

A Tracer Study on the Graduates of Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education Programme in Lao PDR at Salavan Teacher Training College, Academic Year 2019-2020*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study were: 1) to assess the graduates' acquired and developed skills and competencies obtained from the programme at Salavan Teacher Training College (Salavan TTC); 2) to explore the employment situation of the graduates from the programme at Salavan TTC; and 3) to evaluate employers' satisfaction regarding the graduates' skills and competencies obtained from the programme at Salavan TTC. The target population in this study was eighty-eight graduates of B.Ed.in ECE programme at the Salavan TTC in the 2019-2020 academic year, and seventeen employers. The tools used to collect the data were two online questionnaires survey. Data analysis such as frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviations and correlation. The study found that the overall results of the skills and competencies that the graduates acquired during their study were assessed to be at the high level. The relationship between the curriculum and the employment, the survey found that the correlation between the graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the programme and the required skills and competencies at work, was at the moderate level ($\rho = 0.46$). The graduates' satisfaction level with their work was rated at the high level ($\mu = 4.13$, $\sigma = 0.57$), and the employers rated their satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies also at the high level ($\mu = 4.16$, $\sigma = 0.42$).

Keywords: Tracer study, Early childhood Education Programme

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Introduction

The Government of Lao PDR intends to increase the quality of pre-school education services to meet their responsibility for the preparation of pre-school teachers at Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) under the direction of the Department of General Education, Ministry of Education and Sports. Prior to 2012, the Teacher Colleges provided only undergraduate or advanced degree programmes in early childhood education. The development of the first four-year undergraduate child education programme was completed in 2012 with funding support from UNESCO Bangkok. The Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed. in ECE) programme was first opened at Dongkhamxang Teacher Training College in the academic year 2013-2014. Luangnamtha TTC and Salavan TTC offered it in 2014-2015. Ban Keun TTC, Savannakhet TTC, Pakse TTC and Luang Prabang TTC first offered it in the 2016-2017 academic year.

When implementing the B.Ed. in ECE programme for the first time, the Ministry of Education provides training for teachers at the Teachers Training College to help them understand the curriculum and how to apply it, such as creating teaching-learning arrangements and assessments, as well as how to create an environment conducive to the use of the curriculum. Salavan TTC is one of the eight teacher training colleges in Lao PDR, with the training of early childhood education teachers at the undergraduate level and the opening of the first undergraduate programme in the 2014-2015 academic year, with a total of thirty students. In 2015-2016, there were twenty-two undergraduate students in one class. By 2016, the curriculum was improved and opened with three classrooms and a total of 104 students. These students graduated in 2020.

The B.Ed.in ECE programme aims to provide better quality education so that graduates from Salavan Teacher Training College will have the skills, knowledge, and ability to apply that knowledge effectively and respond to the needs of society in accordance with the education plan of the Department of Teacher Education and the five-year development plan of Salavan Teacher Training College from 2020-2024. To identify the direction, duties and projections to improve the quality and consistency of teacher training curricula in accordance with the policy of the Department of Teacher Education, Ministry of Education and Sports. And Expect Students who graduate from Salavan Teacher Training College must have a certain professional knowledge, be qualified, be good developers and be able to respond to the needs of society to become a reality. In order to improve the quality and efficiency of teaching

and learning, and in order to gradually increase the ability of student teachers to develop their teaching careers, it is necessary to evaluate the graduates of B.Ed.in ECE programme. This follow-up assessment of graduates is a way to obtain information that demonstrates the effectiveness of the curriculum and its relevance to its application. For this reason, Salavan TTC is studying this issue in order to apply the results to the curriculum and further improve the implementation of the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum.

Objectives

The overall objective is to assess the adequacy, quality and relevance of the B.Ed. in ECE programme offered at Salavan Teacher Training College in Lao PDR, and the employment situation of the graduates from this programme.

The specific objectives are:

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

Research Framework

This study utilized quantitative approach employing the descriptive survey research design through questionnaires. The survey research was conducted in respond to the objective of the study, which was to trace graduates' associated employment characteristics and evaluate the significance of the graduates' acquired ability and competence, as well as employers' views of graduates.

Research Methodology

Research participants

There were two target population of the participants: 1) graduates of the B.Ed. in ECE program at the Salavan TTC and 2) employers of the graduates. The first target group was comprised of eighty-eight graduates from the academic year 2019-2020 which were

purposively selected. The second target group was comprised of seventeen previously indicated employers of graduates.

Research Instrument and Data Analysis

Two questionnaires utilized in this study were adapted from a theme proposed by Schomburg (2003), with certain items modified to correspond with the study's objectives and the B.Ed. in ECE curriculum. Two target groups of respondents were considered when developing the questionnaires: graduates and employers. Each questionnaire had both closed- and open-ended questions. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to assess the degree of opinion, consistency, satisfaction, adequacy, and requirement.

The graduate questionnaire consisted of the following sections: Part I concerned with the profile of the graduates; Part II focused on the graduates' acquired skills and competencies, which included the skills and competencies acquired from the program, the relevance of the acquired competencies with the job requirements, the graduates' satisfaction with the learning experience, facilities, curriculum, and TTC's support; Part III involved the graduates' employability status; and Part IV emphasized the graduates' job application and work.

The questionnaire for graduate employers consisted of three sections: Part I concerned with the profile of the employers; Part II emphasized on the employers' satisfaction with graduates; and Part III concerned with the employers' satisfaction with graduates' skills and competencies.

The questionnaires were transferred to Google Forms for ease of use and delivered online to both sets of participants. After the tracer study team completed the data collection process, the data was entered into the database to be analyzed. For the data analysis, the team used the SPSS programme to analyze the data; frequency, percentages, mean (μ), standard deviations (σ) and correlation. The mean and correlation were interpreted as follows:

1. The mean values are classified against the criteria for interpreting the level of the opinion, consistency, satisfaction, appropriateness, requirement, with the following evaluation criteria:

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

The results of the data analysis are presented in four parts: 1) Demographic information; 2) Graduates’ acquired skills and competencies of the program; 3) Graduates’ employability and working status; 4) Employers’ perception towards the graduates’ skills and competencies

Part 1 Demographic information

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in two sub-headings, namely the demographic information of the graduates, and the demographic information of the employers, with the following details:

1.1 Demographic information of graduates

Table 1: Demographic information of the graduates

Graduates Profile		Frequency (N = 88)	Percentage
Gender	Male	-	-
	Female	88	100.00
Marital status	Single	62	70.45
	Married	26	29.55
	Divorced	-	-
	Widowed	-	-

Table 1 shows that a total of eighty-eight graduates responded to the survey, and that all of them are female. In terms of marital status, 70.45 percent of respondents are single. In addition, according to the statistics about the ages of the respondents, the average age of the graduates who responded to the survey is less than thirty years old.

1.2 Demographic information of employers

Table 2: Demographic information of the employers

Information of Employers		Frequency (N=17)	Percentage
Gender	Male	10	58.82
	Female	7	41.18
Age	Below 30 years-old	3	17.56
	30 - 40 years-old	8	47.06
	41 - 50 years-old	1	5.88
	Over 50 years-old	5	29.41
Educational level	Doctorate degree	-	-
	Master's degree or equivalent	5	29.41
	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	4	23.53
	Diploma level	5	29.41
	Lower than diploma level	3	17.65
Working experience	5 years and below	3	17.65
	6 - 10 years	7	41.18
	11 - 15 years	2	11.76
	16 - 20 years	-	-
	Over 20 years	5	29.41
Type of institution	Public school	8	47.06
	Private school	9	52.94
	Others	-	-

Table 2 shows that seventeen employers responded to the questionnaire. This includes ten male (58.82 percent) and seven female respondents (41.14 percent). Most of them are in the age range of thirty to forty years-old which accounts for 47.06 percent. The educational level of the majority is a Master's degree or equivalent and Diploma level (29.41 percent). In addition, most of them (41.18 percent) have 6-10 years of work experience. Regarding the type of institutions of the employers, eight are working in public schools (47.06 percent); and nine are working in private schools (52.94 percent).

Part 2 Graduates’ Acquired Skills and Competencies of the program

The data regarding the graduates’s competencies and skills acquired from the program was skills and competencies acquired from the program and the relevance of the acquired competencies with the job requirements.

Table 3: Graduates’ acquired skills and competencies of the program

Items	Acquired skills and competencies		Relevance of the acquired skills with the job requirements		Skills and competencies required by the employers	
	n = 88		n = 26		n = 17	
	μ	σ	μ	σ	μ	σ
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.02	0.62	4.08	0.56	4.35	0.70
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	4.07	0.65	4.19	0.56	4.35	0.60
3. The ability to manage plays and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	3.98	0.67	4.00	0.49	4.18	0.52
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	4.00	0.80	4.23	0.51	4.18	0.52
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	3.58	0.67	3.81	0.56	3.88	0.33
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.50	0.66	4.65	0.48	4.59	0.61
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.40	0.68	4.46	0.50	4.41	0.50
Summary	4.07	0.47	4.20	0.38	4.28	0.35

Table 3 shows that the skills and competencies that the graduates acquired during their study, in general, are at the high level ($\mu = 4.07, \sigma = 0.46$). Twenty-six graduates who are currently employed rated the relevance of their acquired skills and competencies with their job requirement, in general, at the highest level ($\mu = 4.20, \sigma = 0.38$). Overall, the graduates' skills and competencies which are required by the employers, are at the highest level ($\mu = 4.28, \sigma = 0.35$).

Part 3 The graduates' employment situation and working status

The data analysis of the graduates' employment and working status is divided into three sub-topics. 1) the graduates' employment situation and employment status, 2) the graduates' study and employment relationships, and 3) the graduates' job satisfaction. The following are the findings of the data analysis:

3.1) The graduates' employment situation and working status

Table 4: Current employment status and types of work and employment of the graduates

	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Current employment status (n=88)	Employed	26	29.55
	Unemployed	62	70.45
Type of work (n=26)	Teacher civil servant	1	3.85
	Private school teacher	9	34.62
	Volunteer teacher	12	46.15
	Others	4	15.38
Type of employment (n=26)	Full-time	25	96.15
	Part-time/casual	-	-
	Freelance	1	3.85
Duration of job search (n=26)	Others	-	-
	Less than 3 months	11	42.31
	3 - 6 months	11	42.31
	7 - 11 months	3	11.54
	1 - 2 years	1	3.85
	More than 2 years	-	-

Table 4 shows that a total of eighty-eight graduates responded to the survey. Most of them are unemployed (70.45 percent), while 29.55 percent are employed. The twenty-six employed graduates, most of them are volunteer teachers (46.2 percent). From the analysis of the graduates' positions, the survey found that most of them are employed for a full-time position (96.15 percent). Most graduates (42.31 percent) who are currently employed spent either less than three months or three to six months looking for a job.

3.2) the graduates' study and employment relationships

Table 5: The relationship between the graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the programme and the skills and competencies required by the employers

Items	Relationship	
	Size of correlation	Level of correlation
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	0.35	Quite low
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	0.19	Low
3. The ability to manage plays and learning-teaching activities in nurseries, kindergartens, multi-grade classrooms and pre-primary classrooms in a creative manner	0.16	Low
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	0.25	Quite low
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	0.35	Quite low
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	0.22	Quite low
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	0.23	Quite low
Summary	0.46	Moderate

Table 5 shows the results of the analysis of the relationship between the graduates' acquired skills and competencies from the programme and the skills and competencies required by the employers correlates at the moderate level.

3.3) The satisfaction of the graduates with their work

Table 6: The satisfaction of the graduates with their work

Items	N = 26		Level
	μ	σ	
1. The responsible task	4.27	0.60	High
2. Pride of the current responsible task	4.27	0.72	High
3. Motivation to complete the assigned work	4.35	0.56	High
4. Participation in other assigned activities in addition to the primary responsibility	4.15	0.61	High
5. The salary/ remuneration	3.62	1.02	High
Summary	4.13	0.57	High

Table 6 shows that the graduates' satisfaction level with their work is at the high level ($\mu = 4.13$, $\sigma = 0.57$).

Part 4: Evaluation results of the employers' satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies.

Table 7: The employers' perception and satisfaction of the graduates' knowledge and capacities

Items	N = 33		Level
	μ	σ	
1. Knowledge in managing early childhood education	4.12	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	4.35	0.49	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	4.00	0.61	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	3.94	0.65	High
5. Knowledge and capacities to create knowledge through action research	3.88	0.60	High

Items	N = 33		Level
	μ	σ	
6. Code of professional ethics for teachers; and love towards the teaching profession and children	4.41	0.50	High
7. The ability to work with others and preserve the Lao culture and traditions	4.41	0.50	High
Summary	4.16	0.42	High

Table 7 shows that the employers' overall satisfaction with the graduates' skills and competencies is at the high level ($\mu = 4.16$, $\sigma = 0.42$). When considering the list of evaluation items, it shows that item Nos. 6 and 7 have the highest average rating at the high level ($\mu = 4.41$, $\sigma = 0.50$). The lowest average rating level is item No. 5, also at the high level ($\mu = 3.88$, $\sigma = 0.60$).

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions and discussions are drawn:

1) The graduates acquired adequate skills and competences provided by Salavan TTC. The course they took equipped them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for their development as early childhood education teachers. They can apply the skills and knowledge acquired throughout the program to their current positions. The result of this study could be implied that graduates are able to manage learning-teaching according to the 3 characteristics and 5 core principles of education, in accordance with the National Kindergarten Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Sports; code of professional ethics for teachers; and love for 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.

2) The graduates about 29.55% are currently working as teachers in schools and 84.62 percent can find a job within six months. This can be interpreted that the quality of the graduates matches the qualifications required by the school and that the graduates are competitive in the workforce. Furthermore, their current employment matches their program-acquired skills. However, the TTC should explore assisting unemployed individuals to enter the workforce;

3) Employers were highly satisfied with the graduates' abilities and competencies. This may result from the graduates' knowledge and skills in managing early childhood education and teaching and learning, they are able to perform the institution's and community's required tasks. The graduate can collaborate effectively with both employers and coworkers. However, the suggestions made by employers should be properly considered so that future graduates are more knowledgeable and competent in the aforementioned areas and therefore can meet the requirements of the institution and society.

Recommendations

The results of this research should be used as a guideline for the next research study, which could be beneficial to the further improvement and development of the curriculum. It can also be used to motivate teachers and education administrators who are involved in the development of the curriculum. The research team would officially like to offer some recommendations below:

Recommendations for applying the study results

1. TTCs should focus on teaching students to practice with children in order to build the capacity of student teachers in knowledge and skills, such as play management, teaching in kindergarten, kindergarten, pre-school and elementary school.
2. The content of the courses should be improved and included in the curriculum, such as more English lessons, and increasing computer practice and music lessons for children.
3. TTCs should pay attention to the development of knowledge and skills in the research process for student teachers.
4. TTCs should organize activities/development projects to develop skills and promote teamwork among students.

Recommendations for further research

1. There should be periodic follow-up assessments for graduates of the B.Ed. in ECE programme to guide the improvement of the curriculum.
2. There should be follow-up assessments for graduates from B.Ed. in ECE programme at the diploma level, with full-time and part-time programme tracks to follow up on those who use the programme.
3. There should be a follow-up assessment of the quality of users of the B.Ed. in ECE programme curriculum in all systems, especially the teachers who teach specialized courses.

4. The graduate tracer study reports of the Salavan TTCs should be published on the website for the information of those who are interested in other relevant research.

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