it alright if we change the words in the learning outcomes, lets say in 2.3 it is written as weather, can we use fruits instead?”

“I find one section very confusing, page 47, number 11, solving problem, what is the ‘problem’, could anything become a problem?”

(Source: CDD, 2007b)

Comments given by these preschool teachers

showed that they have narrow understanding of the NPC. They have trusted the heresy information which they could not even identify the source. The dilemma these teachers faced was that when they were confused they do not know who to turn to. At the same time, some private preschools felt that by adhering to NPC which do not encourage excessive use of workbook and homework, their enrolment is affected because parents want homework and workbook. In this case the problem in the implementation of NPC is not only due to issue of dissemination of policy but also the various obstacles faced by the respective preschool operator.

#### ***Monitoring and Accountability in Governance***

Maintenance of effective policy implementation needs a comprehensive and efficient monitoring system. In this monitoring system, accountability at every stage is established and upheld. Plan of action drawn up to address problem of implementation at all stages.

***Implementation of NPC in MOE Preschools.*** An indepth research was conducted in 2007 by CDD to ascertain the effectiveness of the implementation of the NPC in government preschools.

Among the research questions were: to what extent have NPC achieve its objectives and what are the problems faced by the teachers during the implementation of NPC. Findings of this study provide indirect measure of the effectiveness of monitoring system for the implementation of NPC. This research adopted the *Stake's Congruence-Contingency Model for Educational Evaluation*. Three categories of data were collected, these are antecedent (situation before which will affect the implementation of curriculum), transaction (process of implementation) and product (of implementation of the curriculum). For each of this category, data collected are related to the aspiration, observation of actual implementation/ test result, standards set by expert and evaluation by stake holders. The concept of congruence (between

aspired and actual implementation) and contingency (measure of dependency) is used. Data was collected through questionnaire, classroom observation, and interview (MOE 2008, CDD 2007a). A total of 3624 (61.6%) preschool teachers returned the questionnaires. A total of 28 classroom observations and interviews were conducted in various states.

Classroom observations revealed that learning through play approach, use of ICT, development of English language skills, creativity, physical ability, problem solving skill among children were not implemented satisfactory as required in NPC. During interviews, teachers were required to explain their understanding of the Learning through Play and the Integrated Approaches. Teachers could not articulate very well their understanding, responses include: "If the material used is toys, then the activity is learning through play", 'Not sure of the concept of play, as long as they are happy and show interest, that is play'.

Findings from the questionnaire indicated that only 3.10% of the respondents do not fully understand the NPC. However findings from interviews revealed that 15 have problem understanding the cognitive components, 8 indicated that they have problem understanding the English components. Respondents faced various problems in implementation of NPC, the more serious problems are related to lack of professional support from school administrators, insufficient quality in-service courses and lack of knowledge and skills in teaching certain components in NPC. If after 5 years of implementation these situations still persists, one obvious question is the effectiveness of monitoring mechanism.

***Non-registration of Private Preschools.*** The Education Act 1996 stipulated that all preschools need to be registered with the MOE and use the NPC. In the year 2005, 31.20% of the children who participated in preschools were from privately run preschools, these were registered private preschools (CDD, 2007b). Gross Enrolment Rate of preschools or percentage of the 4-6 years old in preschools as of

2005 is 67.38% (CDD, 2007b). However, data collected by MOE (CDD, 2007b) showed that only 5.3% of the Primary One children is without preschool experience. The gap is probably due to unregistered private preschools. Random survey and discussion with the Kindergarten's association attested to that.

Private preschool operators and teachers lamented that the long delay and complicated procedure in the application for registration of ECCE centers are the main reason of non registration (CDD, 2007b). To register preschools, one needs to get approval from four different agencies which are the Fire Department, Social Welfare Department, Health and the Local Authority. Approval from some departments is slower than others due to under-staff, and perceived low priority. This is compounded by the fact that some private ECCE providers could not be bothered with laws and regulation and believe that the enforcement is so poor that they would not be affected. However a lot of this is changing in the year 2007 where there are amendment of laws, provision of more man power and vigorous campaign to register ECCE providers. One stop centers are being formed too so that ECCE providers need only to go to one location to get everything approved. Perhaps given time, this issue of non-registration will be obsolete.

### *Coordination and Integration in Policy Implementation*

A sizeable number of early childhood practitioners and advocates faced difficulty in obtaining updated information on ECCE in the country (CDD, 2007b). They are also often frustrated in their process of registration of their centers. They blamed it on the lack of coordination in the ECCE policy implementation (CDD, 2007b). On the other hand, government officers claimed that the perceived lack of coordination is at times caused by ECCE service providers' own ignorance and problem of attitude. A sense of distrust between the authority and the service providers prevails and a sense of helplessness

can be felt through the individual interviews that have been conducted.

*Planning for location of ECCE Centers.* There are many groups of ECCE providers. As more preschools began its operation, the issue of location of ECCE centers surfaced and arguments both among the grassroots and high government officials happened from time to time (CDD, 2007b). As source of students become limited in a particular geographic location, all sectors resorts to luring or 'fighting' for new students and tempers flared at time. One such example was the remark made by one provider:

"Why do you open your centers in this area when we are already here. When you open, our students become less, how can we survive. This is not fair, we were here first." (teacher)

"Please inform us earlier, when your center opened, we have to redeploy or let off our teachers, this is not fair" (high officials)

(Source: CDD, 2007b)

In many instances the MOE preschools were favoured because it is free and students can continue to Primary School in the same premise, teachers are all with a minimum of diploma of preschool education and centers are well equipped. However KEMAS and PERPADUAN are also favoured by some sectors of the society because they use text book and has better involvement of the community. In a similar way, tussel between private service operators exist too. Although there is a regulation of minimum number of preschools in a geographic area, operators still complained of 'why do authority approve more private preschools in this street when they know we already have few here'.

Findings from the ECCE Policy Implementation Review have been presented at various level of the government to raise awareness of the problem and advocate solution. This had prompted more

discussion among the various operators to better plan for suitable location. The general feeling is the recognition and acceptance of the need for various ECCE service providers, but a better integration and coordination system for mutual survival in terms of planning of location is required.

**Procedure of Registration.** The registration of ECCE centers is the first step in setting up private centers. According to government officials there are standard procedure to follow and nothing is ambiguous or inconsistent about it. Again as in all issue of coordination and integration, the private sectors did not think it is so. They related on incidents where they were given different instruction each time and made to run to different departments to complete the registration which take a long time to be approved. They were upset due to the constant changes in rules and the apparent lack of coordination (CDD, 2007b).

**Dissemination of Information.** Dissemination of accurate information is of utmost importance in ensuring smooth implementation of policy. Government as the central agency controlling the mechanism of implementation is the natural source of information. Information related to issue of launching, initiating, assisting, regulating, and monitoring of policy originate from the government. The users on the receiving side felt frustrated if they are not able to access latest and accurate information. This was repeatedly uttered by respondents from the ECCE Policy Implementation Review (CDD, 2007b) The perception that government do not disseminate updated and accurate information led to the users lamenting that there is lack of commitment from the government, and lack of cooperation between the various implementing governmental agencies (as given in the following quotations). This perception is of course dis-agreed by the government officers who revealed there are existing regulatory mechanism and rules were stated very clearly in documents and that

there are proof of regular meeting among implementing agencies:

“The biggest problem in the management and coordination of ECCE policies is lack of commitment and cooperation between the various implementation agencies. This happen because there is no central agencies given the mandate to oversee the implementation of all ECCE policies”

**Different Regulations Set by Different Implementing Agencies.** In Malaysia, preschool education and childcare are under the purview of different Ministries. Preschools (4-6 years old) and childcare centers (0-4 years old) operators have to apply for separate licenses and conform to respective rules and regulations. Problems such as below were faced by the operators:

“No continuity from taska to tadika. I run ECCE for children age 2 to 6. I am required to have two buildings, one for childcare, one for preschool because they came under two different ministries ..... Parents with children in both age groups have to shuttle between different kindergarten and childcare center.”

Placing governance of preschools and childcare centers under a single department was advocated to reduce this confusion and to ensure the welfare of children is taken care of integratedly and holistically.

## Conclusion

Good governance is essential in implementation of policies especially for a comparatively new area such as ECCE which involves cooperation and coordination among multiple sectors. Good governance requires informed decision which can only be made with reliable and valid interpretation of data. In this regard studies such as ECCE

Implementation Review have been very useful. It has successfully identified gaps in the implementation of existing ECCE policies. It has also provided evidence for Malaysia to plan ahead to achieve Goal 1 of Education for All which is expanding and providing quality early childhood care and education to all children of Malaysia. The ECCE frontiers in Malaysia is vibrant and very hopeful currently, much is happening and is going to happen to close the gaps that has been identified in the implementation of ECCE policies. With such evidence-based transformation, the way forward is focused and clear.

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