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### A Conceptual Paper on Safety and Quality Assurance Model in Malaysian Child Care Centres

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and development programs and services, particularly among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, is among the fundamental components of Malaysian childhood education. The quality of early childhood service and staff is a hallmark of early childhood care and education program. The understanding of the significance of early years in a child's life has been increase nowadays. Recent research on brain development has shown that quality of child care enhances children development. Therefore, it is believed that quality of child care nurtures healthy brain development in the first five years of development. Research has also shown that quality of child care contributes to successful later learning. Hence, the main objective is to develop a new standard of safety and quality assurance to safeguard our future leaders/generations from attending the poor services of child care centres. The research methods are quantitative and qualitative research design. The sampling technique is to collect data from operators, nannies and children of child care centres which extracted from Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) website (directory). For quantitative method, the questionnaires will be distribute by self-administered survey to 300 nannies from selected states (Johore, Kedah, Kelantan and Selangor). The qualitative method is also used in the study in form of one-to-one interview. The respondents are 30 operators and 300 children from respective child care centres. The data collected will be analysing using partial least squares (PLS) method. The expected finding is a new model of safety and quality assurance in child care centres.

**Keywords:** Child care centres, safety assurance, quality assurance, cognitive skills, affective skills, communication skills, facility and satisfaction.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The cases of children maltreatments happening around the country are alarming. Lately, in Malaysia, many childcare centres have been plagued with problems of well-being of children under their care. There have been occasions of children's death that may have been caused by negligence of the childcare centres' employees. This has led to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development intervening in order to solve the problems as reported by Hashim (2012); Isa (2007); Zulkifli (2012). These incidents and negligence could be due to poor commitment from the childcare centres' employees. Based on the researched by Majzud (2013) titled 'Critical Issues in Preschool in Malaysia', the researcher found that some important issues affecting the quality of a child care centre is in terms of curriculum, teacher training, equity and access, assessment, and monitoring child care centers. In the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education, Keng (2010) said that in most countries, the challenges encountered child care providers and preschool teachers are inadequately prepared for the crucial task of caring and educating young children.

The Star (2012) said that over half of the 2,035 unregistered day care centres nationwide made the mistake of setting up their operations even before getting approval from the authorities. Many countries operate illegally because they are located in residential areas and their application for permits will stall if their neighbours complain, said Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Heng Sai Kie. Wahid (2016) said that a recent case involves a child who was severely burnt due to the negligence of the child care provider. The victim was awarded RM 403 018.74 as compensation. In another case that are reported by Astro Awani (2015), an infant suffered serious injury causing bleeding in the brain and eyes after been violently shook. The child care operator was sentenced to five years imprisonment and ordered to pay RM 40 000 to the victim as compensation. About 90 percent of 3,123 registered child care centre failed to comply with the guidelines of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) which can be dangerous to children (Berita Harian, 2014). This phenomenon presumed may due to the inadequacy of the laws and policies in Malaysia child care centres currently. Therefore, there is an urgent need to review the current legislation in the effort to upgrade the services offered by child care centres. In doing so, the main features of safety and quality shall be first examined in order to focus on the important aspects that should be given extra attention. Hence, the causes of the safety and quality problems in child care centres as mentioned above must be addressed and a new model of safety and quality assurance need to be discovered and developed based on the current grievances of the parents and others.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Child Care Centre**

Child care is a custodian care by the Government and parents (Chiam, 2008). Center means a child care center or day care center which is a facility other than a private residence, which receives one or more children under 13 years of age for care for the periods of less than 24 hours aday, and at which the parents or guardians are not immediately available to the children. Center also includes a facility that provides care for not less than two weeks, regardless of the number of hours of care per day (Department of Human Services, 2014).

Child care centres have been considered as merely a place to leave children while the parents are at work. A child care centre can be defined as an organisation and the main purpose of which is to care and

train the children from zero to four years of age, under a daily basis by someone other than the child's family members, who is normally outsider, with certain responsibilities and involves a payment of fees (Department of Social Welfare, 2011).

## **2.2. Safety and Quality Assurance Model**

There are some past studies that have developed the model of safety and quality and the development of their model were not suitable with the safety and quality assurance in Malaysian child care centre (Curtis, Wenrich, Carline *et al.*, 2001; Firesmith, 2004; Mayiladuthurai, 2013; Linver *et al.*, 2005). Firesmith (2004) used the concept of a quality model to define safety as a quality factor. One of the models suggested that satisfaction is predicted by workplace characteristics (Figure 4), (Linzer *et al.*, 2005). The model that proposed by Mayiladuthurai (2012) suggested that quality assurance is predicted by quality planning. Alternatively, Curtis, Wenrich, Carline *et al.* (2001) suggested that cognitive skills, affective skills and communication skills are values that important to patients and having systems of care that allow individual physicians to provide high quality end of life.

## **2.3. Child Care Centres in Malaysia**

Basically, early childcare education in Malaysia is placed under two ministries, namely, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development which focuses on childcare education for children of four years of age and below and the Ministry of Education, which concentrates on kindergarten or preschool education for children of five to six years of age.

The Department of Social Welfare which is structured under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, controls the development of early childhood care in Malaysia. The department commenced with the enactment of the Childcare Centre Act 1984. The Act was formulated in order to guarantee the quality of childcare centres. Under the Childcare Centre Act 1984, all childcare centres that take ten and more children under care with a specific fee are required to register their childcare centres with the Department of Social Welfare (Chiam, 2008).

The Childcare Centre Act 1984 also provides a minimum standard of management and administration of childcare centres and highlights the guidelines on programmes and activities for children under their care. In line with this, the Department of Social Welfare has created a variety of training programmes in order to ensure the quality of the childcare centres. First, the Basic Childcare Course, which is a 103-hours course with 31 modules that should be conducted within 17-19 days. This course is mandated by law for every childcare-based centre in Malaysia (Department of Social Welfare, 2012).

Second, the Introductory Course, which is a five-day course that is provided for the home-based childcare providers who enrol less than ten children at their homes (Department of Social Welfare, 2012). Third, the training programme that provides for the officers of the Department of Social Welfare, who are involved in childcare and enforcement of the Childcare Centre Act 1984 (Department of Social Welfare, 2012). Finally, the training of trainers course certified by the Department of Social Welfare, in order for participants to become facilitators of the Basic Childcare Course (Department of Social Welfare, 2012). Thus, the childcare centres should play the same function as played by preschool education centres, which is to be a means for enabling children to build up their potential, and, in turn, contribute to the human

capital development of the nation. Childcare centres are no longer being looked upon merely as a service to enable mothers to go to work (Chiam, 2008).

#### 2.4. Satisfaction

Satisfaction could be described as a process which starts with the formation of customers' expectations and ends with communication of the obtained experience (Guterman, 2015). However, how a person assesses the conducted service is a very subjective thing. Customers' expectations could be significantly impacted by different internal and external factors. The higher the expectations are the more difficult it is for the company to satisfy customers and fulfill their needs.

#### 2.5. Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills are understood as the mental actions or processes of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses (Davis *et al.*, 2011). Cognitive skills refer to the ability of being creative and innovative, and having ideas and visions (Ochsner, 2013).

#### 2.6. Affective Skills

Affective means growth in feeling or emotional areas (attitude or self). The affective domain includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes. ([http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/Bloom/affective\\_domain.html](http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/Bloom/affective_domain.html)).

#### 2.7. Communication Skills

The communication, which is a science of expressing and coming to an agreement, should make the meanings common among people (Durukan & Maden, 2010) and the skill of using the language and nonverbal communication which play the most effective role in the realization of the communication, should reflect the skill of establishing an effective communication of the source (Deniz, 2007). Communication skills are therefore very important for human life. This skill need to be imparted in training for the individual's success in her/his future life. The communication skills are being tried to be imparted in the educational levels. The communication skills included in the curriculum, are that kind of skills that are needed to be imparted and effectively used in all disciplines (Durukan & Maden, 2010).

#### 2.8. Facility

Facilities means the building, equipment and services provider for a particular purpose (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/facility>). The term "facility" means any building, installation, structure, or other property (including any applicable fixtures) owned or operated by, or constructed or manufactured and leased to, the Federal Government (Secretary of Energy, 2008).

#### 2.9. Safety Assurance

Safety assurance is all planned and systematic actions necessary to afford adequate confidence that a product, a service, an organization or a functional system achieves acceptable or tolerable safety. (Commission Regulation, 2011). Safety Assurance might be defined as activities that are designed to gain confidence that

the risk controls established during the Safety Risk Management continue to be effective (Federal Aviation Administration, 2015). The Safety Assurance function applies the quality assurance and internal evaluation activities to ensure that risk controls continue to conform to their expectations and that they continue to be effective in maintaining a risk within acceptable levels.

### 2.10. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance is a management method that is defined as all those planned and systematic actions needed to provide adequate confidence that a product, service or result will satisfy given requirements for quality and be fit for use (Storey *et al.*, 2000). A Quality Assurance program is defined as the sum total of the activities aimed at achieving that required standard (ISO, 1994). Quality assurance is designed to build on and complement State and Territory licensing regulations where they exist. These regulations generally provide a minimum standard of operation for services and cover a range of factors, including space, equipment, and staff qualifications (Taylor, 2005).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below depicts the conceptual framework of this study based on the discussion of variables in literature review section.

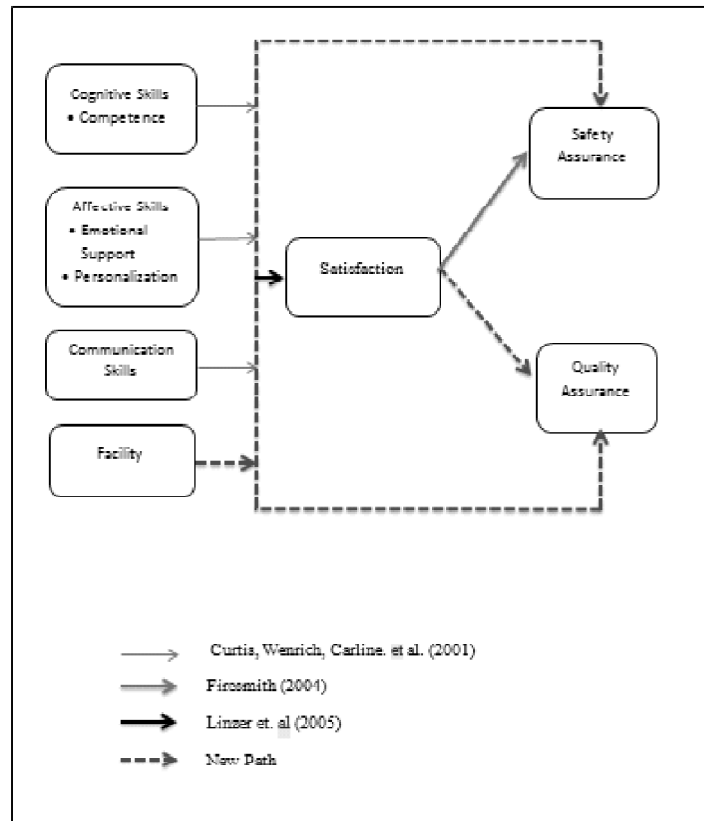


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

### **3.2. Description of Methodology**

Two research designs will be utilized: qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach will interview 30 child care operators (using a structured questionnaire) and 300 children (using a structured questionnaire which focus on smiling face technique by Darling, 2016). For quantitative method, the unit of analysis is the employee of child care centres, best known as nanny or teacher. The sampling frame is child care centre operators, employees and children in four Malaysian regions: Southern, Northern, Eastern and Western of Peninsular represented by Johore, Kedah, Kelantan and Selangor. The sample size contains 30 operators, 300 nannies and 300 children from child care centres in four states. The measurements of the variables (safety assurance, quality assurance, cognitive skills, affective skills, communications skills, facilities and satisfaction) are adapted from past instruments. The analysis method for qualitative will be N-vivo and quantitative will be Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA, discriminant analysis) and Partial Least Squares (PLS).

### **3.3. Data Collection Method**

This is a qualitative and quantitative research design captured in a questionnaire designed for this study and structured questionnaires for interviews. The respondents will be identified through the statistic of child care centre population from the JKM website (directory).

### **3.4. Measurement**

All measurements scales for variables are obtained from existing developed scales. All variables will be measured using 5-point Likert Scale from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Early childhood care is very crucial to ensure our future leaders will have a good care and learning for their development. The findings can assist government bodies such as Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM), Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita Keluarga dan Masyarakat (KPWK) and Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM). The output of this research can assist policy makers to formulate formulas for safety and quality assurances among Malaysian child care operators. The findings will reduce or eliminate confusion among parents regarding the level of safety and quality assurances in child care centres. The outcome from this research can assist the achievement of The Ninth Malaysia Plan, states in that in the second Nation Plan of Action (2006-2020) in term of Early Childhood Care and Development Policy which states that it will be implemented to enhance the quality of life of children with emphasis on their protection, development and participation in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Vision 2020.

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