



Research Article

THE MANAGEMENT OF CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AT PRESCHOOLS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the findings of a project studying the status of managing childcare and early childhood education at preschools in Ho Chi Minh City from the perspective of administrators, teachers, and nannies. The investigated aspects cover the achievement of educational management objectives, planning, conducting the plan, directing, and checking and evaluating the results. The study also surveyed the status of managing the professional development of preschool teachers and facilities at preschools. It was found that the system was not yet synchronized and effective. It was suggested that preschools in Ho Chi Minh are required to take action on reported weaknesses.

Keywords: educational management; early childhood education and care; Ho Chi Minh City

1. Introduction

Preschool education is the most challenging level in terms of educational science (Pham, 2010). This is the stage of education for very young children, and it is also the stage that their personality, soul, and physical development are forming and developing (Cao, 2015).

Implementing educational management reforms, in recent years, the management of schools in general and of preschools, in particular, has changed in some ways and gained some significant achievements, including changing management methods, applying for educational accreditation, applying ICT in the management of childcare and early childhood education. However, the management of preschools in Vietnam is still inadequate. The Government's final report on the performance of Decree No.115/2010/ND-CP dated December 24, 2010, on the State management responsibilities for education has affirmed:

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The management competence at preschools was still inadequate and lacks professionalism. Management of education and training was still weak. There are not sufficient and qualified teachers and educational administrators. Many teachers have not kept up with the current trends in educational reform development with a lack of enthusiasm and even violated professional ethics.

For Ho Chi Minh City, the management of preschools has made some signs of progress: the number of preschools meeting the educational quality standards has increased significantly, and many public and private kindergartens are recognized to deliver high-quality services. However, because of being the largest city in the country, HCM has the most significant number of young children at the preschool stage, especially in densely populated areas and industrial zones. Consequently, the administration of childcare and early childhood education in some preschools has faced many shortcomings. Even some cases of violence against preschool children have been reported, alerting society. The feeling of being unsafe among parents who send their children to some preschools was common.

Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate how childcare and education were managed, and based on the findings of the study, suggestions will be offered to improve the management of childcare and education in preschools in Ho Chi Minh City. This paper presents the research results of the study in Ho Chi Minh City.

1.1. Childcare and early childhood education

Childcare is considered an enthusiastic welcome, necessary actions to be taken to satisfy the needs and expectations of children in the way that they want (Cao, 2015). Preschool childcare is understood as nurturing, protecting, and providing care activities to children from three months to six years old.

Preschool education means organizing educational activities to help children of this age develop comprehensively.

1.2. Management of childcare and early childhood education

Activities to childcare and nurturing in preschools have been identified as a critical task. Care and nurturing activities are carried out on the following principles:

- Taking care of children based on their health, nutrition, and personality; suitable for each group and age group;
- A quality, rich, and appropriate diet combined with creating a happy and hygienic meal is a condition for every child to be healthy and grow up;
- Their sleep and diet, as well as the learning and playing activities of children, are directly related to the child's physical and mental health;
- Tracking children's weight, height, and health status monthly with a mid-month evaluation for appropriate actions, particularly for some children in need of special care (sick children, newly-enrolled children, poorly-absorbed children) (Trieu, 2016).

Preschool education management is a part of educational management, social management, and general education management. Human management is a central element of any management approach. In preschools, teachers are both administrators and being managed, and teachers must take ownership of the school management. The management should be consistent. Preschool education is the first stage of the national education system. However, it is still voluntary, so to attract more children to schools, it is necessary to constantly improve the quality of preschools (Trieu, 2016).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) management study about the entire preschool education and organizational system to control them. The purpose of ECEC management is to consolidate, stabilize, and develop ECEC with diverse and flexible models suitable for the new requirements of the country's socio-economic development.

The management of preschools has many characteristics and features that are different from the management of other types of schools. This is a voluntary level of education; preschool has three vital tasks: caring, educating, and nurturing children at a very young age, and they are almost dependent on the adults' care. They are young children, and their bodies are still immature and are developing. They need to be cared for and nurtured carefully (Cao 2015).

Preschool management can be understood as applying the most common principles, concepts, and methods of management science to the field of preschool education and care. Preschool management is the intentional action of preschool principals on teachers, staff, young children, and parents of preschool children to achieve the goals of preschool education care as regulated (Cao, 2015).

Management is an important component of a preschool system, because it can determine if a service provided meets the quality standards, is affordable, meets local needs, promotes cost-effectiveness, and achieves equitable goals (Kagan & Cohen, 1997). Management can help ensure tighter policymaking among governments, organizations, and programs (Hodgkin & Newell, 1996), enabling families to participate in the education and care system easier (Kagan & Cohen, 1997). Management will facilitate the provision of childcare and education programs tailored to the different needs of families and different geographic areas (Gallagher & Clifford, 2000). Without a good and effective management system, some parents will combine various forms of education and childcare with different qualities to meet the needs of their families. In contrast, the children of other families may be ignored. Children may have inappropriate learning/development interventions because they have to wait in line for admission to childcare educational institutions, and parents may have difficulty finding a reliable service for children to maintain jobs (Capizzano & Adams, 2000; Moore & Vandiviere, 2000; Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

1.3. Previous studies in ECEC management

Neuman (2005), studying the management of early childhood care and education in several OECD countries, concluded that although these countries face relatively similar challenges, they have adopted many different approaches. Diverse approaches to childcare management and early childhood education. In particular, these countries have different approaches in three main aspects: administrative integration, decentralization, and privatization (Kamerman, 2000; Kagan et al., 2002). These diverse approaches are attributed to the involvement of various stakeholders in developing policies for childcare management and early childhood education. First, OECD countries pursue a very different model and system of child education, which may have implications for further extensive research regarding quality standards and teacher staff, government support and children's access to the system, as well as the similarity in the quality of service types. One of the most crucial management decisions relates to the number of ministries or sectors involved in preschool education policies at the national level. More research is needed on the level of division between 'care' and 'education', promoting competition and policy fragmentation. The results of this study also show that there is a tendency to decentralize responsibility for the providers of early childhood education and care services to more effectively meet local needs and circumstances. The third conclusion is that the size and participation of the private sector in preschool care and education vary among OECD countries.

Petitclerc et al. (2017) studied the impact of socioeconomic reduction policies on childcare and education service providers. This study integrated data from five groups of children living in high-income countries (United Kingdom, United States, Netherlands, Canada, and Norway; total N = 21,437). They compared the rates of preschool children going to school and socio-economic choices in childcare and education from different policy contexts for children from 5 to 9 months and 36 to 41 months. They found that in the country with the policy that parents are entitled to at least six months of maternity/paid leave, the number of children going to kindergarten in the early stages is lower than that of the later period. The ratios of preschool children attending kindergarten were in line with universal preschool grants (i.e., not targeted at low-income families). Their research also focuses on other issues such as family income, parental qualifications, and government benefits.

Another study by Ismail et al.(2018) explores key factors in the effective management of childcare and education schools in Jordan and the role of key workers in establishing a nurturing family environment to ensure the optimal welfare of orphans. The study recommends recruiting experienced directors who have a clear vision of managing care centers, in addition to strengthening the reward and salary system at care centers, and training them to be capable of creating a prosperous and healthy new generation.

In Vietnam, a wide range of research on childcare management and education has also been conducted. Trieu Thi Hang (2016) studies the management of childcare and nurturing activities at Hoa Hong Kindergarten, Dong Da District, Hanoi. Her study aimed to improve the quality of care and nurture children in Hoa Hong Kindergarten. She suggested applying appropriate and effective measures to achieve the goal of preschool education "to help children develop physically, emotionally, comprehensively, aesthetically, forming the first elements of personality, well prepared for children to enter grade 1." Similarly, Phan Thi Huong Loan (2017) studies the management of childcare and education activities at public preschools in Hai Ba Trung District, Hanoi. The author believes that what children can learn at this age is crucial to shaping and comprehensively developing a child's life, which depends heavily on the quality of care and education of the family, school, and society. The author also proposed practical measures to improve the quality of care and education for preschool children in general and at public preschools in Hai Ba Trung District, Hanoi. Another study by Dang Hong Phuong (2017) also investigates the current situation and solutions to improve the quality of Vietnamese early childhood education.

It can be seen in other countries, research interests on childcare and early childhood education is very diverse, from state management to the impact of early childhood education on the development of a child. In Vietnam, many research studies also conducted on managerial aspects focusing on early childhood development. This study will add to the overall picture of preschool management and education in Vietnam, mainly focusing on the Ho Chi Minh City area.

2. Methods and participants

Three groups of stakeholders were surveyed to evaluate the current situation of management in preschools in Ho Chi Minh City, including: educational administrators at preschools in Ho Chi Minh City (31 people) and teachers, nannies, and support staff (345 people).

Ten kindergartens in Ho Chi Minh City in districts 1, 3, 7, 9, 12, and Go Vap district voluntarily participated in this study, including six public and four private schools. A total of 760 questionnaires were distributed to teachers and administrators, and the number of returned questionnaires was 642 at a ratio of approximately 84.5%.

3. Findings

3.1. Overall assessment of the ECEC management

Teachers and administrators were divided in their overall evaluation of the management of childcare and education at preschools in Ho Chi Minh City. As evaluated by teachers, the administration was performed at an average level (2.51). In contrast, the administrators considered the work by themselves better than what teachers evaluated, i.e., to be at a reasonable level (2.11).

Table 1. Overall assessment of the management of childcare and education by administrators and teachers

| Teachers' evaluation (345) | Administrators' evaluation (27) |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2.51 | 2.11 |

3.2. The reported results on surveyed managerial aspects

3.2.1. Meeting the managerial goals

Figure 1 illustrates how teachers and administrators evaluated whether their schools/centers could meet the managerial goals.

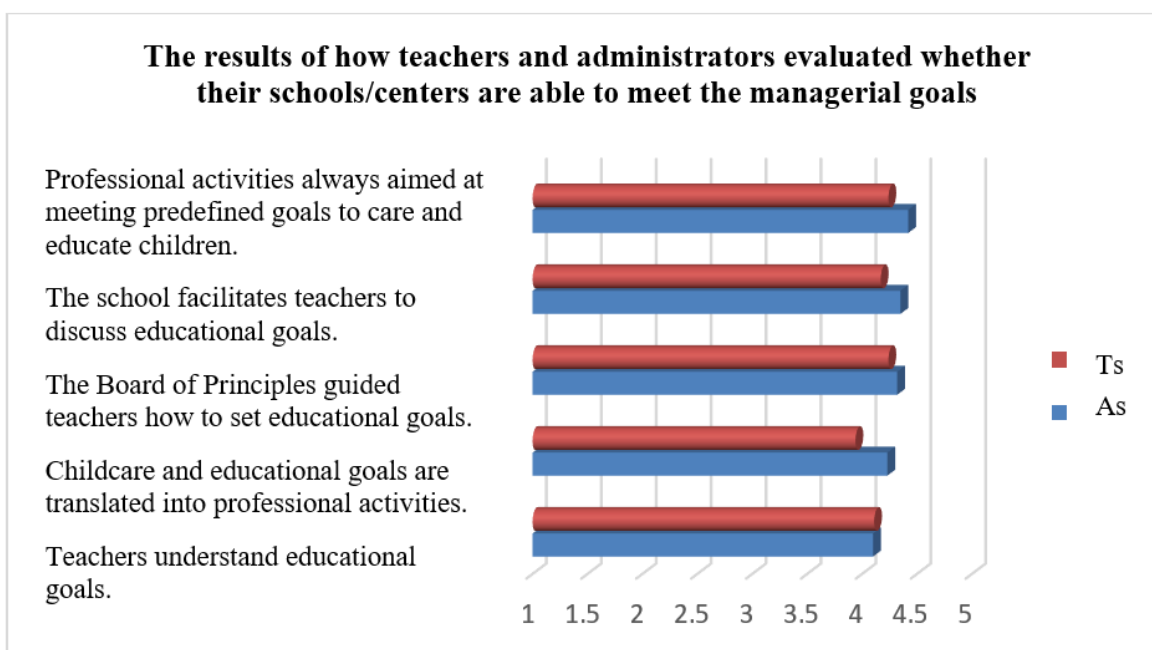


Figure 1. *The results of how teachers and administrators evaluated whether their schools/centers can meet the managerial goals*

Figure 1 shows that administrators evaluated the surveyed aspects a little higher than teachers on activities related to implementing educational management goals without much disparity (above 4 on a 5 Likert scale), except for one aspect. That is "The goals of childcare and education are translated into professional activities" (3.94 for teachers vs. 4.23 for administrators). Also, it can be seen that teachers assessed the aspect "Teachers understand the educational goals" higher than the level administrator did (4.11 to 4.10). Yet, the difference is minor.

3.2.2. Planning childcare and education activities:

Figure 2 demonstrates the surveyed results on planning childcare and education activities.

Results on planning child care and education activities

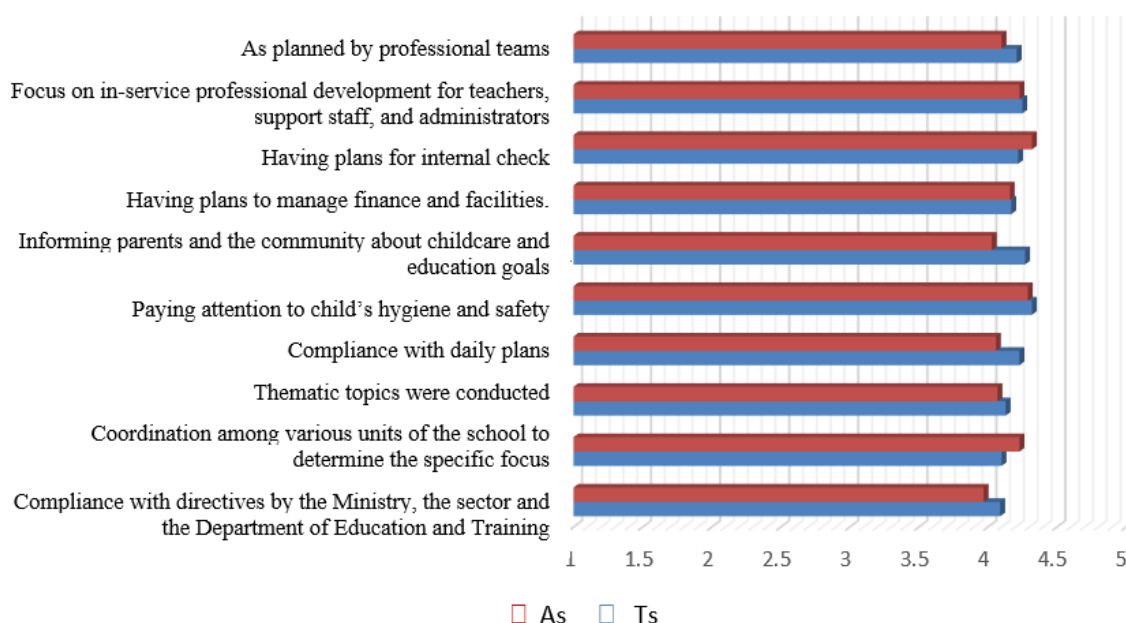


Figure 2. Results on planning childcare and educational activities

Unlike the results of evaluating the implementation of educational management goals in schools, most teachers assessed the surveyed aspects higher than that by administrators, except for two areas:

- Having a plan for internal checks (teachers: 4.22 vs. administrators: 4.32);
- There is coordination between various units of the schools to determine specific focuses (teachers: 4.10 vs. administrators: 4.23).

The results also show that there is a big difference in the evaluation level of teachers and administrators for two areas:

- Informing parents and the community about childcare and education activities (4.27- teachers and 4.03 - administrators);
- Compliance with the pre-defined daily routines and plans (teachers - 4.23 and administrators - 4.06).

The overall results show that both groups underestimated the planning of childcare and education activities in terms of "compliance with the prescribed documents by the Ministry, the Sector, and the Education and Training Department" (4.09 - Teachers and 3.97 - Administrators).

3.2.3. Conducting the set plans for childcare and education activities

Figure 3 illustrates the results of the investigated aspects regarding the implementation of childcare and educational plans.

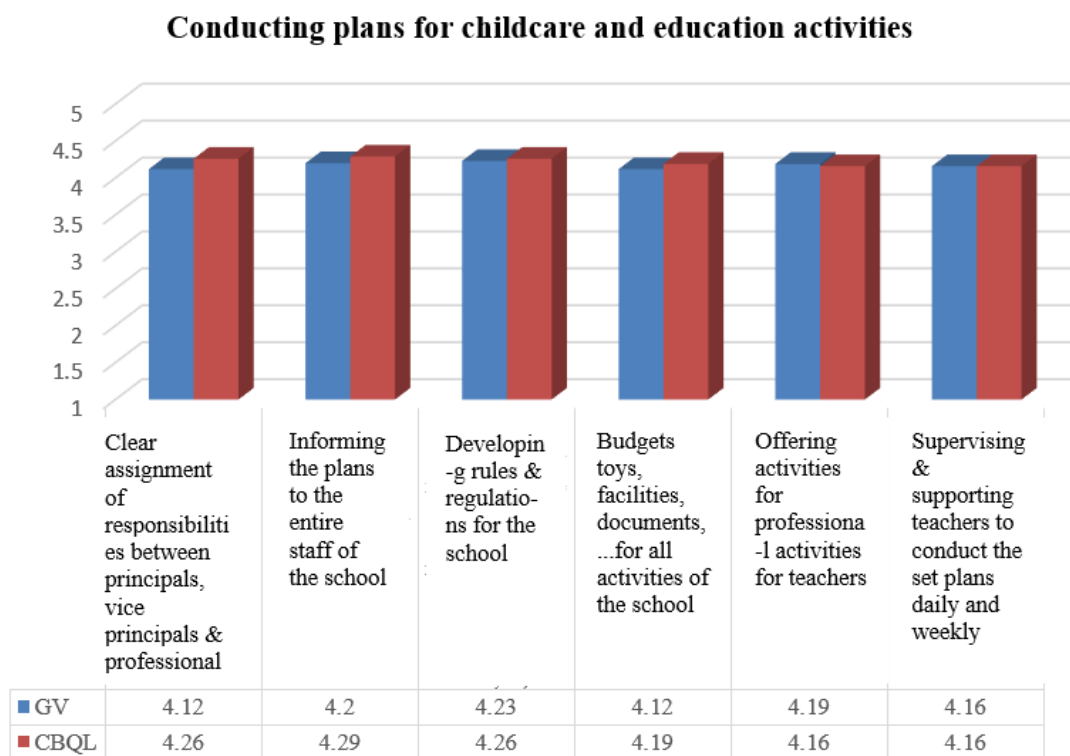


Figure 3. Reported results on the implementation of childcare and educational plans

For evaluating the implementation of the set plans, the administrators assessed this higher than the teachers in most aspects (4/6). "Monitoring and supporting teachers to implement daily and weekly care and education activities for children" is the aspect that both groups perceived the schools did well with a similar result (4.16). "Professional training for preschool teachers to implement childcare and education activities" was evaluated higher by teachers than administrators (4.19 and 4.16).

The two lowest assessed aspects between the two groups were different.

For administrators, it is:

- Professional training for preschool teachers to implement care and education activities for children (4.16);
- Supervise and support teachers in implementing daily and weekly care and education activities for children (4.16).

For teachers, it is:

- Clear assignment of responsibilities between principals, vice-principals and professional leaders and leaders (4.12);
- Preparing funds, facilities, toys, documents, ... for childcare and education activities (4.12).

3.2.4. Directing to carry out the set plans

Directing to implement the set plans

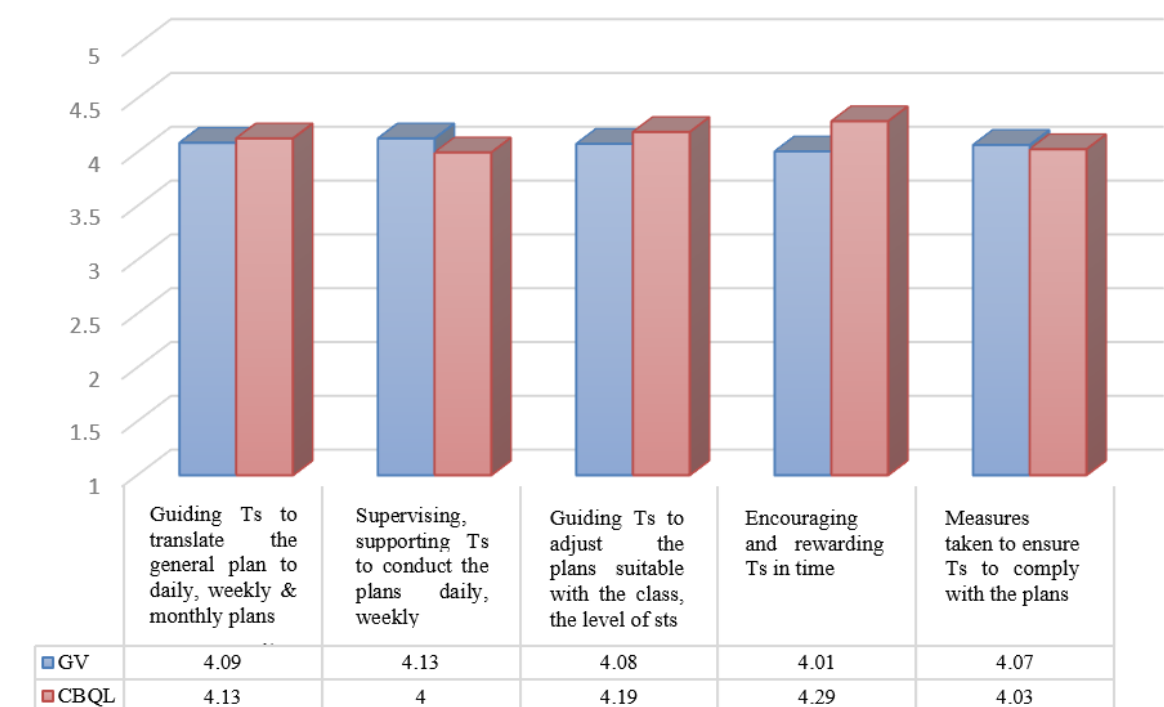


Figure 4. Reported results in directing to conduct the plans

For the direction of the implementation of the plan of care and education for children, teachers and administrators were also divided regarding the level of evaluation. Administrators evaluated higher than teachers did in three areas:

- Promptly encouraging and rewarding (4.29);
- Instruct teachers to adjust the plan in line with the conditions of the class and the student's level (4.19);
- Instruct teachers to change from a general plan to monthly / weekly / daily / activities (4.13).

While teachers assessed the following areas higher than administrators did:

- Supervise and support teachers in implementing the activity plan, taking care of each day/week
- There are measures to handle teachers not implementing the plan.

Thus, it can be seen that the administrators evaluated these aspects higher than teachers and believed that they supported teachers to develop expertise and rewarded them promptly. However, teachers thought that the administrators did a better job of supervising them than supporting them.

3.2.5. Checking the implementation of the plans

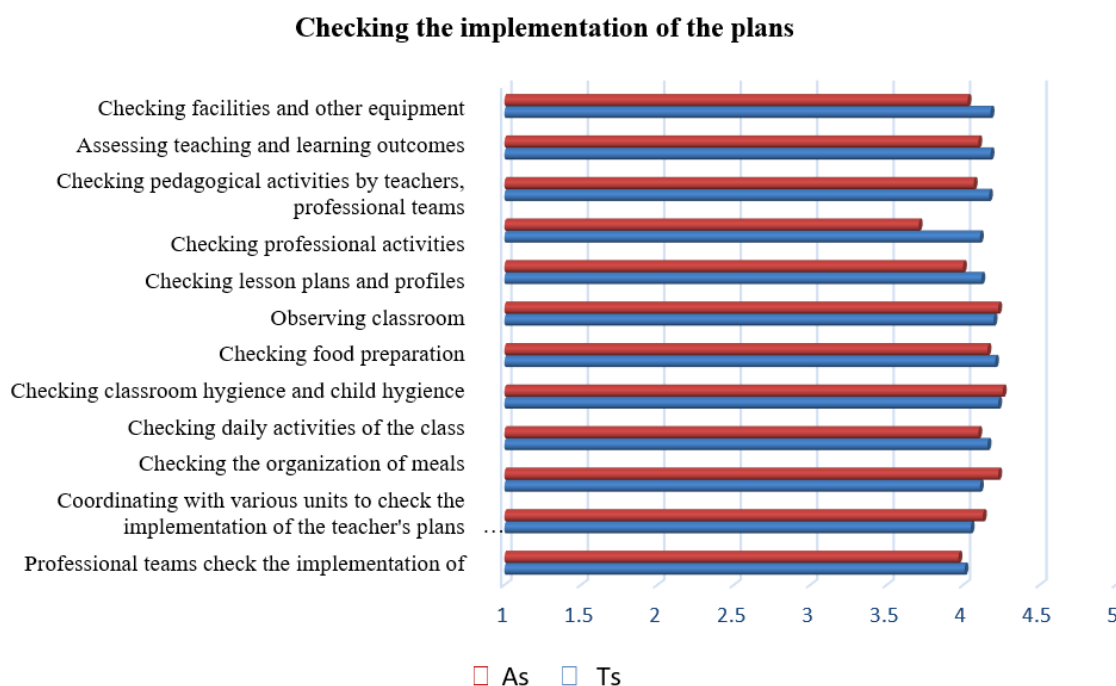


Figure 5. The results of checking the implementation of the plans

There is a disparity in evaluating these aspects between teachers and administrators. Administrators assessed some areas at a higher level than teachers (4/12 aspects). They are:

- Coordinate among various departments at the school to check the implementation of the teachers' plan;
- Check the organization of meals/diet for children;
- Check the performance of classroom hygiene and each child's hygiene;
- Observing the classroom and checking teaching activities.

And these aspects are mainly related to childcare activities rather than education activities for children. For other aspects, teachers assessed them higher than administrators did. In particular, the two areas that teachers and administrators considered the lowest are: "Professional teams monitor and supervise the implementation of the plan" (4.01 and 3.97). Administrators evaluated the lowest rating for "Checking thematic activities" (3.71)

3.2.6. Management of professional development for teachers

Figure 6 demonstrates the results of the study on the management of professional development for teachers.

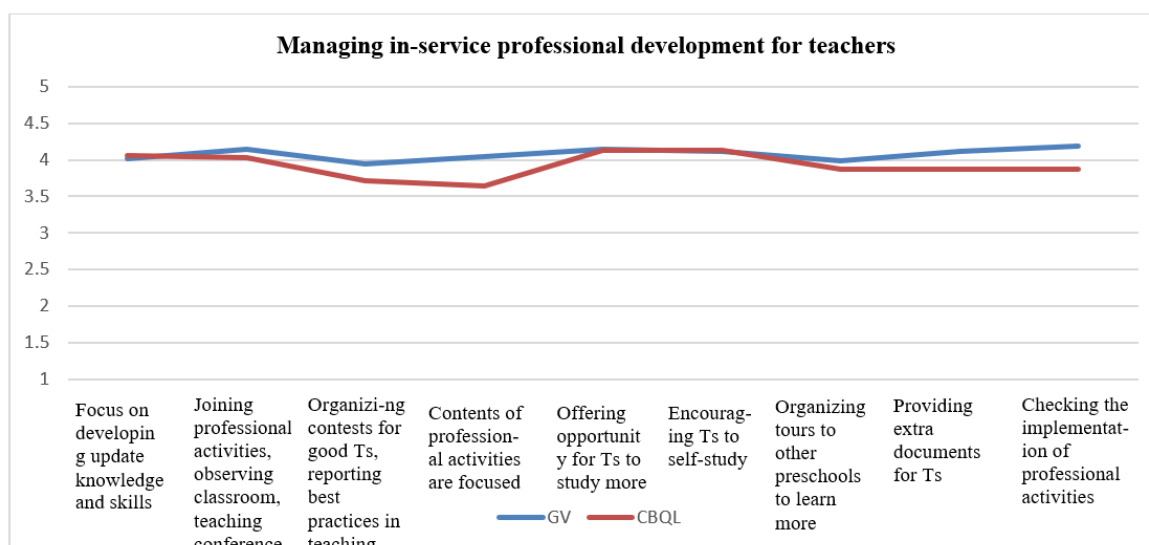


Figure 6. The results on the management of in-service professional development for teachers

The results on the management of professional development for teachers in surveyed preschools show that the two groups assessed the performance of this aspect as lower than the previously discussed aspects. Many areas were rated lower than 4 on a 5 Likert scale. In general, administrators evaluated these aspects lower than teachers did. There are three areas that both administrators and teachers assessed the lowest:

- Organize contests to select good teachers and report best practices in teaching (administrators-3.71; teachers-3.94);
- The content of thematic activities has a clear focus (administrators - 3.65);
- Organize study tours to learn experiences from other schools (teachers - 3.99).

Thus, it can be seen that administrators assessed these aspects at a high level of agreement and believed that they supported teachers in developing expertise and rewarded them promptly. However, teachers felt that administrators did a better job of supervising than supporting them.

3.2.7. Managing teaching and learning facilities:

Figure 7 shows the result of how teachers and administrators assessed the performance of their schools’ management of teaching and learning facilities

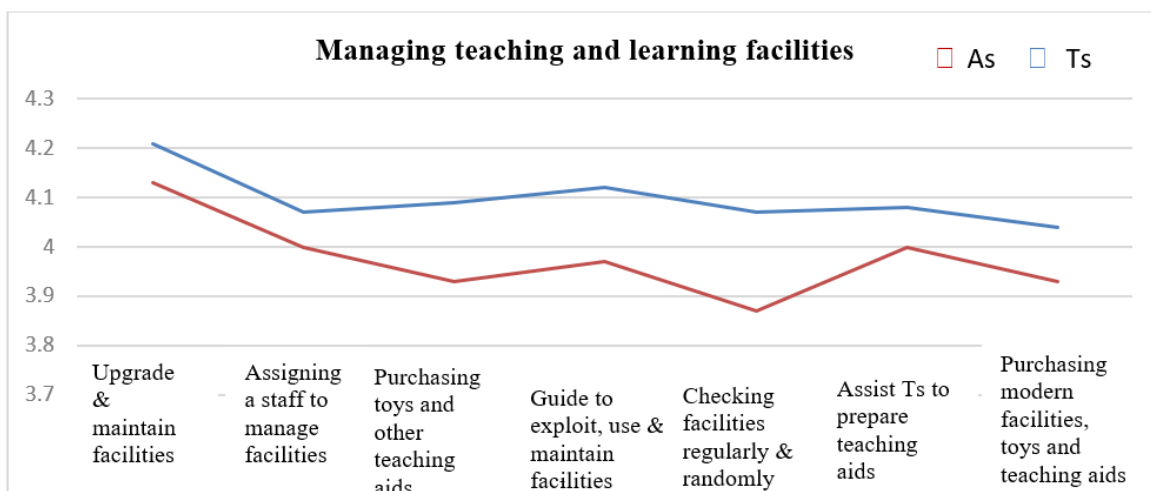


Figure 7. The level of evaluation on managing teaching and learning facilities

Teachers evaluated the implementation of the management of facilities at their preschools higher than administrators. Teachers and administrators both rated the highest for: “Upgrade and maintain facilities” (teachers - 4.21 vs. administrators - 4.13) and the lowest for "Procurement of modern facilities" (teachers – 4.04 and administrators - 3.93). Thus, these pre-schools have focused on upgrading and maintaining facilities for teaching and learning. However, they are required to invest more in the purchase of modern facilities in the schools if possible.

3.3. Factors affecting the effectiveness of management of childcare and education at preschools in HCM City

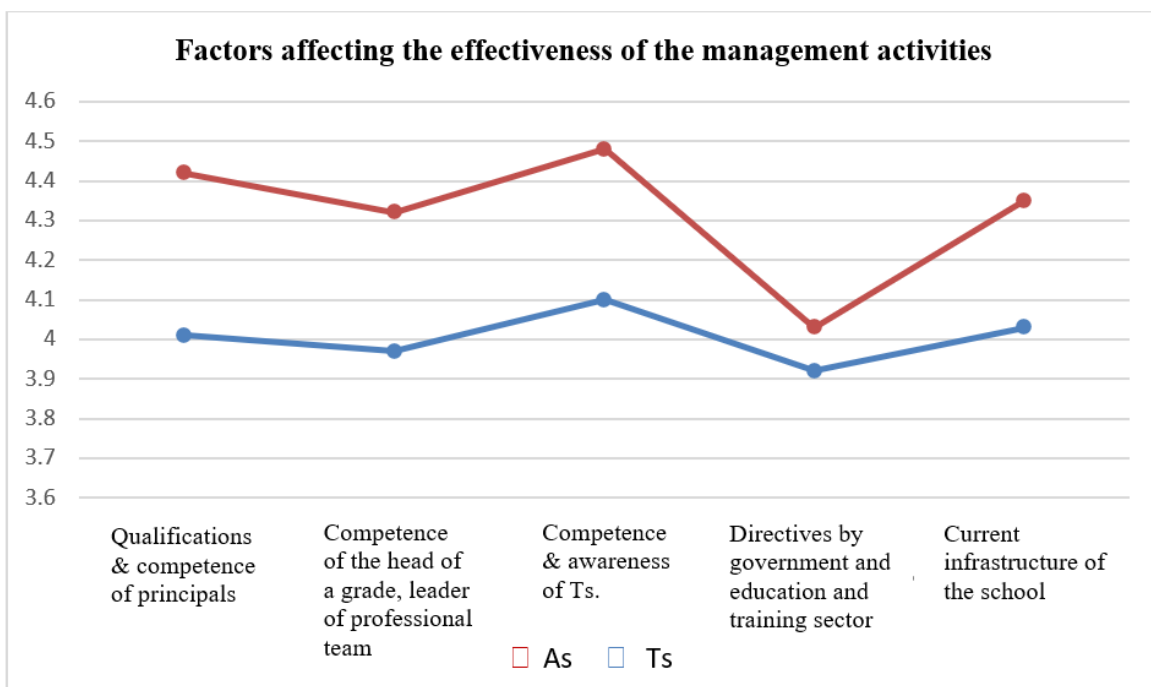


Figure 8. Factors affecting the effectiveness of the management of childcare and education

Assessing the impacts of the five investigated issues on the management of childcare and education activities at preschools in Ho Chi Minh City, administrators believed these aspects had a greater influence on their work than teachers did. Although there is a difference in assessing the level of influence, both administrators and teachers evaluated the highest influencing factor for "Competence, awareness of teachers" (teachers - 4.10 and administrators - 4.48) and the lowest for "Directives by government and education and training sector" (teachers-3.92 and administrators - 4.03).

Thus, in order to improve the effectiveness and quality of management, preschools should prioritize activities on improving teachers' competence and awareness.

3.4. Suggested measures to improve the effectiveness of the management of childcare and education in HCM City

Figure 9 illustrates the perceived level of necessity on the proposed measures to improve the effectiveness of the management of childcare and education in HCM City.

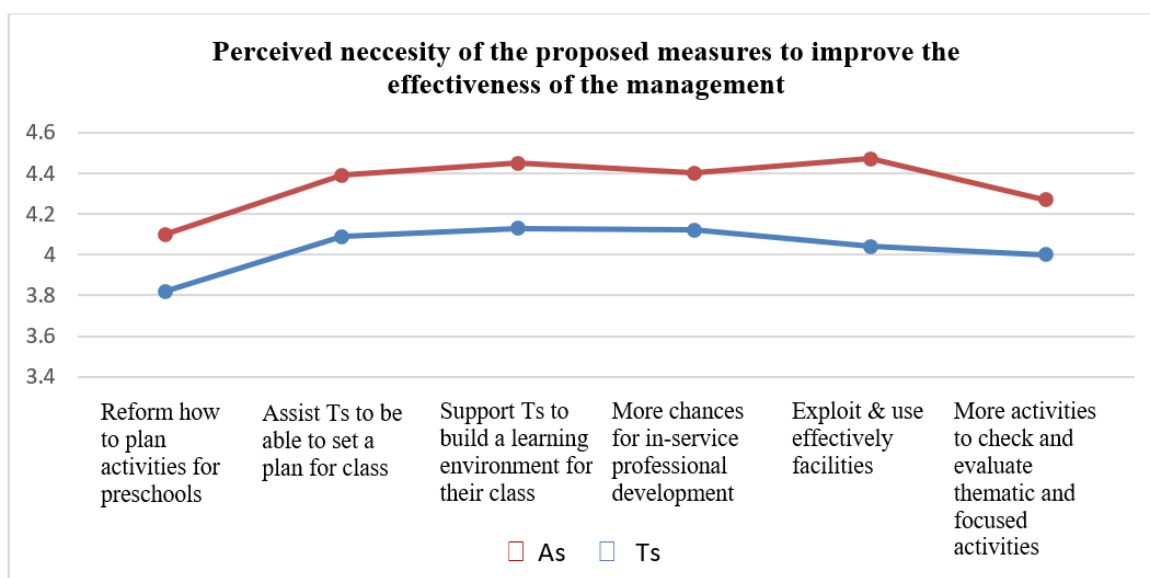


Figure 9. Reported results on the necessity of the proposed measures

Figure 9 shows that the administrators agreed with the proposed measures at a higher level than teachers. For both teachers and administrators, the highest level for:

- Supporting teachers to build a learning environment in class (administrators - 4.45 and teachers - 4.13).

Two other measures that are agreed to be necessary by the two groups are:

- Exploiting and using effectively facilities to support childcare and education activities (Administrators-4.47);
- Offering more activities for professional development for teachers (4.12).

From the perspectives of the two groups, the results show that preschools in Ho Chi Minh City need to support teachers to build a learning environment in the classroom,

enhance teachers' professional development and exploit and use effectively facilities to support childcare and education activities to improve the management of childcare and education activities.

3.5. Areas for improvement of childcare and educational management

The findings of the study show that administrators and teachers had different levels of assessment of the surveyed aspects. Administrators evaluated the overall management of preschools higher than teachers did. In particular, they assessed the areas related to the direction of management higher and the competence and cooperation of teachers lower. In addition, it can be seen that management activities related to childcare were assessed higher than those related to child education.

The survey results also show that the following issues need to be promoted to improve the effectiveness of the management of childcare and education in preschools in Ho Chi Minh City.

- a) The goals of childcare and education are translated into professional activities
- b) The planning of childcare and education activities to be "Compliance with the prescribed documents of the Ministry, the sector, and the Education and Training Department."
- c) Professional development for preschool teachers to carry out childcare and education activities
- d) Supervise and support teachers in implementing daily and weekly care and education activities for children
- e) Clear assignment of responsibilities between principals, vice principals, and professional heads and heads
- f) Preparing funds, facilities, toys, documents and the like for childcare and education activities
- g) The professional leaders check and supervise the implementation of the plan
- h) Checking thematic/focused activities

In addition, preschools also need to invest more in purchasing more modern facilities for their schools.

To improve the efficiency and quality of management, schools should prioritize improving teachers' competence and awareness. The results also show that preschools in Ho Chi Minh City need to support teachers to build a learning environment in class, enhance teachers' self-fostering activities and effectively exploit and use facilities to support childcare and education activities to improve the management of childcare and education activities. It can be seen that although the survey was only conducted during the in-service stages, the role of early childhood teacher training (under the responsibility of teacher education universities) is also significant to help develop teachers' competence. This initial teacher

training stage needs to pay attention to helping preschool student teachers build a learning environment in the classroom [to address the solution d). as proposed in this article].

4. Conclusion

ECEC management is a system of intentional and scientific influences on ECEC schools, to create optimal conditions for conducting the goals of preschool education; ECEC management is an integral part of ECEC management in particular and educational management in general. Solutions to improve the quality of ECEC institutions are specific ways to implement management methods for ECEC institutions to create optimal conditions for meeting the goals of preschool education. The aspects of managing educational activities in preschools include: Planning educational activities; Managing child education goals; Checking the implementation of education plans; Managing classroom activities of teachers; Managing care activities by nannies; Managing facilities to support educational activities. In general, the management of childcare and education activities at Ho Chi Minh City preschools was reported to be quite good and good for some aspects of this study.

The study results on the management of ECEC in preschools in Ho Chi Minh City show that besides some significant achievements, certain limitations in the management of childcare and education were also found. The system was not yet synchronized and effective. Preschools are required to have more specific plans to improve the aspects evaluated low in this study. This will contribute to stabilizing the teaching and managing staff, improving the quality of education care, and actively investing in facilities to ensure all children enjoy the best care in all types of education.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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**THỰC TRẠNG QUẢN LÝ VIỆC CHĂM SÓC VÀ GIÁO DỤC TRẺ
TẠI CÁC TRƯỜNG MẦM NON Ở THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH****Phạm Thị Hương***Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam**Tác giả liên hệ: Phạm Thị Hương – Email: huongpt@hcmue.edu.vn**Ngày nhận bài: 10-5-2022; ngày nhận bài sửa: 25-5-2022; ngày duyệt đăng: 15-6-2022***TÓM TẮT**

Bài viết trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu về thực trạng quản lý việc chăm sóc và giáo dục trẻ tại các trường mầm non trên địa bàn Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh từ quan điểm của cán bộ quản lý, giáo viên và bảo mẫu. Các nội dung được khảo sát liên quan đến thực hiện mục tiêu quản lý giáo dục, lập kế hoạch hoạt động, tổ chức thực hiện, chỉ đạo thực hiện, kiểm tra giám sát và đánh giá việc thực hiện. Ngoài ra, bài viết cũng khảo sát thực trạng quản lý công tác bồi dưỡng chuyên môn và cơ sở vật chất tại các trường mầm non. Kết quả cho thấy công tác quản lý về chất lượng chăm sóc, giáo dục trẻ chưa được đồng bộ và hiệu quả. Các trường cần có kế hoạch cụ thể nhằm cải tiến các điểm chưa được đánh giá cao tại các trường.

Từ khóa: công tác quản lý; chăm sóc và giáo dục trẻ; Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh