

The Relationship Between Work Culture and the Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0314>

Received: 31 May 2025; Accepted: 03 June 2025; Published: 08 July 2025

ABSTRACT

School work culture is a key factor in the effectiveness of school organizational management. However, teachers face various challenges in shaping quality school organizational management. Therefore, this study aims to identify the relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This study uses a quantitative approach, specifically a survey method involving 81 ECE teachers from both the public and private sectors serving in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The research instrument used a questionnaire to collect data on work culture practices and the challenges faced by ECE teachers. Data analysis used descriptive statistics to identify the level of work culture and the level of challenges faced by ECE teachers. Meanwhile, Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers. The findings show that the level of work culture among ECE teachers is high (mean = 4.25, SD = 0.676), while the level of challenges faced by ECE teachers is moderate (mean = 2.82, SD = 0.948). This study also shows that there is no significant relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers ($r = -0.083$, Sig. = 0.463 > 0.05). Therefore, all responsible parties need to work together to shape an effective work culture for teachers and reduce the challenges they face.

Keywords: work culture, teacher challenges, early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

School work culture is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness and quality of school organizational management. This is because a quality school work culture includes leaders and colleagues who provide support and encouragement, directly or indirectly, to meet the needs and support the development of school organizational management (Morris et al., 2020). An effective school work culture emphasizes fostering positive work engagement and a satisfying, dedicated, and productive work environment. A positive work culture also significantly impacts job satisfaction, well-being, and teacher performance, making work management more systematic (Fu et al., 2022).

However, teachers still face various challenges in schools. Among the challenges teachers face in the workplace are factors such as excessive student numbers, insufficient school facilities, excessive workload, or ineffective education systems. According to Camacho and Parham (2019), the challenges teachers face in schools significantly impact their well-being, leading to stress and extreme fatigue.

Therefore, the relationship between teacher work culture and the challenges teachers face in schools is interconnected in creating quality management and teacher well-being in schools. Studies on teacher work culture in schools are still limited in Malaysian educational institutions. According to Abdullah and Ling (2019), studies on school work culture are still limited, even though various issues have been raised by affected parties such as schools, teachers, and educational institutions in the country.

Based on previous studies, the work culture practiced in a school organization leads to problems for teachers. Xia et al. (2021) explain that teachers face challenges such as tense relationships with colleagues and a lack of cooperation in achieving school organizational goals. This is supported by Gaikhorst et al. (2017), who state that teachers working in schools need to be prepared to face workplace challenges. This is because challenges in schools are ongoing, and teachers find it difficult to adapt and meet school demands.

Meanwhile, Aliazas and Chua (2021) found that a healthy work culture can lead to changes in the management system and ensure teacher well-being while working in schools. This is because teachers can adapt to challenges in completing tasks such as workload, limited time, and insufficient manpower. This finding aligns with Mannix-McNamara (2021), which shows that a negative work culture environment causes teachers to face challenges in schools. Therefore, studies on teacher work culture and challenges need to be conducted to shape a quality work culture in schools.

This study was conducted to identify the relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the level of work culture among early childhood education teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
2. To identify the level of challenges faced by early childhood education teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
3. To identify the relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by early childhood education teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

The hypothesis of this study is only for the third research question, using the alternative hypothesis as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by early childhood education teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach to achieve its purpose and objectives. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), a quantitative approach is a method of collecting data objectively and using statistical methods. The survey method was used by the researcher to collect data on work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The survey method is a medium to understand human behavior regarding certain matters in their environment (Pardi & Shamsuddin, 2012). The study sample involved 81 ECE teachers serving in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The study sample refers to subjects within a population who are selected as respondents (Mohamad & Razak, 2018).

This study used a questionnaire as the research instrument to collect data, which consisted of three parts:

1. Part A: Respondent Demographic Information.
2. Part B: Work Culture of Early Childhood Education Teachers.
3. Part C: Challenges of Early Childhood Education Teachers.

The researcher used Cronbach's Alpha to measure the reliability of the questionnaire instrument. Based on Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the teacher work culture construct was 0.810. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.810 is good. Meanwhile, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the teacher challenges construct was 0.794. Bonett and Wright (2014) state that a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 is acceptable for conducting research.

Table 1 Reliability Analysis

Construct	α	No. of Items
Teacher Work Culture	0.810	16
Teacher Challenges	0.794	13

Data collection was conducted by the researcher after obtaining permission from the ECE centers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms. The researcher analyzed the data using SPSS software. Descriptive analysis was used to identify the mean scores of work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers. The mean score values according to levels are shown in Table 2:

Table 2 Mean Score Values According to Levels

Level	Mean Score Range
Low	1.00 - 2.33
Moderate	2.34 - 3.66
High	3.67 - 5.00

Meanwhile, Pearson correlation analysis was used to identify the relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers.

FINDINGS

Level of Work Culture among Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

The findings show that the overall level of work culture among ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah is high (mean = 4.25, SD = 0.676). The item with the highest mean score was "Item B2: Nursery and Kindergarten leaders support nursery and kindergarten activities." (mean = 4.62, SD = 0.621). Meanwhile, the item with the lowest mean score was "Item B9: Teachers use excellent nursery or kindergarten as a benchmark." (mean = 3.98, SD = 0.749). The findings are shown in Table 3:

Table 3 Mean Scores and Levels of Work Culture among Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (N = 81)

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
B1	Nursery/Kindergarten leaders are able to influence staff.	4.34	0.673	High
B2	Nursery/Kindergarten leaders support nursery and kindergarten activities.	4.62	0.621	High
B3	Nursery/Kindergarten leaders encourage staff professional development.	4.46	0.690	High
B4	Nursery/Kindergarten leaders provide fair treatment to all staff.	4.25	0.787	High
B5	Nursery/Kindergarten leaders provide sufficient time for teachers to complete tasks.	4.09	0.682	High
B6	Nursery/Kindergarten have clear direction.	4.29	0.621	High
B7	Teachers share the vision of the nursery/kindergarten.	4.20	0.626	High
B8	Teachers strive to develop the nursery/kindergarten.	4.44	0.689	High

B9	Teachers use excellent nursery/kindergarten as a benchmark.	3.98	0.749	High
B10	Teachers can identify ways to achieve nursery/kindergarten success.	4.33	0.689	High
B11	Teachers collaborate to develop nursery/kindergarten achievements.	4.43	0.650	High
B12	Teachers perform tasks based on nursery/kindergarten needs.	4.25	0.628	High
B13	Teachers discuss teaching and learning improvement activities.	4.06	0.713	High
B14	Teachers discuss the best teaching and learning methods.	4.09	0.644	High
B15	Teachers discuss student assessment.	4.19	0.659	High
B16	Teachers discuss student achievements with colleagues.	4.11	0.707	High
Overall		4.25	0.676	High

Level of Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

The findings show that the overall level of challenges faced by ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah is moderate (mean = 2.82, SD = 0.948). The item with the highest mean score was "Item C10: Teachers use their weekends to complete nursery and kindergarten management tasks." (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.676). Meanwhile, the item with the lowest mean score was "Item C11: Teachers have tense relationships with colleagues." (mean = 1.24, SD = 0.750). The findings are shown in Table 4:

Table 4 Mean Scores and Levels of Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (N = 81)

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
C1	I perform difficult tasks at the nursery/kindergarten.	3.07	0.997	Moderate
C2	Additional workload from co-curricular activities reduces my motivation to work.	3.01	0.941	Moderate
C3	Crowded classrooms increase my stress at work.	3.11	0.987	Moderate
C4	The operational hours at the nursery/kindergarten reduce my focus on teaching.	2.86	0.876	Moderate
C5	The school hours at the nursery/kindergarten make classroom management challenging.	3.13	0.904	Moderate
C6	Lack of facilities affects my performance.	3.35	1.075	Moderate
C7	The nursery/kindergarten building affects my productivity at work.	2.77	0.948	Moderate
C8	I become a substitute teacher when a teacher is absent.	2.72	1.000	Moderate
C9	I perform administrative tasks outside my job scope.	2.98	0.928	Moderate
C10	I use my weekends to complete nursery/kindergarten management tasks.	3.35	0.676	Moderate
C11	I have tense relationships with colleagues.	1.24	0.750	Low
C12	I receive unclear instructions from the administration.	2.02	1.332	Low
C13	I have short breaks.	3.11	0.921	Moderate
Overall		2.82	0.948	Moderate

Relationship between Work Culture and Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

Through Pearson correlation analysis, the findings show a Pearson coefficient value of $r = -0.083$ and a Sig. value of 0.463. Since the Sig. value is greater than 0.05 (Sig. > 0.05), the researcher failed to accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) of this study. The researcher concludes that there is no significant relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers, as shown in Table 5:

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Analysis to Determine the Relationship between Work Culture and Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Education Teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (N = 81)

Variable		Teacher Challenges	Work Culture
Teacher Challenges	Pearson Correlation (r)	1	-0.083
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.463
	N	81	81
Work Culture	Pearson Correlation (r)	-0.083	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.463	
	N	81	81

DISCUSSION

The first finding shows that the overall level of work culture among ECE teachers is high. This indicates that quality work culture is highly emphasized by ECE teachers. This statement is supported by Thorpe et al. (2020), who state that teachers need to apply professionalism in the workplace to ensure well-being, effective organizational management, and cooperation in schools. Additionally, work culture related to nursery or kindergarten leadership that supports school activities is the most prominent work culture practiced by ECE teachers. This aligns with Yaakob et al. (2016), who found that school leaders with vision and commitment to excellent school performance will encourage and influence all organizational parties to achieve certain goals.

Next, this study found that the challenges faced by ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah are at a moderate level. This indicates that teachers still face several challenges in nursery or kindergarten. This is supported by Acton (2018), who states that teachers face challenges in schools such as excessive workload and a negative work environment. Most ECE teachers use their weekends to complete nursery or kindergarten management tasks. This is due to the excessive workload of teachers, which forces them to sacrifice personal time to meet school demands. This finding aligns with Ishak and Rusman (2018), which shows that the workload given to teachers in schools affects their performance, as teachers are forced to complete school tasks to achieve school goals. This reduces teachers' motivation to work in schools, as the organization prioritizes school achievements over teacher well-being (Duplon et al., 2022).

At the same time, this study found that ECE teachers have fewer tense relationships with colleagues. This means that ECE teachers have good relationships with colleagues while working in nursery or kindergarten. Haslip and Donaldson (2021) explain that teachers who prioritize good relationships with colleagues can improve work efficacy, have a tolerant attitude, cooperate, and act professionally in performing tasks. This can reduce teacher fatigue in the workplace and make school management more systematic. Therefore, workplace challenges significantly impact teachers, as they need to adapt to the challenges, they face to ensure that management demands are met while ensuring good student achievement.

This study also found no relationship between work culture and the challenges faced by ECE teachers. This means that teacher work culture does not influence the challenges faced by ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Therefore, ECE teachers who practice quality work culture can overcome workplace challenges such as workload, work environment, and personal factors. According to Ishak and Rusman (2018), schools that

emphasize teacher well-being will ensure that the tasks given are within the scope of teachers and balanced in meeting school needs. This aligns with Mannix-McNamara (2021), which found that schools that practice a work culture that supports teachers can increase teacher motivation to perform tasks in an effort to improve school performance. Acton (2018) also states that teachers will face pressure and find it difficult to fully commit to work if the school does not foster a healthy work culture and affects teacher well-being while on duty.

Therefore, nursery or kindergarten administration needs to reduce the workload given to teachers and provide sufficient time to complete tasks. According to Kashif et al. (2021), the limited time given by school management to teachers affects their work performance. This is because limited time causes tasks to fail to be completed on time and affects school organizational management. Sufficient time allows teachers to manage work systematically and balancedly, as they can complete tasks without time pressure or pressure from superiors (Sharma & Verma, 2022). Therefore, the administration needs to be tolerant and form an effective organizational management system to ensure that the workload can be reduced and teacher efficacy while working can be increased.

Nursery or kindergarten administration also needs to improve the quality of facilities to reduce teacher workload and improve the quality of nursery and kindergarten services. According to Rahman et al. (2022), complete educational infrastructure can improve the quality of co-curricular activities and school management and increase teacher productivity in the workplace. This leads to a good school work culture and reduces teacher challenges in terms of limited facilities. Adequate facilities in nursery and kindergarten need to be prioritized in shaping an effective work culture.

In addition, teachers need to play an important role in improving the quality of work culture in schools. This study shows that teachers apply a sense of camaraderie in implementing a healthy work culture in nursery and kindergarten. Discussions among teachers can form alternatives and solutions to overcome all teacher challenges. Teachers also need to build good relationships with colleagues and the administration to ensure effective management and increase efforts to create a healthy teacher work culture in schools. Baco et al. (2020) found that teacher commitment to superiors and colleagues leads to teacher preparation in forming relationships, understanding, and appreciation to achieve school organizational goals. Therefore, teachers need to take proactive steps with superiors and colleagues to shape a quality work culture.

Teachers also need to apply a cooperative attitude to achieve school goals. O'Shea (2021) states that good relationships between teachers and school organizations can increase job satisfaction and improve school goal achievement. Teachers need to foster professionalism in solving problems to ensure personal well-being and create an effective teacher work culture in nursery and kindergarten. Teachers need to voice out problems or challenges faced while working. This is because teachers play an important role in changing school culture or climate to reduce problems and lead to the formation of a quality work culture in schools (Veeriah & Li, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study has identified the level of work culture and challenges faced by ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu,

Sabah. The findings of this study prove that the work culture of ECE teachers is high, while the challenges faced by ECE teachers are still moderate. However, these findings can only be generalized to ECE teachers in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. All parties need to work together to ensure that quality work culture can be maintained and the challenges faced by teachers can be reduced. Drastic efforts need to be made to reduce the challenges faced by ECE teachers. All responsible parties, such as teachers, the administration, and the Ministry of Education Malaysia, need to work together and play an important role in shaping an effective teacher work culture and overcoming the challenges faced by teachers.

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