Ascertaining Adult Learner Characteristics and ICT Competencies of Private Preschool Teachers

Helen Khoo Chooi Sim

Educational Studies Department, Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Pulau Pinang, MALAYSIA

Abstract

This study seeks to examine the adult learner characteristics and level of perceived ICT competencies of private preschool teachers enrolled in a three-week preschool teachers' course at Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Quantitative method was employed in this study to elicit responses from 56 private preschool teachers. Results from this study denoted that 98.2% of the respondents perceived that learning is important to them and 92.8% of the respondents perceived that it is important for teachers to be lifelong learners. Almost all (96.4%) of the respondents indicated that teachers should be lifelong learners and also professed that they personally want to learn. The respondents indicated that they want to learn things that are useful (mean=3.32); they can be successful in learning if they want to (mean=3.28) and are responsible for their own learning (mean=3.16). Results from this study also indicated that the level of perceived ICT competencies recorded higher means when compared to the level of usage for six ICT competencies identified in this study. The item 'Serving the internet for teaching and learning materials' recorded the highest mean of 2.38; followed by item 'Usage of electronic mails' which recorded a mean of 2.37; and item 'Microsoft Office Word' recorded a mean of 2.33. This study also revealed that there exist positive moderate correlations between the level of perceived competency and level of usage for all 6 ICT. It is recommended that more courses and training to be conducted in the areas of ICT to improve the level of competency and its usage amongst the private preschools teachers in order to uplift the preschool educational standard in Malaysia.

Introduction

The 21st century has been characterized by technological advances and globalization. In the quest of preparing Malaysians toward becoming information and technologically developed citizens by the year 2020, the Malaysian Government has recognized the importance of instilling the lifelong learning culture amongst its citizens. The development of quality human capital in Malaysia requires its citizens to be lifelong learners who are constantly learning to keep abreast with the new developments in the changing world. As adult learners, it is important that Malaysian citizens especially those in the field of education to continually master new information and communication technologies. Currently, the advancement in computer hardware and software provide a greater impact on the educational technology. The computer is now widely used as a new form of teaching and learning strategy to complement the traditional teaching methods. Mastering computer technology and harnessing it for widespread and comprehensive use is not an easy task. This becomes even more challenging when this technology is progressing and changing rapidly. Thus, it is imperative for teachers to be lifelong learners and constantly update and upgrade knowledge and skills in that area.

Preschool Education in Malaysia

In Malaysia, education is a National Key Result Area (NKRA) for the Government in its' Transformation Programme for the nation. The Education NKRA is intended to provide the starting point and platform to improve students' outcomes across Malaysia's school system and to enable access to quality education for all students. In line with the goal of ensuring every Malaysian child can succeed, the Government has increase the focus on improving and expanding adoption of early childhood education to provide more children in Malaysia with a better head-start. Early childhood education plays a vital role in developing a child's mind. The earliest formative years of a child's development are the most crucial because it will result in the biggest impact on the mental development of a child.

Children are the nation's intellectual assets and some will even become national leaders in the years to come. Thus, building a strong educational foundation for young children should be prioritized. It is imperative to raise the quality of pre-school teaching and the standard of preschool teachers nationwide. Moreover, it is in line with the Government Transformation Programme's National Key Results Area initiative to improve pre-school enrolment nationwide to 87% by 2012 and to raise the number to 97% by 2020. To achieve the above objectives, the Government will train over 21,000 pre-school teachers by 2012 to raise the professionalism of early childcare education (ECCE) in Malaysia (The Star, 22 December 2010).

In order to raise the standard and quality of preschool teachers nationwide, the training of private pre-school teachers was conducted and funded by the government at Teacher Education Institution and Universities nationwide. The Preschool Teacher Course is a three-week programme for the training of teachers from private preschools in Malaysia. In the programme, teachers are required to attend lectures and tutorials, pass the coursework as well as the examination. Course participants were provided with self-learning materials (modules) and they have to attend a face-to-face interaction at Teacher Education Institutions.

Characteristics of Adult Learners and Adult Learning

The philosophy of teacher education of Malaysia envisioned to produce teachers who are noble in character, progressive and scientific in outlook, committed to uphold the aspirations of the nation, and cherishes the national cultural heritage, ensures the development of the individual and the preservation of a united, democratic, progressive and disciplined society (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1987). This is to realize the Malaysian's Philosophy of Education to produce future citizens who are holistically developed in terms of their intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical growth, who have a firm belief in God, who possess high moral standards and who are capable of effectively contributing to the family, the society and the Nation. Thus, teachers should continuously seek to improve themselves professionally and equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to keep abreast with the new developments in the education arena.

In the study of adult learners' characteristics, Knowles (1970) postulates that adults are self-directed and they prefer self-directed learning. He defined 'andragogy' as the art and science of helping adults to learn. Andragogy is learner-centered and the learner is not as dependent on the teacher for knowledge. Knowles et al (1998) added that adult learners differ in several ways. According to them, adult learners are self-directed and willing to take responsibilities in making decisions. Adult learners have a vast and growing reservoir of experience and prior knowledge which becomes a rich resource for learning. They are ready to learn things which are relevant to their job, personal life and social roles. In addition, they are problem-oriented, thereby focusing more on immediate application of knowledge to solve problems; and lastly they have internal motivation to learn.

Guglielmino & Guglielmino (1991) defined self-directed as "adults having control over what, when and how they learn to achieve their mission". Wynne (2011) supported the view that adults are autonomous and self-directed. Adults are self-reliant learners and prefer to work at their own pace. Individuals learn best when they are ready to learn and when they have identified their own learning needs. Adults by virtue of their age, experience and maturity have the advantage of being independent in learning. Adults are presumed to be self-aware, self-motivated and self-empowered to make rational choices for and by themselves when it comes to learning. Conversely to children, adults need not be forced to learn. Adult learners will voluntarily learn to achieve certain goals and rewards (career advancement, self-satisfaction, etc.).

Wynne (2011) opined that adults are goal oriented and need to know why they are learning something. Adults have accumulated life experiences and tend to favour practical learning activities that enable them to draw on their prior skills and knowledge. They are realistic, have insights and are readily able to relate new facts to past experiences and enjoy having their talents and knowledge explored in a teaching situation. In addition, adults learn best in a democratic, participatory and collaborative environment and need to be actively involved in determining how and what they will learn, and they need active, not passive, learning experiences. Thus, adult educators should inform adult learners the purpose or aim of the course and involve them actively in the teaching and learning process. Adult educators should be

expert in their subject's area to facilitate adult learning and provide more opportunities or adult learners to share their past and present learning experiences. This will in turn motivate them to do better in their studies.

In addition, due recognition and respect should also be given to adult learners to keep them engage in the learning process. Adult educators should respect the views of their adult learners and give more opportunities for them to be involved in the learning process. Adult educators should also provide a conducive learning environment and opportunities for their adult learners. Learning process should take into consideration adult learners' past experiences and the learners' view should be given due respect. More democratic and participatory learning environment should be prioritized in the learning process. Consequently, studies should be conducted on adult learners' characteristics so that adult educators can provide the best learning environment for their adult learners.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education

In this ICT era, the huge amount of information and the power of technology especially the digital power and computerization have brought about many developments in the education arena. The Tenth Malaysia Plan (Education Planning Unit, 2010) advocates a system that takes into account elements of ICT in schools, which aims to nurture creativity and innovation among students in order to equip them with new skills and capabilities to meet the demands of a high-income economy. A study conducted by Lim, Abbas and Mansor (2010) revealed some pertinent outcomes in relation to realising the goals of the Tenth Malaysian Plan where it is evident that teachers are very positive about ICT, possess competency in ICT and are prepared to use it in their pedagogical practices.

As a general term, information technology encompasses all forms of technology to create, manipulate, store, communicate and disseminate information in its various forms through the network of computers and other emerging technological devices. For the purpose of this study the definition of information technology provided by the Moursand & Bielefeldt (1999, p. 5) was chosen. According to them, information technology includes computer hardware and software, the network that ties computers together and a host of devices that covert information (text, images, sounds, motion) into common digital formats. At present, the availability of the computer and internet is crucial for one to access information and learn continuously. Teachers should be equipped with the necessary basic ICT skills such as Microsoft Office Words, Microsoft PowerPoint, skills to serve the World Wide Web for information, emailing and integrating technology in teaching and learning.

The use of ICT tools in teaching and learning should become part of normal classroom practice. Infusion of ICT technologies in classroom teaching and learning processes will make teaching and learning more interactive and interesting. It will also create new opportunities for teachers to interact with their students, peers and faculty inside and outside of the classroom. Thus, teachers should master ICT technologies in order to enhance their knowledge of the related subject. As adult and lifelong learners, teachers should continuously engage in the ICT seeking processes. Teachers should have knowledge and experience with the vast range of educational technology and must learn strategies for using it effectively in the classroom. Teachers must become knowledgeable about technology's interactive and networking capabilities to enable them to adopt it in their daily planning and implementing of lessons.

The prerequisite for integration of ICT in the teaching and learning processes is the mastering of computer skills by the learners. Thus the purpose of this study is to investigate the level of ICT skills and the frequency of usage by private preschool teachers. It is imperative for them to master the necessary ICT skills in order to perform as effective preschool teachers to keep abreast with the new development in the education arena.

Objectives of Study

The Preschool Teacher Course is a three-week programme for the training of teachers from private preschools in Malaysia. In the programme, preschool teachers are required to attend lectures and tutorials, pass the coursework as well as the examination. 56 private preschool teachers from the state of Penang attended the three-week programme from 22 November to 10 December 2010 at Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Pulau Pinang (IPGKPP).

The objective of this study is to ascertain the perception of respondents toward learning and their learner characteristics. This study also sought to investigate the level of perceived ICT competency and its usage. The research questions are as follows:

a.   What is the perception of respondents towards learning and lifelong learning?
b.   What are the archetypal characteristics of adult learners that prevail in the preschool teachers?
c.   What is the perceived level of ICT competency and usage of the respondents?
d.   Are there any correlations between the level of perceived ICT competency and the level of usage?

Methodology

Quantitative method based upon a questionnaire was employed to elicit responses from a total number of 56 private preschool teachers who attended a three-week Preschool Teacher Course at IPGKPP. The questionnaire contained 4 sections to elicit the demographic information of the respondents, adult learner characteristics, the level of perceived ICT competency and level of ICT usage. Feedback for section 1 contained 4 items to elicit the demographic information of the respondents. Section 2 contained 35 adult learner characteristics identified for this study using Likert scales from 1 to 4 with "strongly agree" designated as a 4, "agree" as a 3, "disagree" as a 2, "strongly disagree" as 1. Section 3 contained 6 ICT skills using a 4 Likert-scale of with "very skillful" designated as a 4, "skillful" as a 3, "not skillful" as a 2, "strongly not skillful" as 1. Feedback for section 4 regarding the frequency of usage was obtained using Likert scales from 1 to 4 with "very frequent" designated as a 4, "frequent" as a 3, "sometimes" as a 2, "never" as 1. A pilot test was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire and an overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.969 was recorded. The coefficient indicated that the questionnaire was reliable.

The questionnaires were distributed in person by the researcher on the first day of the course and the completed questionnaires were collected at a specific time agreed to by both parties. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 16.0. Responses from the survey were entered into the SPSS system for data analysis. Results generated included percentages and means and provided information about the central tendency of the identified groups. Correlation Analysis was performed to test the correlation between the level of perceived ICT competency and its level of usage.

Significance of Study

This study is important for the results of the study will add to the body of knowledge surrounding adult learning programmes and adult learners' characteristics. The results will reveal to the Institute's lecturers regarding the important adult learner characteristics that prevail amongst private preschool teachers. This information will enable lecturers of the Institute to plan suitable teaching strategies and methods to achieve the outcome of the course effectively.

In this era of globalization, it is imperative to integrate ICT in the teaching and learning processes. Information pertaining to level of ICT competencies and it's usage will give insights to adult educators to plan and integrate technology in their teaching and learning activities. Lecturers of the institute should equip themselves with the necessary ICT skills as advocators of ICT in teaching and learning processes. In addition, they should also possess knowledge regarding their adult learners on a continuous basis. Knowledge pertaining adult learners will enable adult educators to plan their lessons effectively.

Finally, by responding to the questionnaire, the respondents will be able to reflect on their own adult learners' characteristics. In addition, they will also be reflecting on their own level of ICT competencies and usage. It is hoped that through reflection, it enable the respondents to understand themselves or their own shortcomings and seek ways to better equipped themselves with ICT competencies to face the challenges as an adult learner in this globalized era.

Results, Discussion & Recommendations

Quantitative methodologies were employed to elicit the characteristics of 56 adult learners that prevail in the preschool teachers. Descriptive statistics were used to report the results of the study.

Respondents' Profile

All the 56 (100%) respondents were all females (Table 1). The learner composition of this programme reflects the dominance of the female gender in the teaching profession especially preschool education. It also signified the dominance of the female gender in the Malaysian teaching profession.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Respondents

No.	Item		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender:	Male	0	0
		Female	56	100
2.	Age:	21 – 25 years	5	8.9
		26 – 30 years	4	7.1
		31 – 35 years	3	5.4
		36 – 40 years	2	3.6
		41 – 45 years	15	26.8
		46 – 50 years	10	17.9
		More than 50 years	17	30.4
3.	Academic/ Professional Qualification	SPM/MCE	46	82.1
		STPM/HSC	5	8.9
		Diploma	5	8.9
4.	Marital Status	Single	16	28.6
		Married	36	64.3
		Others	4	7.2

Table 1 also revealed that 84% (47) respondents are of 30 years of age and above. This indicated that a vast majority the private preschool teachers are matured teachers. In addition, more than two-thirds (70.9%) of the respondents are experience preschool teachers who have teaching experiences of more than 5 years. Only 29.1% (16) respondents have teaching experiences of less than 5 years. In addition, there are 26.8% (15) respondents who taught in preschools for more than 20 years. The findings of the study indicated that the preschool teachers in the state of Penang are experienced in the field of early childhood education.

In terms of academic qualification, 82.1% (46) respondents have the Malaysian Certificate of Education qualification; 8.9% (5) have the Higher School Certificate qualification and Diploma Certificates respectively. Majority of the respondents i.e. 64.3% (36) of the respondents are married with families, with 28.6% (16) respondents who are singles and 7.2% (4) other status. This profile indicated that the respondents are matured learners and hold various responsibilities of an adult and family person.

Perception towards learning and lifelong learning

98.2% (55) of the respondents perceived that learning is important to them (Table 2). Out of this percentage, 69.7% (39) of the respondents viewed that learning is very important. Only one respondent perceived that learning is not important. To support this finding, 92.8% (52) of the respondents perceived that it is important for teachers to be lifelong learners. 96.4% (54) of the respondents indicated that teachers should be lifelong learners and 96.4% (54) of the respondents also professed that they personally want to learn.

Table 2   Importance of learning and lifelong learning

No.	Item		Frequency	Percentage
1.	How important is learning to you?	Not Very Important	0	0
		Not Important	1	1.8
		Important	16	28.6
		Very Important	39	69.7
2.	Is it important for teachers to be a lifelong learner?	Not Very Important	1	1.8
		Not Important	3	5.4
		Important	27	48.2
		Very Important	25	44.6
3.	Should teachers be lifelong learners?	No	2	3.6
		Yes	54	96.4
4.	Do you personally want to learn?	No	2	3.6
		Yes	54	96.4

Results from this study indicated that the respondents have positive attitude towards learning and lifelong learning. It also demonstrates that the respondents are affirmative about the concept of lifelong learning. This is of utmost importance to instill lifelong learning culture amongst teachers in accordance to the government's policy to achieve the status of a developed nation by the year 2020.   Teachers should be lifelong learners and continuously update and upgrade themselves with the new development in the teaching arena. It is imperative of them to be lifelong learners seeking new information and skills to keep abreast with the new developments in the globalized world. Thus, more opportunities and avenue should be given to teachers to continuously develop their professionalism in all aspects related to the school and education environment. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should conduct more relevant courses to upgrade the teaching profession.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Table 3 depicts the responses of the respondents regarding the important adult learner characteristics as perceived by them. A total of 35 characteristics of a notional adult learner characteristics were identified in this study. The respondents perceived that the characteristic of 'I want to learn things that are useful to me' recorded the highest mean of 3.32 out of a 4 Likert-scale of agreement (1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree and 4=Strongly Agree). This was followed by the item 'I will be successful in learning if I want to' and 'I am responsible for my own learning' which record a means of 3.28 and 3.16 respectively. The results of the study disclosed that the respondents want to learn things that are useful to them.   This result is congruent with the proposal by Knowles (1990) that adults want to learn mostly what is useful to them and when they need to learn it.

The respondents of this study perceived that they will be successful in learning if they want to and that they are responsible for their own learning. This finding proved that adult learners are self-directed learners. This finding is congruent with the characteristic of adult learning as opined by Knowles et al., (1998) that adult learners are self-directed and willing to take responsibilities in making decisions. According to Speck (1996), adults will commit to learning when the goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to them. As a self-directed learner, adult learners are responsible individual who knows what is best for them and seek to improve oneself. They are knowledgeable personals who would like to be successfully personally and professionally.

Table 3   Characteristics of Adult Learners

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I would like to be given personal attention when studying	2.36	.710
9.	I am interested in learning	3.06	.456
14.	I have vast knowledge and experiences	2.54	.503
15.	I have my own values and beliefs	3.00	.461
16.	I would like to be treated as a adult	3.08	.498
18.	I would like to study straightforward	3.10	.409
21.	I prefer to be active during the teaching and learning process	3.00	.447
23.	I want to learn things that are useful to me	3.32	.471
24.	I will be successful in learning if I want to	3.28	.529
25.	I would like to learn in a democratic situation	3.14	.566
28.	I would like to know the aims of the course	3.11	.423
30.	I am responsible for my own learning	3.16	.464
35.	I am confident that I will be successful in my learning	3.15	.456

Another interesting finding of this study is that the item 'I am confident that I will be successful in my learning' recorded a mean of 3.15. It is followed by item 'I would like to learn in a democratic situation' (mean=3.14); and 'I would like to know the aims of the course' (mean=3.10) and 'I would like to study straightforward' (mean=3.10). Respondents of this study also indicated that they are confident and will be successful in their learning (mean=3.15). This finding is important for it indicates that adult learners are self-directed and willing to take responsibilities in their decision made (Knowles et al, 1998).

This finding is also congruent with the opinion purported by Wynne (2011) that adults learn best in a democratic, participatory and collaborative environment and need to be actively involved in determining how and what they will learn, and they need active, not passive, learning experiences. As adult learners, they will be successful in whatever endeavours if they have decided to partake it. If they are determined to be successful, adult learners will put in enormous effort to ensure its success. This is congruent with Wynne's (2011) opinion that adults are goal oriented. Thus, it is recommended that adult educators should provide opportunities for their adult learners to be confident in their learning process. It is also recommended that adult educators to be considerate and adopt democratic approach in their instructional approach. This method will encourage their adult learners to be active in the teaching and learning processes and subsequently lead to success in the outcome of their studies.

Respondents of this study are goal oriented. They indicated that they would like to know the aims of the course (mean=3.11) i.e. to know where they are heading and the outcomes of the course. This finding is congruent with the purposeful learning purported by Wynne (2011) that adults are goal oriented. Adults need to know why they are learning something. Adults learn best when they know the purpose of learning. When adult learners know that aims of the course, it will help them to stay focused. In addition, adult learners desired that learning process should be straightforward and would like to be treated as adults (mean=3.08). This finding is congruent with the adult learner characteristics purported by Speck (1996).

Additional finding of this study is that the item 'I am interested in learning' recorded a mean of 3.06, followed by item 'I prefer to be active during the teaching and learning process' and 'I have my own values and beliefs' each recorded means of 3.00. The findings revealed that private preschool teachers who are adults required adult learner treatment from their educators. As adult learners, the respondents are interested in learning and they would like to be active during the teaching and learning process. The respondents also indicated that they have their own values and beliefs. This implied that adult educators

should not impose their personal values and beliefs on their adult learners. It is thus recommended that adult educators should be impartial. Fair and just treatment should be adopted throughout the teaching and learning process.

Results of this study also indicated that item 'I would like to be given personal attention when studying' recorded the lowest mean of 2.36. This is an interesting finding for it denotes that adult learners would like to learn together with other adult learners as stated by Speck (1996). They would like to share their past knowledge and skills and experience with other adult learners. What is more important for adult learners are that they would like to be respected by the adult educators as adult learning involves ego (Speck, 1996). Unlike young children, adult learners do not seek personal attention from their educators when studying. They would like to be treated and respected as an independent and experience adult.

Another interesting finding is that the item 'I have vast knowledge and experiences' recorded a mean of 2.54. It is the second lowest item out of a total of 35 characteristics identified in this study. The low mean indicated that the respondents perceived that the knowledge and experiences they possessed is insufficient to meet the demands of the teaching profession. This realization is a positive indicator that they would like to learn more knowledge and skills pertaining to their field of expertise. Thus, more stringent effort should be taken by the Ministry of Education and relevant parties to upgrade and update their knowledge, skills and experiences. It is recommended that more opportunities should be provided for private preschool teachers to attend courses pertaining to their scope of responsibilities to update and upgrade their knowledge and skills in the field of preschool education.

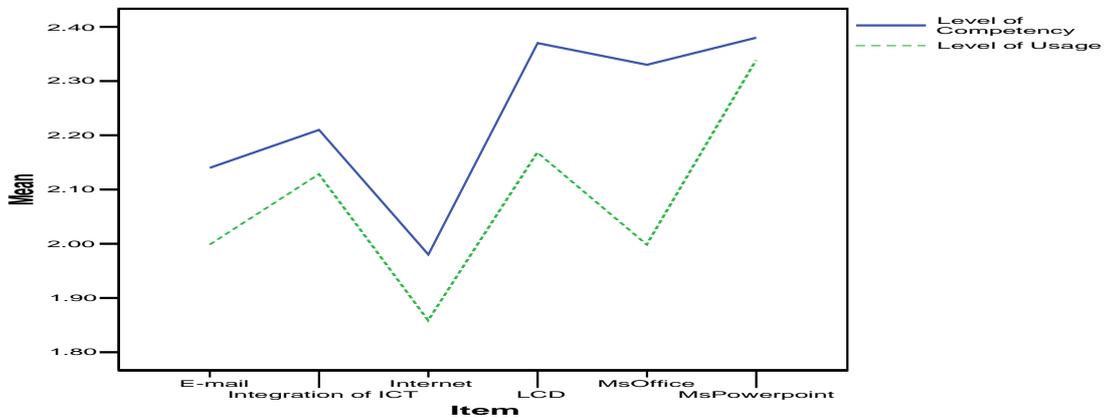## Level of Perceived ICT Competency and Usage

Table 4 depicts the respondents' level of perceived ICT competency and usage. A total of 6 ICT competencies were identified in this study. Results indicated that the level of perceived ICT competencies recorded higher means when compared to the level of usage. The item 'Serving the internet for teaching and learning materials' recorded the highest mean of 2.38; followed by item 'usage of electronic mails' which recorded a mean of 2.37; and item 'Microsoft Office Word Application' recorded a mean 2.33 from a 4 Likert-scale of skills (1=Strongly Not Skilful; 2=Not Skilful; 3=Skilful and 4=Very Skilful). Results from this study indicated that the respondents' level of perceived ICT skills is of average due to low means revealed from the analysis of the findings.

Table 4   Level of Perceived ICT Competency and Usage

No.	Item	Level of Perceived ICT Competency		Level of ICT Usage	
		Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
1.	Microsoft Office Word Application	**2.33**	**.678**	**2.26**	**.723**
2.	Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation	2.20	.728	2.00	.707
3.	Serving the internet for teaching and learning materials	**2.38**	**.631**	**2.34**	**.717**
4.	Usage of LCD in teaching and learning process	1.98	.515	1.86	.606
5.	Usage of electronic mails	**2.37**	**.720**	**2.17**	**.781**
6.	Integration of technology in teaching and learning processes	2.14	.639	2.00	.684

The level of usage of the 6 ICT skills is even lower than the level of competency. The item 'Serving the internet for teaching and learning materials' also recorded the highest mean (min=2.34), followed by item 'usage of electronic mails' (mean=2.17) and item 'Microsoft Office Application' (mean=2.26) from a 4 Likert-scale of usage (1=Never; 2=Sometimes; 3=Frequent and 4=Very Frequent). The low means revealed from this study indicated that the respondents need to be encouraged to increase their level of usage in the ICT skills.

Results from this study indicated that the respondents' level of usage of ICT skills is comparatively lower than their level of level of competency (Graph 1). Thus, it is recommended that more courses and training to be conducted in the areas of ICT to improve the level of competency of ICT amongst the private preschools teachers. In this globalized era, it is imperative for teachers to equip themselves with the necessary technology skills to keep abreast with the new development in the education arena.

Graph 1 Level of Competency and Usage in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills

Table 5 showed the correlations between the level of perceived competency and level usage of 6 ICT skills identified in this study. Pearson Product Moment Analysis indicated positive significant correlations between the level of perceived competency and level of usage for all 6 ICT skills identified in this study. The analysis showed moderate positive significant correlation between the level of competency and the level of usage for all the 6 ICT skills i.e. MSOffice Word($r=0.503$; sig.$=0.000$); MSPowerPoint ($r=0.593$; sig.$=0.000$); Internet ($r=518$; sig.$=0.000$); LCD ($r=0.585$; sig.$=0.000$); Email ($r=0.652$; sig.$=0.000$) and Integration of ICT ($r=0.671$; sig.$=0.000$). This finding indicated that respondents who have high level of ICT competency also have high level of usage and vice-versa.

Table 5 Correlation between the Level of Competency and Level of Usage

Level of Competency		MSOffice	MSPPt	Internet	LCD	Email	Integrate
Level of Usage-MSOffice Word	Pearson Correlation	**.503****	.293*	.502(**)	.265	.442**	.429**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	.043	.000	.072	.002	.002
Level of Usage-MSPPt	Pearson Correlation	.211	**.593****	.229	.577**	.410**	.418**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.155	**.000**	.122	.000	.004	.003
Level of Usage-Internet	Pearson Correlation	.211	.159	**.518****	.148	.414**	.347*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.155	.274	**.000**	.316	.004	.015
Level of Usage-LCD	Pearson Correlation	.063	.341*	.224	**.585****	.223	.338*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.675	.018	.135	**.000**	.137	.019
Level of Usage-Email	Pearson Correlation	.507**	.359*	.529**	.324*	**.652****	.561**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.013	.000	.028	**.000**	.000
Level of Usage-Integrate	Pearson Correlation	.419**	.570**	.436**	.554**	.504**	**.671****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.002	.000	.000	**.000**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Another interesting finding from this study is that the level of usage of MSPowerPoint is positively significant with the level of competency in MSPowerPoint (r=0.593; sig= 0.000); level of competency in LCD (r=0.577; sig=0.000); level of Integration of ICT (r=0.418; sig=0.003) and level of competency in Email (r=0.410; sig=0.004). This finding revealed that respondents who utilize MSPowerPoint frequently in their teaching and learning processes are competent in MSPowerPoint, LCD, integration of ICT and Emailing. This also implied that they are able to integrate ICT in the teaching and learning processes confidently.

Recommendations

The respondents of this study portray positive attitudes toward learning and lifelong learning. This calls for more opportunities to be given by the Ministry of Education to enable the respondents to pursue their ambition as lifelong learners. More relevant courses pertaining to their scope of responsibilities and the field of ICT should be provided to private preschool teachers. Course contents should be useful and relevant to preschool teachers to ensure that they will be successful in their learning as adult learners are responsible for their own learning.

This study highlights the importance of uplifting respondents' level of competency and usage in ICT skills. ICT competencies are deemed as important in this technology era. The results of this study revealed that respondents' level of ICT competencies and frequency of use are moderate. Since the level of competency is positively significant to the level of usage, more stringent effort should be taken to improve the level of competency as a means to increase the level of usage. Preschool teachers should be encouraged to use ICT in the teaching and learning processes. More courses pertaining ICT should be conducted as to improve the level of competency and subsequently its usage. In this ICT era, ICT competencies are enablers for successful lifelong adult learners.

In terms of research, this study has its own limitations. This study only involved 56 private preschool teachers from the state of Penang only. Findings of this study therefore can only be generalized for a similar group of preschool teachers. Further studies can utilize preschool teachers in government schools as to provide a broader picture of the status of ICT competencies and usage among preschool teachers in Malaysia. By using different groups of respondents, researchers can also examine the possibility of differences that may occur between the private and government preschool teachers. It would also be worthwhile to include subjects from other states as well, and compare whether there are significant differences amongst states in Malaysia.

Conclusion

The Malaysian government aimed to produce teachers of high calibre with the appropriate skills and knowledge who are competent and qualified to teach in all schools in the country. More importantly are the preschool teachers who play important roles in shaping the future generation at a tender age. The adult learners' characteristic prevalent in this study is that the adult learners wanted to learn things that are useful to them. In addition they professed that they will be successful in learning if they want to and they are responsible for their own learning. It is imperative for all adult educators to be able to identify learner characteristics in order to ensure that adult learners are successful in their studies. The level of ICT competency and usage of preschool teachers should be given emphasis. This calls for more courses pertaining to ICT area to be conducted in order to improve the level of ICT competency and its usage amongst preschool teachers. It is imperative for teachers to equip themselves with the positive attitude regarding learning and ICT to uplift the level of educational standard in Malaysia. Furthermore, the high level of competency and usage in ICT amongst teachers will assist the nation to achieve its goal of excellence in the education arena. Lastly, educators should be encouraged, motivated and developed into lifelong learners to prepare themselves for the challenges of the 21st century.

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