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Conducive Attributes of Physical Learning Environment at Preschool Level for Slow Learners

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Abstract

Conducive attributes of physical learning environment of schools play a dominant role in the successful delivery of lessons for slow learners. This study aims to propose a framework towards achieving conducive attributes of preschool learning environment suitable for slow learners through literature review. In summary, the physical conditions including human comfort (visual, thermal, acoustic), spatial planning, quality of furnishing and finishing and safety features are important attributes to consider for conducive learning environment. Findings are useful for designers, service providers and policy makers of special needs preschools when making decisions to provide conducive facilities for the slow learners.

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Keywords: Slow learners; physical learning environment; conducive attributes; preschool

1. Introduction

Being able to learn and to become a highly functioning adult is of a paramount importance for slow learners. Hence, all aspects of the slow learners' well-being and the environment should be considered. In their early childhood, conducive attributes of physical learning environment of preschools play a dominant role in the successful delivery of lessons for slow learners.

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Unfortunately, in Malaysia, there are few published work on the provision of quality preschool education and physical environment for slow learners. The government's strategies to improve the quality of preschool education could be seen clearly in the Preschool Education Policy & National Key Result Area (NKRA) (Ministry of Communication and Multimedia, 2013). However, most policies are designed to improve teaching systems and social environments, with minimal allocation to physical environments. However, the Government's Permata Programme (with RM100 million budget for preschool education) lacks a holistic approach as no emphasis is given to highlight the physical environment aspect of preschools.

The paper aims to propose a framework, towards achieving conducive attributes of preschool learning environment, suitable for slow learners based on a review of literatures. The objectives of the study are:

- To define slow learners in terms of detection, special needs, requirement and management.
- To investigate the current trends of appropriate preschool physical environment to support special teaching programmes.
- To explore the current trends of preschool facilitated by the Malaysian government
- To propose a framework of conducive attributes of preschool learning environment suitable for slow learners.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Slow learners' identification and detection*

Due to their unique characteristics of slow learners (Chauhan, 2011), their education must be altered and geared to their slower pace of learning (Borah, 2013; Lohman, 2011; Placement, 2010; Krishnakumar et al., 2006). Denying their disabilities and pretending that they are able to learn as normal students will be detrimental to their development (Idol, 2006).

It is suggested that, slow learners need help but the "type of school" is not the answer as neither group of slow learners is "successful" in school (Kaznowski, 2003). Special Education does not positively affect the academic performance of the slow learners, whilst mainstream education is not a realistic option for slow learner either (Kaznowski, 2003), where leaving them failing in the mainstream school is not an acceptable alternative (Kaznowski, 2004). These issues posed a challenge to provide the best learning environment for slow learners, and it is suggested that the way we cater to their individual needs, despite the type of school, will make the ultimate difference (Holloway, 2001).

Early detection of children with disabilities falls within the purview of both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education (NECIC, 2013). More than 95% of children and their families are accessible by public health staff in the new-born period and primary school under existing programmes. It is, therefore, ideal and crucial that these ministries have in place effective, holistic and proactive mechanisms for early detection of disabilities in children. More in-depth analysis of slow learners and early detection method in Malaysia will be featured in the findings.

2.2. *Physical environment's impact on preschool children development*

Many studies have concluded that physical dimensions and different aspects of the physical environment influences students' behaviour and attitudes differently (MacCaulay, 1990; Mendell & Heath, 2005). The physical environment and children's development of cognitive and social competency are directly related (Moore 1994, Moore 2002). Studies into the design process of preschools have found that design elements are typically overlooked (MacCaulay, 1990; Mendell & Heath, 2005). The children are the experts of their environment; therefore design process of a preschool environment should adopt a holistic approach. Focus among educators seem to be low in environments with inadequate facilities Parents, children and teachers should be consulted to ensure their needs are catered properly (ŞahİN & Dostoğlu, 2012).

2.2.1. *Preschool developmental process and the influence of the physical environment*

The preschool age is important as most mental, physical and cognitive development occurs during this period - 80% occurs during the ages 4 to 6. Learning should be fun and accidental, not forced upon (Reynolds, 1970).

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