

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In Thailand, education plays an important role in developing the new generation to have more knowledge and skill in order to survive in a highly competitive world. This is one of the major reasons that stimulate parents to push their children into the educational system; for example, bi-lingual, tri-lingual and international curriculum. Most new generations and parents are not confident in studying in class only so they try to take extra classes in the evening or on holidays. A lot of tutorial schools are established to serve this demand and teach all required subjects to students from grade 1-12 in order to pass examinations, and to get a better exam score. However, most Thai parents are willing to pay a huge amount of tuition fee for their children in order to keep them to be more competitive than others. Some of them are fast learners and have significant improvement in their knowledge and score but some are opposite. Some children are very fast learners while others need explanation more than twice in order to get understanding. Their differences are the results of their early childhood education.

Everyone knows that education is an important element for the new generation to develop their potential to a maximum level. Government and private educational institutes are struggling to improve their curriculum and teaching style to match parents' demand and suit each unique child. Nowadays, Thai parents pay more attention to their kids' education and tend to start their kids' learning at an earlier age; most of them show their interests in developing their kids from kindergarten school onwards and only gear to academic achievement in international language, math and science. There are fewer parents who know that the first three years of children' lives have a profound impact on their future; the best period of children' brain development starts from birth to the first three years of their lives. At the age of three, children' brains are developed to 80 % of adults' brain (จิระ สุมิตร และ พรอนงค์ นิยมค้า, 2550, น. 9). However, current educational programs in Thailand start in kindergarten school which children aged more than three years old; so brain development at this age is low.

Moreover, not only are well-educated parents ignorant of the efficient methods to improve their children's intelligence, but they still have some incorrect attitudes about education and children's brain development, believing that they would start at kindergarten school onwards. Nor do these parents know how to teach or train their children in the first 3 years. Besides, even though they realize the importance of brain development at early age, they are not able to find the proper nursery schools or pre-kindergarten schools which are able to develop their children's learning in the first 3 years.

Major considerations in choosing Pre-kindergarten schools

Choosing the proper pre-kindergarten schools for each child is a very sophisticated task since it is a second home for children to stay, sleep, dine, care, and learn new experiences for at least 6 hours a day while their parents went to work; there are many concerns which parents need to look at in detail so that they can make a careful choice. For 6 hours a day, their children have to interact with their friends, teachers, surrounding environment; the learning environments should stimulate children to learn and practice their required skills such as body movement, verbal, hearing development. The proper motivations would stimulate their learning and show their ability while they are in school. The major considerations in choosing pre-kindergarten school for children are as follows. Firstly, syllabuses and teaching style should be matched with children's preference and parents' expectation otherwise both will suffer. Some family understand that learning at this age is not geared to academic learning, so they prefer to send their children to less academic school while others did opposite. Secondly, school location should be located near parents' office or children home since it is convenient for picking them up after work. Thirdly, teachers should be qualified and attentive since teaching the very young child is a hard job and needs teacher who understand the nature of young children and know how to rear each of them. Fourthly, tuition fee should be affordable for Thai parents in various financial statuses. Sometimes parents prefer to start their kids' learning at an early age but are not able to afford the tuition fee of international pre-kindergarten schools. Lastly, safe and hygienic environment should be considered as young children are very sensitive to dirt and full of curiosity so they try new things without taking care of themselves so

they might slip on the floor accidentally or get sick from an unclean environment. It should also be noted here that most of the above criteria are similar to those in the study of Kunteera Chienvichai (2007, p. 32) which stated that parents are satisfied with schools because of the following factors: school curriculum, qualification and teaching style of teachers, school facilities, and school fee.

Syllabuses in Pre-kindergarten school

Hughes (2002, p. 267) indicated that most educators and parents believed that if the early learning of young children was better; it would result in their academic achievement in later years. This reason led many educators to overemphasize the “threeR’s: reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic” educational program during the preschool years; children in a relaxed school environment received better grade results than children in an academic environment. In fact, children who showed outstanding academic performance were from schools that did not emphasis on academic learning at all. These children spent a lot of time in unstructured play with friends under a less academic focused environment through natural learning activities; it resulted in their improvement such as language literacy and reading ability. Gestwicki (1997, p. 7) stated that the purpose of providing education to very young children was to prepare them for further learning through their natural curiosity, so the proper syllabuses for pre-kindergarten children should not focus only on academic needs. Instead, it should address the whole child’s developmental needs as well in order to enhance the fullest potential abilities of children at an early age - positive schooling experience, basic thinking, feeling, and interacting with others. Holistic curriculum was new teaching-learning process which did not separate subjects taught at separate times (Gonzalez-Mena, 1997, p. 6); for instance, bread making class stimulated skills related to academic and various developments. One activity ran throughout the day; it developed language and interpersonal skills since they had to talk to each other; it developed math and science since they had to mix wheat, butter, sugar, water in a bowl at appropriate portion; physical and sensory development occurred since wheat and water were pressed and blended with their hands, and they can see the changing in color and smell the bread after baking. The proper syllabuses for pre-kindergarten school under traditional and modern educational theories should focus on the

following learning areas: personal & social & emotional development, communication & language & literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creative development. There are some international pre-kindergarten schools providing interesting syllabuses which matched with the above mentioned; for example, foreign languages, basic cooking, pottery, swimming, music, art, craft, fitness, yoga, dance, ballet, creative play. All activities were designed to serve children's curiosity to learn and explore the world through their senses of sight, sound and touch. Children gained experiences from variety of activities through playing and safe environments; some activities create the opportunities to build their social skills and self-confidence in an enriching, trusting environment.

Status of Pre-kindergarten schooling in Thailand

Most pre-kindergarten schools and nurseries in Thailand aim at attracting international parents who are busy and have to leave their small children with trusted nursery while they are working. There are many reasons that pre-kindergarten schooling is still at the beginning stage and is not popular among Thai parents. Firstly, their tuition fees and nursery fees are quite expensive since they are designed for international parents. Thai parents are not able to afford it. Secondly, each pre-kindergarten school can only serve a small number of students since small children need more caregivers to teach and care for them. Some schools allocate at least two teachers for every two to three very young children in order to monitor each child closely, protect them from danger, and motivate them through various learning activities. Thirdly, most of them do not provide school bus services for the pre-kindergarten children. Parents have to bring their children to school in the morning and pick them up in the evening themselves which is inconvenient even though the schools are located in the central area of the city. Sometimes they prefer to leave their children with a child care center near their office or with their relatives rather than put them into schools. Fourthly, Thai parents perceive education in pre-kindergarten school wrongly that it is the same as other educational levels. Some perceive that pre-kindergarten schools are like a nursery where they can leave their children safely and children can learn from activities to develop their various skills: gross motor skills,

find motor skills. Some parents misunderstand that learning should be limited to the classroom only under specific time. Instead, young children learn every moment through every interaction and encounter (Gestwicki, 1997, p. 21). Fifthly, pre-kindergarten syllabuses need to be developed to match Thai children, Thai cultures, and parents' expectation. Thai parents prefer schools to have both Thai and foreign teachers, teach Thai language and cultures heritage in the class in order to provide the knowledge of good Thai manners & values to their children (Tisana Khemmani, 1996). Lastly, peers and relatives' attitudes towards pre-kindergarten schooling is the most influential factor which leads Thai parents to misunderstand that it is too early for children to start learning in the early years of their life. They think that the proper schooling should start at kindergarten school onwards. Besides, there is no solid report to show the importance of pre-kindergarten schooling and intelligence improvement of early schooling, especially at pre-kindergarten level. Some Thai parents are reluctant to invest for their children in pre-kindergarten level since they are not aware of its benefits. So they perceive that investment in pre-kindergarten schooling is a waste of money.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1.2.1 What are the current attitudes of Thai parents towards the importance of pre-kindergarten schooling?

1.2.2 What are the considerations among Thai parents in choosing pre-kindergarten schools for children?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are the following:

1.3.1 Main Objectives

(1) To survey Thai parents' attitudes towards the importance of pre-kindergarten schooling.

(2) To explore the criteria of Thai parents in choosing pre-kindergarten schools for their children.

1.3.2 Sub Objective

To know Thai parents' opinions on advantages and disadvantages of pre-kindergarten schooling.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The definitions of the terms of this study are as follows:

1.4.1 **Parents** refer to persons who support and look after children or have authority over children

1.4.2 **Pre-kindergarten School** means the school that provides curriculums for children aged below 3 years or before attending Kindergarten level.

Terms	Conceptual definition	Operational definition
Gender	The characteristics of people that are divided according to the social function they have	Gender characteristics of an individual: male or female
Age	The number of years since parents were born	Number of years a subject of this study has lived after he/she was born.
Educational Level	The scale or years of acquiring academic knowledge	The level of academic knowledge
Occupation	Work one does for a living	The current job of the subject in this study
Type of family	A group of people who are closely related	A group of people who have / do not have children
Family Income	Money gained from working in a family	Monetary gained in working for living on a monthly basis in a family
Decision Making	Willing to choose the pre-kindergarten school that can serve parents needs and expectations.	The scale of the influential factors in choosing pre-kindergarten school for children
Teacher	A person who provide knowledge and cares in school system.	

Tuition Fee	Money which was paid for education.	
Environment	Surrounding atmosphere of one place.	
Facilities	The equipment which can be used in a place.	
Service	The basic essentials that parents require.	
Curriculum	List of subjects studied in a school.	

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to 100 Thai parents and focuses only on parents who live in Bangkok. This research was aimed to investigate Thai parents' attitudes towards the importance of pre-kindergarten schooling and their criteria in choosing pre-kindergarten schools for their children. This research will also study the advantages and disadvantages of pre-kindergarten schooling.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 The findings of Thai parents' attitude of pre-kindergarten schooling will be useful for current kindergarten schools to expand the education to children below 3 years of age.

1.6.2 The findings of Thai parents' criteria in choosing pre-kindergarten school could be useful for pre-kindergarten schools to design their curriculum for children below 3 years of age to match with parents' expectations.

1.6.3 The findings of this research will be useful for further study.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of Thai parents' attitudes towards importance of pre-kindergarten schooling and major considerations in choosing pre-kindergarten school for children in this paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter One consists of background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, scope of the study, definitions of terms, significance of the study, and the organization of the study. Chapter Two focuses on review of literature, related theories, concepts and relevant

studies. Chapter Three is the methodology comprising subjects, materials, procedures and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results and tables of the survey. Lastly, Chapter Five provides a summary of the study, summary of findings, discussion, conclusion and recommendations for further study.