

Tracer Study of the Graduates of the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) Programme in Ban Keun Teacher Training College, Academic Year 2019 – 2020*

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Abstract

The objectives of the study were to: 1) assess the graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies obtained from the programme; 2) explore the employment situation of the graduates of the programme; and 3) evaluate employers' satisfaction regarding the graduates' skills and competencies obtained from the programme. The population consists of 55 graduates, and 16 employers. The instruments for this data collection were two online questionnaires. Data analysis were frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviations and correlation. The study found that : 1) the graduates' opinion was that the skills and competencies that they acquired during their study were at the high level ($\mu = 4.07$, $\sigma = 0.46$), furthermore the relationship between the graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the programme and the required skills and competencies at work is at a quite high level ($\rho = 0.75$), 2) the graduates' employment situation and working status were employed 72.7 percent, most of them (87.50 percent) are private school teachers, and most of them are employed as full-time employees (92.50 percent) , and 3) the employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies found that their overall satisfaction with the graduate' skills and competencies is at the high level ($\mu = 4.40$, $\sigma = 0.43$).

Keywords: Tracer study, Early childhood Education Programme

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Introduction

The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is committed to providing quality pre-school education services by raising awareness of the importance of early childhood development. The responsibility for preparing early childhood teachers falls upon the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) under the supervision of the Department of Teacher Education (DTE), Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES).

Before 2012, Lao teacher training colleges only offered early childhood teacher education programmes at the Diploma levels. The development of the first-ever four-year Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) was completed in 2012, with the support of UNESCO Bangkok. The programme was first launched in Dongkhamxang TTC in the academic year 2013-2014, followed by Luangnamtha TTC and Salavan TTC in the academic year 2014-2015, and Luangprabang TTC, Pakse TTC, Bankeun TTC, and Savanhnakhet TTC in the academic year 2016-2017.

Upon the completion of the programme's first cycle in 2017, a curriculum evaluation was carried out. The findings of the evaluation were used as a basis for curriculum revision in 2018 to improve the quality of the programme and ensure that it aligned with the 2012 national early childhood education curriculum. The revised curriculum was first adopted for the academic year 2018/2019 in Dongkhamxang TTC and Saravan TTC, and in Luangnamtha TTC and Suvanhnakhet TTC the following academic year. (Department of Teacher Education, 2012)

To implement the National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS, 2006-2015), the Five-Year Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (ESSDP, 2016-2020) and the Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan from 2016-2020, the Department of Teacher Education and the Teacher Development Centre developed a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) programme. Dongkhamxang Teacher Training College has served as the main implementing agency in collaboration with the other seven teacher training colleges that prepare teachers from pre-school up to secondary level, as well as related departments, with support from UNESCO Bangkok under the Capacity Development for Education in Lao PDR: Capacity Building Support in Teaching Education (CapED). The Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) programme, having been officially approved in accordance with the ministerial agreement on the curriculum endorsement and

implementation (Ministerial Agreement No.3563/MoES, dated 28 August 2013) is now fully implemented. (Department of Teacher Education, 2019)

The programme was first implemented from the 2013-2014 to the 2016-2017 academic years, with the first cohort of graduates in 2017. At that point, a curriculum evaluation study was conducted in collaboration with experts from UNESCO Bangkok. The ensuing curriculum review was conducted to improve the curriculum structure in order to focus on efficiency, reduce the number of teaching hours of theory and increase practice hours according to the national curriculum standard for Bachelor's degrees No. 4132 / HEIs / 2011, dated 03/11/2011. This also was to ensure correspondence with the early childhood education learning experience plans within the National Kindergarten Curriculum.

Ban Keun Teacher Training College is located at Kuen Nuea village, Thulakom district, Vientiane Province. Ban Keun Teacher Training College launched the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) programme since 2017, with eighty-four graduates in two cohorts yielding fifty-seven graduates in 2020. The graduates work as teachers in public and private schools. And, there are still a small number of graduates who are still unemployed.

Tracer study is common research method for educational institutions to check on the employability of their graduates. It can be used to achieve in many ways such as ; to collect the information on how well the graduates are doing in their works, to meet the needs of the employers, to get feedback from the graduates and to modify and upgrade the curriculum. (Schomburg, 2003, 2016; Cohen, 2004)

Therefore, to ensure the quality and relevance of the programme, Ban Keun TTC agreed to conduct a graduate tracer study with graduates in the academic year 2019-2020. The results of the study will help identify the areas that need to be further improved to ensure that new graduates are employable. They also can contribute to the improvement of the quality of early childhood education in Lao PDR, help develop teaching and learning management skills and provide course updates.

Objectives

The overall objective is to assess the adequacy, quality and relevance of the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education programme offered at Ban Keun Teacher Training College in Lao PDR, and the employment situation of the graduates from this programme.

The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies obtained from the programme;
2. explore the employment situation of the graduates of the programme; and
3. evaluate employers' satisfaction regarding the graduates' skills and competencies obtained from the programme.

Key questions

- 1) Do the graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the programme match the requirements of their jobs? What are the skills and competencies the graduates acquired during studies?
- 2) What are the graduates' retrospective assessments of the programme? (e.g, satisfaction with learning experience, learning facilities and curriculum)
- 3) Does training and experience provided by teacher training colleges enable the graduates to address the demands of their workplaces and communities?
- 4) What is the employment situation and status of the graduates? Do they work in their field of study?
- 5) How did the graduates transfer into employment?
- 6) What are the relationships between studies and current employment?
- 7) Are the graduates satisfied with their jobs?
- 8) What is the level of satisfaction of employers regarding the graduates' performance?

Research Methodology

Target Population

1) Graduates from the B.Ed. in ECE programme who graduated in 2020 from Ban Keun Teacher Training College, (55 graduates); and 2) Employers of the graduates mentioned above, such as directors, deputy directors (academic department), supervisors, etc. (a total number of 16 people)

Timeframe

The duration of this graduate tracer study was from 19 July to 30 September 2021

Data collection instruments

There were 2 questionnaires; 1) the 4 parts questionnaires for the graduates which consists of closed-ended and open-ended questions and 2) three parts questionnaire for the employers. The questionnaires were quality check by focus group discussion.

Data collection method

Step 1: Discuss the design of data collection tools; step 2: prepare questionnaires step 3: Create questionnaires with Google Forms and pre-test the questionnaires, and step 4 complete the questionnaires.

Data analysis method

After the questionnaires were completed, the Team entered the into the database for data analysis, using SPSS programme to analyse the data by finding the frequency (μ), percentage, mean, standard deviation (σ) and correlation value. The mean values and correlation are interpreted as follows.

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|------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1) Average | 4.51 - 5.00 | refers to very high |
| Average | 3.51 - 4.50 | refers to high |
| Average | 2.51 - 3.50 | refers to medium |
| Average | 1.51 - 2.50 | refers to low |
| Average | 1.00 - 1.50 | refers to very low |
- 2) The interpretation of the correlation coefficient according to the correlation level:
- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| The correlation value | 0.81 or higher | refers to high correlation |
| The correlation value | 0.61 - 0.80 | refers to quite high correlation |
| The correlation value | 0.41 - 0.60 | refers to moderate correlation |
| The correlation value | 0.21 - 0.40 | refers to quite low correlation |
| The correlation value | below 0.20 | refers to low correlation |

Research Results

1.1 General information of the graduates and the employers.

There were fifty-five graduates, all of them were female, the majority of them are single, accounting for eighty percent of all respondents. And there were 16 employers who responded to the survey, five male employers (31.2 percent) and eleven females (68.8 percent). Most of them are below thirty years of age, (43.8 percent). The educational level of

most is a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, (37.5 percent). In addition, most of them have six to ten years of work experience, seven graduates are working in public schools (43.8 percent) and nine graduates are working in private schools (56.2 percent). It is found that most of the employers are school directors.

2. The evaluation results of the graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the programme

2.1 The graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the programme; and the relevance of the acquired skills and competencies with their job requirements.

The graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the programme.

Table 1: The graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies from the programme.

Evaluation Items	N = 55		level
	μ	σ	
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.16	0.53	high
2. The ability to manage the learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in line with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports	4.16	0.60	high
3. The ability to manage playtime and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	4.04	0.67	high
4. The ability to create an enabling environment for children to play and learn, regardless of their race, language, religion, gender, age, disability and socio-economic hardship	4.01	0.79	high
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	3.59	0.66	high
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.49	0.65	high
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.36	0.69	high
Summary	4.07	0.46	high

Table 1 shows that the skills and competencies that the graduates acquired during study are at a high level ($\mu = 4.07$, $\sigma = 0.46$). It found that item No. 6: 'code of professional

ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children’, has the highest average rating at the high level ($\mu = 4.49$, $\sigma = 0.65$), while the lowest rating level, item No. 5: ‘knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research’, is still at the high level ($\mu = 3.59$, $\sigma = 0.66$).

The relevance of the acquired skills and competencies with the job requirements

Table 2: The relevance of the graduates’ acquired skills and competencies with their job requirements

Evaluation Items	N = 40		level
	μ	σ	
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.18	0.60	high
2. The ability to manage the learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in line with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports	4.27	0.60	high
3. The ability to manage playtime and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	4.05	0.68	high
4. The ability to create an enabling environment for children to play and learn, regardless of their race, language, religion, gender, age, disability and socio-economic hardship	4.05	0.63	high
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	3.95	0.68	high
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.42	0.68	high
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.23	0.73	high
Summary	4.15	0.39	high

Table 2 shows that graduates who are currently being employed rated the relevance of their acquired skills and competencies with their job requirement at the high level ($\mu = 4.15$, $\sigma = 0.39$). The items No. 6: ‘code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children’, has the highest average rating ($\mu = 4.42$, $\sigma = 0.68$). The item with the lowest average rating is No. 5: ‘knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research’, is also at the high level ($\mu = 3.95$, $\sigma = 0.68$).

2.2 Graduates' satisfaction with learning experiences, learning facilities and curriculum

The Satisfaction of the graduates with learning experiences

Table 3: Satisfaction of the graduates with learning experiences

Evaluation Items	N = 55		Level
	μ	σ	
1. The teaching and learning management complies with and covers the curriculum content.	4.24	0.58	High
2. The teaching and learning management is in line with the nature and purpose of each subject of the programme.	4.09	0.59	High
3. Activities/programmes for development and enhancement of skills and capacities, such as promoting teamwork, are provided.	4.15	0.60	High
4. The learning assessment is in line with the curriculum.	4.11	0.60	High
5. Teacher educators are knowledgeable and experienced.	4.09	0.61	High
6. Teacher educators are a good role model for behaviours and practices.	4.20	0.62	High
Summary	4.14	0.44	High

Table 3 shows that the satisfaction of graduates with learning experiences is at the high level ($\mu = 4.14$, $\sigma = 0.44$). It found that item No. 1: 'the teaching and learning management complies with and covers the curriculum content', has the highest average rating at the high level ($\mu = 4.24$, $\sigma = 0.58$). The lowest average rating item is No. 5: 'teacher educators are knowledgeable and experienced', also at the high level ($\mu = 4.09$, $\sigma = 0.61$).

The satisfaction of the graduates with learning facilities

Table 4: Satisfaction of graduates with learning facilities

Evaluation Items	N = 55		level
	μ	σ	
1. Library facilities and resources are adequate for learning.	3.98	0.73	high
2. Materials and documents are suitable and can be used to facilitate learning.	3.89	0.71	high
3. The practice/training rooms have sufficient and suitable equipment.	3.78	0.77	high
4. The ICT system can facilitate self-directed research.	3.82	0.64	high
Summary	3.86	0.60	high

Table 4 shows that satisfaction of the graduates with the learning facilities is at the high level ($\mu = 3.86$, $\sigma = 0.60$). The item No. 1: ‘library facilities and resources are adequate for learning’, has the highest average rating at the high level ($\mu = 3.98$, $\sigma = 0.73$). The item with the lowest average rating is No. 3: ‘the practice/training rooms have sufficient and suitable equipment’, also registers at the high level ($\mu = 3.78$, $\sigma = 0.77$).

The satisfaction of the graduates with the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum

Table 5: Satisfaction of the graduates with the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum

Evaluation Items	N = 55		level
	μ	σ	
1. The curriculum is up-to-date and relevant to the current situation.	4.18	0.64	High
2. The subjects offered in the curriculum	4.02	0.56	High
3. The subject contents covered in the curriculum	4.02	0.62	High
Summary	4.07	0.49	High

As Table 5 displays, satisfaction of graduates with the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum is at the high level ($\mu = 4.07$, $\sigma = 0.49$). The item No. 1: ‘the curriculum is up-to-date and relevant to the current situation’, has the highest average rating at the high level ($\mu = 4.18$, $\sigma = 0.64$). The item with the lowest average rating is No. 3: ‘the subject contents covered in the curriculum’, also at the high level ($\mu = 4.02$, $\sigma = 0.62$).

3. The Evaluation results of the graduates’ employment situation and working status

3.1 The graduates’ employment situation and working status

Table 6: Current employment status of the graduates

Current employment status	Number (persons)	Percentage
Employed	40	72.7
Unemployed	15	27.3
Summary	55	100.0

Table 6 shows that most of them are employed (72.7 percent) and the rest are yet unemployed (27.3 percent).

Table 7: Types of work and employment of the employed graduates

Types of work and employment		Number (people)	Percentage
Type of work	Teacher civil servant	-	-
	Private school teacher	35	63.6
	Volunteer teacher	5	9.1
	Others	-	-
Type of employment	Full time	38	69.1
	Part-time / casual	1	1.8
	freelance	1	1.8
	Others	-	-

Table 7 presents the finding that most of them are private school teachers, (63.6 percent) and most of those (69.1 percent) are employed as full-time employees.

Table 8: The relevance between the graduates' study and their current employment

The relevance between the graduates' qualification and current employment	Number (persons)	Percentage
The current employment matches with their qualifications.	35	87.50
The current employment partially matches with their qualifications.	5	12.50
The current employment does not match with their qualifications.	-	-
Summary	40	100.00

Table 8 indicates that most graduates think that their current employment matches with their qualifications, (87.5 percent), while fifteen (27.3 percent) think that the current employment does not match with their qualifications.

4. The evaluation results of the employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies

4.1 The employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies

Table 9: The employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies

Evaluation Items	N = 16		Level
	μ	σ	
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.25	0.86	high
2. The ability to manage the learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in line with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports	4.50	0.63	high
3. The ability to manage plays and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	4.31	0.70	high
4. The ability to create an enabling environment for children to play and learn, regardless of their race, language, religion, gender, age, disability and socio-economic hardship	4.50	0.63	high
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	3.94	0.57	high
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.69	0.47	very high
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.53	0.50	very high
Summary	4.40	0.43	high

Table 9 shows that the employers' overall satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies is at the high level ($\mu = 4.40$, $\sigma = 0.43$). It found that item No. 6: 'code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children', has the highest average rating at the quite high level ($\mu = 4.69$, $\sigma = 0.47$). The lowest average rating level is for item No. 5: 'knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research', but at the high level ($\mu = 3.94$, $\sigma = 0.57$).

Discussion

The following are a few points of discussion derived from the study.

1) The skills and competencies that graduates acquired during their study were at the high level ($\mu = 4.07$, $\sigma = 0.46$), furthermore the results of the correlation coefficients test shows that the relationship between the graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the programme and the required skills and competencies at work is at a quite high level ($\rho = 0.75$). This study confirms that the graduates have the ability to manage the learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in line with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports; code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children; the ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions; and the ability to manage playtime and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner. The satisfaction of the graduates with learning experiences is at the high level ($\mu = 4.14$, $\sigma = 0.44$) because the teaching and learning management complies with and covers the curriculum content; teacher educators are a good role model for behaviors and practices. Activities/programmes for development and enhancement of skills and capacities, such as promoting teamwork, are provided.

In term of satisfaction of graduates with learning facilities is at the high level ($\mu = 3.86$, $\sigma = 0.60$), the study showed that library facilities and resources are adequate for learning and materials and documents are suitable and can be used to facilitate learning. The satisfaction of the graduates with the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum, the study showed that the curriculum is up-to-date and relevant to the current situation and the subjects offered in the curriculum as well as the subject contents covered in the curriculum.

2) The evaluation results of the graduates' employment situation and working status; all of them are females. They are employed (72.7 percent) and unemployed (27.3 percent), most of them are private school teachers, (63.6 percent) and (69.1 percent) are employed as full-time employees (69.1 percent). In line with this study, it indicates that most graduates think that their current employment matches with their qualifications, (87.5 percent).

3) The evaluation results of the employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies shows that the employers' overall satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies is at the high level ($\mu = 4.40$, $\sigma = 0.43$). Because the employers noted that graduates have professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children. The teacher is an important person which create the learner's quality. In the past there was a research to develop the teachers to be the quality of academic in teaching and learning process.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for applying the study results

1.The TTC should promote the development of knowledge and capacities of graduates through an action research process and should increase learning facilities, including practice rooms, hands-on practical training opportunities, and equipment that are appropriate and sufficient.

2.The TTC should increase academic cooperation and practicum teaching with the private sector, and should help providing information about finding a job, not only in government schools but also in private schools.

3.The Department of Teacher Education/Ministry of Education and Sports should adjust the curriculum or courses that focus on the development of knowledge through the research process and provide adequate support.

2. Recommendations for further study / research


1. A graduate tracer study should be conducted every three years, or every five years, and the results from the study should be used to improve the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum for better learning outcomes of graduates.

2. Other target groups such as parents and communities should be added to the study. It should incorporate a variety of data collection methods.

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