

# **Parental Satisfaction with the Services of Pre-school Centres: A Case Study in Songkhla Province, Thailand**

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## Structured Abstract

### *Purpose:*

The objective of this research was to study parental expectations of and satisfaction with overall services of pre-school centres and to determine the factors which affected the parents' satisfaction, in part of one of Thailand's southern provinces.

### *Design:*

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire from parents of children attending 29 day-care, or pre-school, centres in Songkhla Province, South Thailand, over a two month period in spring 2014. The data were analysed mainly using descriptive statistics and some correlation analyses, with subsequent logical interpretation.

### *Findings:*

Given the location and non-compulsory nature of the childcare provision being assessed, it would seem fair to say that the answer to the overarching objective was fairly positive. Expectations were non-trivial, parents looked for more than 'baby-minding' and expected there to be some appropriately qualified staff. The perceived satisfaction levels indicate that there is nevertheless scope for improvement.

### *Practical implications:*

Since the outcomes being delivered are seen to be mainly positive by parents and guardians, the policy implication for the Thai government is that they should continue to promote, and ideally enhance, this kind of early years provision. Results suggest that Thai parents would be well advised to make use of child care centres to promote the socialisation and development of their children.

### *Originality:*

The originality of the work derives from the lack of similar systematic studies in Thailand and in particular for the rural southern provinces.

**Keywords:** Parents' satisfaction, expectations, childcare centre, pre-school, Songkhla, Thailand

## **Introduction**

The significance of pre-school education has been emphasized in Thailand since the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) was launched on 20 August 1999 (ONEC, 1999). Besides the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security have also provided several strategic plans and programs about early childhood development. The Local Administrative Organization has responsibility for providing pre-school education according to the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999). All child-care centres established by any organizations such as the Department of Community Development, the Ministry of Interior; Department of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Culture; and the Office of Primary Education, the Ministry of Education, were transferred to the Local Administrative Organization in 2002. In all, since that transfer 19,157 childcare centres across the country have been under the jurisdiction of the Local Administrative Organization (Department of Local Administration Organization, 2014).

Both direct and indirect budgets from both central and local government were continuously provided to support and develop childcare centres, especially educating and training all caregivers in each childcare centre to have a formal qualification. A National Curriculum for preschool education, together with a plan of learning activities preparation, was developed as a guideline for caregivers to educate children in childcare centres to achieve an ultimate goal of development of a whole child in physical, mental, emotional, social and intellectual domains; promoting morality and ethics and encouraging children to do their daily activities on their own (MOE, 2014; DLAO, 2014).

Although pre-school education is not compulsory in Thailand, some local administrative organizations set up a policy to encourage parents to enrol their preschool age children as a key performance index. In 2013, the Office of Regional Educational Sector Twelve reported that 72.5% of children between 3-5 years old were enrolled in a childcare centre or a kindergarten in Songkhla Province, which is located in the lower southern part of Thailand. However, parents, as a child's first teacher, still have a crucial role for their development in childcare centres (ONEC, 2007). Research has clearly shown that strong parent-teacher relationships lead to increased parental involvement which has been shown to have a significant and lasting impact on children's academic achievement (Knopf and Swick, 2007: 291). However, more specific guidance on developing positive relationships and ideas for involving parents in the childcare centres, especially in respect of parents' expectations and satisfaction for asking their cooperation in childcare and child development, is needed for early childhood educators.

The overall objective of the research project reported here was to study parental expectations of and satisfaction with overall services of pre-school centres and to begin to determine factors which

affect parents' satisfaction with the pre-school education provided, in part of one of Thailand's southern provinces.

The population for the empirical work reported here were families with at least one child in pre-school education (see the Methodology section for more details). Thus the objective noted was pursued amongst those who were actually engaged with the pre-school education system. A major complementary issue, which we do not attempt to address in our primary work, is that of the degree of inclusion or exclusion of families and their children in pre- and then school education. We briefly review some of the associated issues at the end of the Literature Review which follows and pick up the theme again in the final section on the implications of our work.

### **Brief Literature Review**

As we stated in the Introduction, there is prior research from beyond Thailand which asserts the importance of strong parent-teacher relationships if the kind of early years education now being promoted by Thailand's Ministry of Education is to bear fruit, see e.g. Knopf and Swick (2007). An early study focused on Thai parental attitudes was conducted by Dunn and Dasananda (1995). They noted that by 1995, at least one third of Thai children aged 3 to 6 years were attending kindergarten programmes. The parent subjects in their study were reported to place a high value on the teaching of academic skills and rather less value on care giving. Since then there have been several studies, master's theses mostly, about parents' satisfaction with childcare services in the area of each local administration organization in Thailand (see e.g. Tongso and Runesuwan, 2013; Marasi and Sewdon, 2013) but there remains much to be explored. Some of these Thai studies showed that the factors affecting their levels of satisfaction were related to their own education. Information about parents' satisfaction, along with knowledge of the dimensions with which parents are most and least satisfied and their expectations, could be used to show whether the childcare service in a centre is effective and could serve as a basis for the future development of centres to serve all families in the service area of each local administration organization. Israsena (2007) concluded within her doctoral thesis that, while Thai teachers are favourably inclined to the notion of student-centred learning with early years children, they exhibit 'relatively low levels of developmentally appropriate practices.' In other words, the spirit is willing but they need help to develop professionally.

Whilst knowledge of prior work in the Thai context is clearly valuable, evidence from other places should not be overlooked since simple logic suggests that the issues involved are likely to be common across national boundaries: children, teachers and their parents all have at least some aims in common, see e.g. Liu et al (2001), Kellingham et al (2006), Frey et al (2013). Liu et al focussed on parental expectations of childcare facilities in Australia, while Kellingham et al looked at the potential link between parental satisfaction and then loyalty to providers in the early years, educational arena. Omar et al (2009) undertook a study in Malaysia which found that service

quality, as perceived by parents, of childcare centres was positively related with parental satisfaction and trust. This may be thought especially relevant since Thailand and Malaysia are neighbours within ASEAN.

Frey et al (2013) examined the feasibility of and satisfaction with an early childhood intervention program in United States (namely, the pre-school version of the 'First Step to Success'), investigating its treatment integrity, social validity and outcome satisfaction. [The focus of the programme is on proactive interventions with children who have had poor parenting, up to and including abuse, prior to their exposure to formal pre-school.] The researchers found that parents' perceptions of and satisfaction with the programme's goals, procedures, and outcomes were extremely favourable of the first step to success of interventions aimed at improving children's social skills and decreasing problem behaviour. In a different context, Norwegian day-care legislation places the responsibility for developing positive and close relationships with parents on the care giver, see Drugli and Undheim (2012). They investigated the perspectives of parents and care givers regarding their partnerships when young children are in Norwegian day-care facilities. They found that most parents and care givers expressed some measure of satisfaction with their daily communication but felt that the quality of communication could be improved, particularly at the end of the day. Overall, these two pieces of research emphasise the idea that early stage interventions with children as they enter a structured care and learning environment can be very positive.

Dalli et al (2011) conducted a literature review for the New Zealand government, focussing on quality of very early-years education. Their conclusions included, inter alia, that: clear programme protocols are beneficial; low adult-child ratios, well qualified staff and a well articulated curriculum are of benefit; and, direct benefits to children include social development and positive social behaviour. At the very least this suggests that the Thai government's decision to make efforts in the area of early years (pre-school) is well judged. Another study supporting that view is that of Powell et al (2010). They examined public sector school pre-kindergartens in the mid-west area of the United States. Key aspects of their findings were that: parental involvement with the schools and perceived teacher responsiveness were severally, positively linked with children's social skills, maths skills (parental), early reading (teacher responsiveness); while both aspects of adult activity were negatively related to problem behaviour amongst children. The finding about behaviour seems especially important since it indicates that pre-school centre attendance can help to avoid the bad behaviour of spoilt, and perhaps also ignored, young children.

An Asian study supporting this line of reasoning (particularly relevant because of its social setting) is that of Aboud (2006) looking at data from rural Bangladesh: she reports as follows (p46), "Four hundred children between 4.5 and 6.5 years were assessed, half in preschools and half in villages where there were no preschools. After controlling [for] the differences in children's age, nutritional status, mother's education, and assets: preschool children performed better than the comparison children on measures of vocabulary, verbal reasoning, nonverbal reasoning, and school readiness. On some indicators of social development during play, preschool children performed better,

though not on the cognitive aspects of play. They were less likely to be stunted but did not differ on most other health variables.”

Again, while asserting the benefits of early years interventions in some form, the study by Kagitcibasi et al (2001) in Turkey, looks at the differing effects of such interventions being home based (i.e. the input is mainly from parents) or based at pre-school day-care centres. They found that both types of intervention could be effective in the short term but the home based approach had more enduring effects. Our thought here would be that primacy of parental input and control obviously pre-supposes that the children’s parents themselves have the social and educational skills necessary to create an environment which delivers benefits. Such an assumption may be somewhat ‘heroic’ when one looks at parents who in truth are poorly educated rural peasants, of whom there are many in Thailand. This argues for day-care centres and kindergartens if all children are to have a decent chance.

While there appears to be a broad consensus as to the value of pre-school education and there have been efforts to identify positive situational factors, there may be problems too. This is illustrated by the study in Hong Kong of Ho (2008). She highlights the potential tensions inherent in pre-school provision where parents are already worrying about their children’s future school attainment before they even arrive at ‘proper’ school. These tensions are basically between the parents’ desire for academic preparation for primary school and the professionals’ belief in the value to children of learning through play. This is perhaps likely to be less of an issue in rural Thailand but illustrates the principle that the actors in the play may not always begin by pulling in the same direction, albeit all of them have the children’s interests at heart in a broad sense.

We pause here to consider the issue of inclusion/exclusion as it relates to the education of young children in South East Asia, of which Thailand is part. There are a variety of reasons why children may not participate in pre-school education: these include social convention (ideas such as ‘parents know best’); ability to pay, given that such education is often not funded by the state; and unwillingness of providers to deal with handicapped children (Bray, 1998; de Los Angeles-Bantista, 2004; Rao and Pearson, 2009; Kim and Umayahara, 2010; Gangopadhyay and Bhattacharyay, 2015).

Kim and Umayahara (2010) state that, although pre-primary enrolment has increased substantially in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Asia Pacific region, huge disparities continue to exist among and within countries. Countries in the region are far from providing equal opportunities for all children from birth. One of the problems facing governments is the competing demand for funding from other important areas such as pollution, disease and infrastructure development, Bray (1998). This is why, in some countries such as Cambodia, non-governmental funding is the norm for pre-school education, Rao and Pearson (2009).

Children with special needs are a particular case for concern. Such children have educational needs just like other children but these are not always readily provided for. In the context of Brunei,

Mundia (2009) noted with concern that there was a lack of contact and coordination between special education in schools and school counseling professionals. Even worse, there are no special education teachers or school counselors at pre-school level in Brunei.

Finally, in regard to the issue of inclusion, Pereira (2016) makes an important point. He argues that, while at one level issues faced by SE Asian countries (with his exemplars being Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam) are common, solutions have to be tailored to the individual country in line with their differing contextual challenges, be it: the place of religion within education in Indonesia; the tensions between the Malays and other ethnic groups in Malaysia; and again issues around minority ethnic groups in Vietnam. He also notes that in Vietnam, three quarters of children attend pre-school in urban areas but only about half do in rural areas. Against that baseline Thailand's Songkhla province is doing quite well but the development of services for the excluded should remain a matter for future attention.

## **Methodology**

This study sought to fulfil a perceived need to determine participating parents' views of the activities of pre-school of childcare centres which their children attend. It forms part of an existing research and development project, "Preschool Centres Development in Songkhla: A Case Study of Local Curriculum and Integrated Lesson Plans for Early Childhood Development in the Pilot Preschool Centres" (Sornprasit et al, 2015). Instead of undertaking this research and development project separately, it was integrated into a wider work of the Arts and Cultural Centre (ACC), Prince of Songkhla University, based on the value and process of Thai living culture as the main driving force to develop human potential, which is the main social capital for the sustainability of cultural evolution and inheritance. The second author, a project leader and director of ACC until 2014, has been working with these preschool teachers in the studied area since 2000. Results of this study were also used to enhance the service quality of each childcare centre for developing human potential in early childhood, which will help to deliver equity and efficiency (Heckman, 2011).

As noted already the overarching objective was to study parental expectations of and satisfaction with overall services of pre-school centres and to begin to determine factors which affect parents' satisfaction with the pre-school education provided, in part of one of Thailand's southern provinces. In order to address this overall objective we analysed five separate questions which consider parts of the overall picture. Those questions were:

- (a) What are the expectations of parents regarding teachers' duties in childcare centres?
- (b) What is the overall level of parental satisfaction with childcare services and the qualifications of staff, including the building and environment of the centre?

- (c) With which dimension(s) of question (b) are parents most and least satisfied?
- (d) What is the level of parental satisfaction with their children's development?
- (e) How are parents' expectations and satisfaction related for each dimension?

We now consider the nature of the data collection process and the type analysis deployed to examine that data.

### *1. The data collection instrument*

In this study, a questionnaire was designed to ask parents about their expectations of teachers' duties and their levels of satisfaction about teachers' knowledge and ability, services, activities and quality of the childcare centre. Satisfaction regarding each aspect was scored on a five point Likert scale, ranging from least satisfactory, 1, to the highly satisfactory, 5. (Likert, 1967)

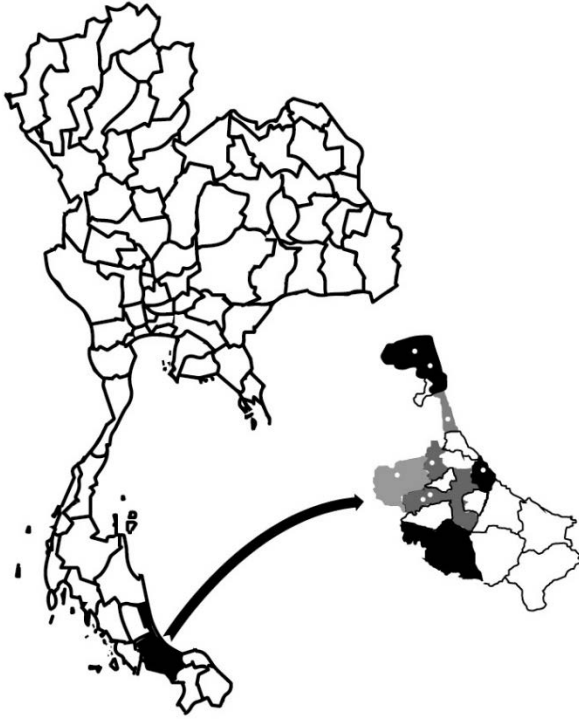
Although violent incidents have caused concern among people in the three southern border provinces of Thailand, and in some districts in Songkhla, which were not part of study area, some sensitive questions like socio-economic characteristics of respondents were excluded to avoid issues of perceived discrimination, during the collection period. However, some information about respondents which concern a childcare centre was addressed in the questionnaire.

Since this study was a part of the long term development of a wider project, as noted in the Introduction, the questionnaire was developed mainly by the second author and discussed with the pre-school teachers for confirmation of construct and content validity. There was a pilot test of the instrument for concurrent validity and reliability. As a result, some wording of the questionnaire was amended before data collection to ensure that parents could understand and give their opinions directly.

### *2. The population, data collection and sample*

The population consisted of families in a rural area of Songkhla Province, who had at least one child enrolled in a childcare centre in the educational year May 2013 to March 2014. The childcare centres were public and organized by local public administration in each Tambon or sub-district which are the targets of study in the project. Their locations are shown in the map of the area in Figure 1 below





**Figure 1 A map of Songkhla and location of the childcare centres in Songkhla Province, Thailand Source: Adapted from Google Maps (2015)**

Data were gathered from 27 February to 27 April 2014 by a self-administered questionnaire. Parents were asked to complete the questionnaires which were distributed and collected by a teacher or teaching assistant in each childcare centre. Using a convenience sampling method, the details of the population and the sample are as follows:

**Table 1 Details of population and sample**

Description	Amount
1. Total number of childcare centres in this study	29
2. Population size (Total no. enrolled children)	1,824
3. Total number of teaching assistants	62
4. Total number of teachers	53
5. Total number of staff	115
6. Average staff per childcare centre	3.96
7. Average number of children per staff member	15.86
8. Number of responses to questionnaire received	1,302
9. Response rate	71%
10. Maximum response rate for a childcare centre	100%
11. Minimum response rate for a childcare centre	29%

Since this data was gathered by staff in each childcare centre, the response rate for each childcare centre was probably affected by the number of staff. A collection period started by the end of the second semester is another factor affecting the response rate. Therefore, some childcare centres which still had more activities by the end of semester, had higher response rates than others.

### *3. Data analysis*

Statistical methods used included basic descriptive statistics such as means and some fairly straightforward Hypothesis testing as described below. Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Since this study was a part of the wider project for evaluation of childcare services provided by centres after using the 'Local Curriculum and Integrated Lesson Plans for Early Childhood Development', Pearson's chi square and significance level (two tailed test) at 0.01 were used to test the hypothesis of correlating between parents' satisfaction levels and their expectation for teacher duty in childcare centre. Factors or independent variables in this study were parents' expectations for teachers' duties in childcare centres.

The Hypothesis tests were set up along these lines:

Null Hypothesis - H0 : Factors or independent variables were not associated with parents' satisfaction levels (dependent variable).

Alternate Hypothesis - H1: Factors or independent variables were associated with parents' satisfaction levels.

If the Asym. Sig. (Asymmetric Significance) (2 sided) or the observed significance level is less than 0.01, it leads us to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that factors and parents' satisfaction levels were independent. And to accept the alternate hypothesis that factors and parents' satisfaction levels were dependent.

## **Findings from the analysis**

### *1. Information about the respondents*

Most respondents had one child enrolled at a childcare centre (81.6%). Most children were aged about either 2-3 years old (37.7%) or 3-4 years old (38%) respectively. Most of the people who answered the relevant question lived less than 1 kilometre from a childcare centre (41.8%) – 17.2 percent were missing values. Most respondents were parents of children (85%). Therefore, most children lived with their parents (84.3%) and were picked up by them (73.3%). See Table 2:

**Table 2 Information about the Respondents**

Description	Number	Percentage
1. Number with children who were enrolled at one and the same childcare centre		
• One Child	1,063	81.6
• Two children	139	10.7
• More than two children	23	1.8
• Missing Value	77	5.9
• Total	1,302	100.0
2. Ages of Children		
• 2 years old	24	1.8
• 2-3 years old	491	37.7
• 3-4 years old	495	38.0
• More than 4 years old	201	15.4
• Missing Value	91	7.0
• Total	1,302	100.0
3. Distance from childcare centre to children's' homes		
• Less than 1.00 Kilometre	544	41.8
• 1.000-2.500 Kilometres	234	18.0
• 2.500-5.000 Kilometres	237	18.2
• > 5.000 Kilometres	63	4.8
• Missing Value	224	17.2
• Total	1,302	100.0
4. Respondents' relationship with children		
• Parent	1,107	85.0
• Grandparent	128	9.8
• Uncle or Aunt	45	3.5
• Others	14	1.1
• Missing Value	8	.6
• Total	1,302	100.0
5. Children live with		
• Parent	1,098	84.3
• Grandparent	152	11.7
• Uncle or Aunt	21	1.6
• Others	15	1.2
• Missing Value	16	1.2
• Total	1,302	100.0
6. Children are picked up by		
• Parent	983	75.5
• Grandparent	175	13.4

• Uncle or Aunt	76	5.8
• Others	44	3.4
• Missing Value	24	1.8
• Total	1,302	100.0

### 2. Respondents' expectations of teachers' duties in their childcare centre

Respondents could choose their expectations of teachers' duties to include more than one function. The top three teachers' duties were taking care of children, allowing them to have their own development and potential (Exp1 = 85%); Teaching children reading and writing skills and mathematics literacy (Exp2 = 71%); and regularly developing teaching methods for children (Exp3 = 70%). Picking up children from home to take them to a childcare centre was a teacher's duty for which respondents had the lowest expectation. However almost fifty percent of respondents expected teacher to fulfill a nannying role (performing the functions of a nanny) for their children, including feeding and bathing them and looking after their security (Exp5 = 49%). See Table 3:

**Table 3 Respondents' expectations of teachers' duty in their childcare centre ordered by rated importance**

Teachers' duty	Percentage
1. Taking care of children to have their own development and potential (Exp1)	85
2. Teaching children reading and writing skills and mathematics literacy (Exp2)	71
3. Regularly developing teaching methods for children (Exp3)	70
4. Arranging children activities to stretch very able kids (Exp4)	51
5. Nannying children by feeding them , bathing them and looking after their security (Exp5)	49
6. Communicating with Parents (Exp6)	41
7. Producing teaching and studying media and tools (Exp7)	39
8. Supporting community activity (Exp8)	34
9. Regularly setting up meetings with parents (Exp9)	28
10. Picking up children from home to take to a childcare centre (Exp10)	15

### 3. Average level of respondents' satisfaction with a childcare service

Respondents could rate their levels of satisfaction ranging from least satisfactory, 1, to the highly satisfactory, 5, for each dimension of satisfaction such as teachers' knowledge and ability, services, activities and quality of childcare centre. The average levels of respondents' satisfaction fell within quite a narrow range, namely [3.40: 4.08].

The dimensions of satisfaction with the highest average rating were

- Knowledge and ability of teachers at a childcare centre (Satis2 = 4.08)
- Knowledge and ability of the head of a childcare centre (Satis1 = 3.93)
- Looking after children's' security (Satis10 = 3.91)
- Teaching and study media and tools (Satis12 = 3.91)
- Children's' development (Satis13 = 3.91)

While the dimensions of satisfaction with the lowest average rating were

- Knowledge and ability of teaching assistants at a childcare centre (Satis3 = 3.40)
- Picking up Children (Satis14 = 3.40)
- Environment outside childcare centre (Satis4 = 3.51)

However, the respondents average overall rating of childcare centres was (Satis19 = 3.79), which sets it at the 42<sup>nd</sup> percentile of the set. See Table 4:

**Table 4 Average level of parents' satisfaction with childcare**

Satisfaction	Average
1. Knowledge and ability of the head of a childcare centre (Satis1)	3.93
2. Knowledge and ability of teachers of a childcare centre (Satis2)	4.02
3. Knowledge and ability of teaching assistants of a childcare centre (Satis3)	3.40
4. Environment outside a childcare centre (Satis4)	3.51
5. Environment inside a childcare centre (Satis5)	3.69
6. Cleanliness of a childcare centre (Satis6)	3.75
7. Neatness and tidiness of a childcare centre (Satis7)	3.77
8. Quality of lunch meal for children (Satis8)	3.89
9. Quality of break time meal for children (Satis9)	3.77
10. Looking after children's' security (Satis10)	3.91
11. Arranging activities for children's' development (Satis11)	3.89
12. Teaching and study Media and tools (Satis12)	3.91
13. Children's' development (Satis13)	3.91
14. Picking up Children (Satis14)	3.47
15. Participating in activities at a childcare centre (Satis15)	3.73
16. Parent and teacher meetings at a childcare centre (Satis16)	3.66
17. Receiving information from a childcare centre (Satis17)	3.66
18. Supporting and development of a childcare centre by local public administrator (Satis18)	3.58
19. Overall quality of a childcare centre (Satis19)	3.79

#### 4. Levels of respondents' satisfaction regarding their children's' development

Respondents could choose their satisfaction with their child's development in more than one dimension. The top two child development factors were ability to live with others and self-care (80%), while love for culture/Thai identity and reasoning were the factors with the lowest satisfaction ratings (25%), see Table 5 below.

**Table 5 Parents' satisfaction with their child's development, on a range of elements, in decreasing rank**

Child Development	Percentage
1. Live with others	80%
2. Self-care	80%
3. Emotion and Mind	70%
4. Body	68%
5. Language/Communication	63%
6. Manner & Etiquette	54%
7. Creativity	48%
8. Art/Music	45%
9. Moral & Ethics	43%
10. Decision Making	43%
11. Knowing for community	32%
12. Love for nature/environment	33%
13. Love for culture/Thai Identity	25%
14. Reasoning	25%

#### 5. Correlation of parents' satisfaction levels and expectations of teachers' duties in childcare centre

Since respondents could express their expectations of teachers' duties in relation to more than one function, data relating to each function may be correlated. To analyse the correlation of respondents' expectations of teachers' duties in a childcare centre for each function, Pearson's chi squared and significance level (two tailed test) at 0.01 were employed before further analysis. The results in Table 6 show that most functions of a teacher's duties are correlated, as reflected by their significance levels (two tailed tests, at the 0.01 level), except taking care of children to have their own development and potential (Exp1) and nannying children by feeding, bathing and looking after their security (Exp5). The observed significance levels being less than 0.01, led us to reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) that most functions of a teacher's duties that respondents expected were independent, and to accept that most of them were dependent, except Exp1 and Exp5. It meant that a group of respondents who had an expectation of the teacher's duty on Exp1 was a different and separated one from a group who had an expectation of the teacher's duty in respect of Exp5.

Therefore, Exp1 and Exp5 are both functions to represent respondents' expectations of teachers' duty for a further analysis. Furthermore, this different expectation of respondents or parents also implied a conflicting perspective of teachers' roles in the infant/toddler classroom (Wigus, 2005).

**Table 6 Correlation among functions of a teacher's duties**

		Exp1	Exp2	Exp3	Exp4	Exp5	Exp6	Exp7	Exp8	Exp9
Exp1	Pearson Correlation	1	.070*	.333**	.209**	-0.005	.169**	.232**	.111**	.143**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.011	0	0	0.848	0	0	0	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp2	Pearson Correlation	.070*	1	.181**	.180**	.085**	.112**	.062*	0.044	.182**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.011		0	0	0.002	0	0.024	0.113	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp3	Pearson Correlation	.333**	.181**	1	.368**	.115**	.307**	.319**	.228**	.274**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp4	Pearson Correlation	.209**	.180**	.368**	1	.113**	.344**	.349**	.244**	.321**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp5	Pearson Correlation	-0.005	.085**	.115**	.113**	1	.201**	.143**	.191**	.148**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.848	0.002	0	0		0	0	0	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp6	Pearson Correlation	.232**	.062*	.319**	.349**	.143**	.395**	1	.361**	.384**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.024	0	0	0	0		0	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp7	Pearson Correlation	.169**	.112**	.307**	.344**	.201**	1	.395**	.401**	.299**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp8	Pearson Correlation	.111**	0.044	.228**	.244**	.191**	.401**	.361**	1	.446**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.113	0	0	0	0	0		0
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp9	Pearson Correlation	.143**	.182**	.274**	.321**	.148**	.299**	.384**	.446**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302

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

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

In Table 7 below we examine correlations between selected customer expectation factors and customer satisfaction factors. This highlights whether the parents expectations (or hopes) were in fact realised in practice in the sample centres. We focus on factors Satis(i), where i= 1,2,3,15, because they refer specifically to respondents'/parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the teaching staff in the centres (i=1,2,3) and the interaction between the two types of adults (i=15).

**Table 7 Correlations between selected expectation and satisfaction factors**

		Exp1	Exp5	Satis1	Satis2	Satis3	Satis15
Exp1	Pearson Correlation	1	-.005	.150**	.036	-.053	.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.848	.000	.197	.057	.979
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Exp5	Pearson Correlation	-.005	1	-.023	.068*	.080**	.077**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.848		.410	.014	.004	.006
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Satis1	Pearson Correlation	.150**	-.023	1	.403**	.127**	.320**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.410		.000	.000	.000
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Satis2	Pearson Correlation	.036	.068*	.403**	1	.293**	.370**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.197	.014	.000		.000	.000
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Satis3	Pearson Correlation	-.053	.080**	.127**	.293**	1	.229**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.057	.004	.000	.000		.000
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302
Satis15	Pearson Correlation	.001	.077**	.320**	.370**	.229**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.979	.006	.000	.000	.000	
	N	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302	1302

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

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



Examination of these data showed that the correlations of these selected expectations in relation to only three dimensions of satisfaction were significant at the .01 level. Namely, in conjunction with Exp 1 (the expectation that teaching staff would facilitate children's individual development),

- knowledge and ability of the head of childcare centre (Satis1);

and in relation to Exp 5 (effective child nannying)

- Knowledge and ability of teacher assistant of childcare centre (Satis3)
- Participating in activities at a childcare centre (Satis15)

The relationship between, Exp 5 and knowledge and ability of teachers of the childcare centre (Satis2) was significant at the lower 0.05 level. This led us to reject the null hypothesis (H0) which argues that the variables were not associated and accept the alternate hypothesis, i.e. accept that the variables were associated. This means that

- the respondents who expected teacher's duty of taking care of children so as to allow them to have their own development and potential (Exp1), got more satisfaction with knowledge and ability of the head of childcare centre (Satis1),
- whereas, the respondents who expected teacher's duty on nannying children by feeding them, bathing them and looking after their security (Exp5), got more satisfaction with knowledge and ability of teacher of childcare centre (Satis2); knowledge and ability of teacher assistant of childcare centre (Satis3); and participating in activities at childcare centres (Satis15).

The table also shows strong intra-correlation within this subset of parent satisfaction elements.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, given the location and non-compulsory nature of the childcare provision being assessed, it would seem fair to say that the answer to the overarching objective was fairly positive. Expectations were non-trivial; parents looked for more than 'baby-minding' and expected there to be some appropriately qualified staff. The perceived satisfaction levels indicate that there is scope for improvement but the picture is not unduly negative. In short parents and guardians of the children attending the Songkhla facilities observed believe that their charges are being properly cared for by acceptable staff, are being helped to develop socially and are learning some important basic intellectual material (such as numeracy and reading). However, it should be noted that the official aims of the 'Local Curriculum and Integrated Lesson Plans for Early Childhood Development' programme did not specifically focus on the acquisition of mathematical knowledge. Hence we report only that parents perceived some knowledge acquisition in this field positively relative to their own expectations, as distinct from the programme's specified objectives.

In more detail, the results of the study showed that the majority of respondents were parents and had one child enrolled at a childcare centre. Most children were aged 3-4 years old and lived less than 1 kilometre from each childcare centre. Although respondents were allowed to choose their expectation for more than two functions, the top three teachers' duties of respondents' expectation were taking care of children, allowing them to have their own development and potential; teaching children reading and writing skills and mathematics literacy; and regularly developing teaching methods for children. The study showed moderate to high level of respondents' satisfaction with teachers' knowledge and ability, services, activities and quality of childcare centre. While teaching assistants' knowledge and ability; and picking up children were the lowest average rating. They also have a high satisfaction on their child development which were live with others and self-care. The respondents' expectations about taking care of children to allow them to achieve their own development and potential affected levels of satisfaction in respect of head teachers' knowledge and ability. While the respondent's expectation on nannying children by feeding them , bathing them and looking after their security, affected levels of satisfaction in respects of both teacher and assistant teachers' knowledge and ability; and participating in activities at a childcare centre.

Expectations of respondents about taking care of children such that they have their own development path and potential were not highly correlated with perceptions of satisfaction as to the nannying of children, by feeding, bathing and looking after their security. This suggested some element of conflict of perspectives around the teacher's role in the infant/toddler classroom. It inevitably denies that such perspectives relate to a relationship between parent and teacher. Many research works have clearly shown that parent-teacher relationships lead to increased parental involvement which has been shown to have a significant and lasting impact on children's academic achievement (for more details see Knopf and Swick, 2007). One result was to show that different expectations affected levels of satisfaction in respects of different dimensions. Parents who expected a teacher's duty to focus on child development were more likely to be more satisfied with the knowledge and ability of a head teacher of a childcare centre. Whereas, parents who expected a teacher's duty to focus on factors such as food feeding tended to have more satisfaction with the knowledge and ability of teachers' and assistant teachers' knowledge and ability, and participating in activities at a childcare centre. These results implied that the teaching direction (/focus) of a head teacher may concentrate on child development issues, while teachers and teaching assistants may concentrate more on the nanny role. Although both these aspects of a teacher's duties fall within their job description and responsibility to provide a good service in a childcare centre, other components such as parental involvement are needed to bring about a good quality or effective education with full potential for children's' development, in all ways. Therefore, to build a parent-school partnership into the life of a childcare centre, with space for providing parent feedback and involvement, as well as exchanging views of their expectations between parents and all staff, is what is truly required to deliver a vision of their (mutually understood) ideal childcare centre.

### **Implications and utility of the study findings**

As noted, this study began with the need for parents' views in evaluating the childcare service of centres in a Thai province which forms part of a sponsored research and development project, "Preschool Centres Development in Songkhla: A Case Study of Local Curriculum and Integrated Lesson Plans for Early Childhood Development in the Pilot Preschool Centres" (Sornprasit et al, 2015). After data analysis was done, a workshop for discussion of these results with head teachers or representatives of childcare centres and local public administration was held. This two way communication brought about a useful and direct implication because teachers and representatives of a childcare centre are allowed to ask questions and make comments to help them understand it and to use the results of this study in each centre to improve their service. The results of this project were not a direct output of a unified local curriculum, with associated integrated lesson plans such as were observed in the project and used in the childcare centres, because they use various curricula including a national curriculum and various teaching methods advised by other institutions and the local public administration. Nevertheless, the researchers can use these results and their feedback as a valuable part of the larger project.

One interesting outcome, as noted before, was the dissonance between perceptions of importance of what may be seen as early stage academic development of and the care-giving and social nurture of the children attending the kind of Thai pre-school centres studied. This suggests that it would likely be beneficial for enhanced explanation to the parents of existing and potential students of the benefits of an holistic approach to the development of their children. Social, health and academic development are all important for the child and all should be moulded into an attractive, unified experience. Finally, lessons learnt in the southern province of Songkhla are likely to be equally applicable across the rest of Thailand, even in Bangkok albeit the 'metropolitan elite' may feel themselves to be special. It may also be reasonable to speculate that many of the findings may also apply to other countries in the region. After all why should good quality pre-school provision be fundamentally different in Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei or wherever? To take a very particular case in point, Southern Thailand and the Northern states of Malaysia have much in common. Indeed the border between the two countries, as they now are, was adjusted as recently as 1909, under a treaty between Siam (Thailand) and Britain.

The reported study's usefulness or utility could be further enhanced if some of the factors relating to the inclusion/exclusion issue were to be addressed in a future phase of work. The most basic issue would probably be to explore why those children not participating in pre-school provision in Songkhla are absent. If possible it would be helpful to also compare that position with those of other provinces in Thailand. Picking up on Pereira's (2016) comment that solutions must be crafted to best fit contexts, perhaps raises the issue of the Buddhist/Muslim mix in Songkhla (since the province is located in the South of Thailand, there are many more Muslims there than in the rest of the country). Pereira with reference to Indonesia and Young et al (2017) in the Brunei context make explicit reference to the potential tensions between modern, educational thinking and the perceived needs of Islam in school, and presumably also pre-school, education.

Finally, one would speculate that, sadly, the opportunities and needs of disabled children, be they physical or mental disabilities, are likely to be somewhere rather low down the priorities list of many funders and providers, in a setting of intrinsic shortage. Any evidence to the contrary would be both interesting and a source of hope.

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