

# Assessment of the Professional Competencies of Students Majoring in Early Childhood Education at Some Universities in Vietnam Today

Pham Thi Yen<sup>1\*</sup>, Pham Minh Hung<sup>2</sup>, Nguyen Thi Huong<sup>2</sup>,  
Nguyen Duc Vuong<sup>1</sup>, Tran Thi Thuy Nga<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quang Binh University

<sup>2</sup>Vinh University

\*Corresponding author: [phamyenqb@gmail.com](mailto:phamyenqb@gmail.com)

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**Abstract** In the process of a fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training today, the task of properly assessing the status of students' professional competence is significantly important in the process of teaching and learning at schools. The research article presents the competency requirements and analyzes and assesses the current situation of professional competence of students majoring in Early Childhood Education. From the research results, several causes and limitations are pointed out, and some measures are proposed to improve learning results and teaching quality.

**Keywords:** *capacity, assessment, capacity assessment, early childhood education*

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## 1. Introduction

The quality of training in general, the quality of training in early childhood education in particular as a result of the training process is reflected in the characteristics of quality, personality values and the value of labour or professional capacity of learners corresponding to the objectives, and training programs. The correct assessment of students' professional competence is a breakthrough and essential in the process of teaching and learning at schools. Because properly assessing the capacity of students will obtain accurate information about the level of achievement of output standards, goals and training requirements, thereby promptly making changes in content, programs, methods of education and training so that students have sufficient qualities, ability to meet the needs of the job after graduation. This critical task contributes to improving the quality and commitment to the quality of training to society. To properly assess students' capacity requires close leadership and cooperation between educational managers and teachers with the spirit of initiative, positivity, self-discipline and creativity, upholding the personal responsibility of academic subjects and educational management.

## 2. Research Content

### 2.1. Research Overview on Professional Competencies of Preschool Teachers

There are many definitions of competency, and this concept attracts the interest of many researchers. In the conventional sense, competence is the combination of thoughts, skills and attitudes available or in the form of learnable potential of an individual or organisation to successfully perform a task. The job completion level and quality will reflect the person's level of competence [9]. The European Union (Caena, 2001) has made recommendations on The competencies that teachers need to be equipped with, include 3 areas [6]: 1) Knowledge – Understanding; 2) Skills; 3) Beliefs, attitudes, values and commitments.

California Early Childhood Education (ECE, 2012) states that [7]: Pedagogical competence is the knowledge, skills, and qualities an early childhood teacher needs to ensure quality care and education for young children and their families. ECE has arranged the competency group of preschool teachers in the following 12 areas: 1) Understanding developmental psychology and learning; 2) Embrace culture: Diversity and equity; 3) Skills in

establishing relationships, communicating and guiding children; 4) Ensure the participation of families and communities; 5) Child language development; 6) Skills in observation, screening and evaluation, case management; 7) Knowledge of children with special needs and inclusive education; 8) Building learning and program development models; 9) Knowledge of health, safety and nutrition; 10) Teamwork in the field of early childhood education; 11) Professionalism; 12) Management and supervision.

According to UNESCO and SEAMEO (2016) [17], in Southeast Asia, the competency framework of early childhood teachers is reflected in 7 core capacity standards: 1) Understanding children's learning and development; 2) Promoting child learning and development; 3) Building a comprehensive and safe educational environment; 4) Promote the health, nutrition, safety and protection of children; 5) Be able to build relationships with parents, families, and child care teams; 6) Networking and cooperation with appropriate partners to develop early childhood care and education; 7) Ensure professional development and personal development.

Margaret McMahon, in her book "Do You Want to Work in ChildCare", argues that the necessary competencies that preschool teachers need are [14]: 1) Enthusiastic, friendly; 2) Discipline, principle, fairness; 3) Good communication skills; 4) Sharp thinking; 5) Knowledge of health, safety and first aid skills; 6) Ability to understand, empathise; 7) Ability to work as a team and collaborate; 8) Organizational ability.

In the book "The Profession of Preschool Teacher" by Author Ho Lam Hong [12]: The necessary competencies of preschool teachers include: 1) a Deep understanding of children; 2) an understanding of the science of early childhood education; 3) Capacity to plan and organise the implementation of teaching and education plans; 4) Communication capacity; 5) Cognitive competence; 6) Creative capacity; 7) Self-learning capacity; 8) Social activity skills group; 9) A positive perspective and mindset.

According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (2018), the professional competency standards of preschool teachers include [4]: 1) Teacher qualities; 2) Professional development; 3) Building an educational environment; 4) Developing relationships between the school, family and community; 5) Using foreign languages, applying information technology and demonstrating artistic abilities in child nurturing, caring and education activities.

## 2.2. Professional Capacity Requirements of Students Majoring in Early Childhood Education

Based on theoretical and practical analysis of the professional capacity of preschool teachers, we propose some basic professional competency requirements that students in Early Childhood Education need to have are:

- 1) Understanding the child's development and learning process;
- 2) Set up an education environment to the standards of the selected education program;
- 3) Knowledge of nurturing, caring for, ensuring safety and education for the comprehensive development of children;

4) Understanding children with special needs and inclusive education;

5) Skills in establishing relationships, communicating with children and managing groups/classes;

6) Problem-solving skills, flexibility and creativity;

7) Observe and evaluate the development of children;

8) Build relationships with parents and the community in professional activities;

9) Applying information technology, using foreign languages and demonstrating artistic abilities in professional activities;

10) Ability to self-study and self-assessment in professional activities;

11) Professional development ability;

12) Demonstrate civic responsibility, moral qualities, and standard pedagogical style.

## 2.3. Results of Assessment of Professional Capacity of Students in Early Childhood Education in Some Vietnamese Universities

### 2.3.1. Respondents

To assess the actual situation of professional capacity of students majoring in Early childhood education, we conducted a survey of managers, lecturers, students, alums and employers in several Vietnamese universities. Survey subjects include 35 managers and 106 lecturers, 339 students, 170 alums at 5 universities in Vietnam (Quang Binh University, Hue University of Education, Vinh University), Ha Tinh University, Hanoi National University of Education), and 57 employers. Survey methods and tools are used through the survey using anket. The data collected is processed using SPSS software. Assessment is based on four levels corresponding to points 1, 2, 3, and 4. Each class has a specific mean: (Weak):  $1 \leq \bar{X} \leq 1.74$ ; Average:  $1.75 \leq \bar{X} \leq 2.49$ ; Fair:  $2.50 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.24$ ; Good:  $\bar{X} \leq 3.25$ .

### 2.2.2. Reliability of the Assessment Tool

Survey data showed that the questionnaire was highly reliable; Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reached 0.605. The results of the answers to the questions given by the questionnaire are pretty focused, the results of statistical analysis of the correlation between the results of the answers to each question across the questionnaire show a high degree of correlation, proving that the questionnaire has a strict content structure, the survey issues are all professional manifestations, belongs to the professional competency structure that students need to achieve.

For the research results to be more reliable, we organize organising, interviews, and exchanges with participants.

Table 1. Reliability of survey tool

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.613	.605	12

The statistical results of each component capacity structure's reliability further confirm the data's reliability. Each form of 12 competencies has Cronbach's Alpha

reliability of 0.60 or greater. Besides, the analysis of correlation results of each question answer with the overall results of the structure also did not detect any questions that need to be eliminated to ensure the tool's reliability.

### 2.3.3. Research Results and Discussion

The results of the survey to assess the status of students' professional competence are shown through the following data:

**Table 2. Results of evaluating the current situation of professional competence of students majoring in Early Childhood Education**

Competency	Managers		Lecturers		Students		Alumni		Employers		F	P
	$\bar{X}$	Standard Deviation										
1) Understand children's development and their learning.	2.34	.482	2.35	.570	2.42	.535	2.29	.457	2.32	.602	1.61	.171
2 Building a safe educational environment and developing educational programs.	2.31	.471	2.30	.461	2.47	.597	2.39	.490	2.40	.728	2.08	.081
3) Knowledge of child rearing, care, safety and comprehensive development education	2.31	.631	2.28	.673	2.40	.594	2.38	.478	1.98	.596	7.60	.001
4) Understanding children with special needs and inclusive education.	1.71	.547	1.74	.503	1.87	2	1.71	.457	1.58	.498	8.53	.000
5 Skills to establish relationships, communicate with children and manage groups/classes.	2.37	.490	2.35	.535	2.41	.657	2.38	.486	2.28	.453	1.16	.329
6) Problem solving skills, flexibility and creativity.	2.43	.558	2.23	.420	2.34	.700	2.32	.511	1.84	.523	18.3	.001
7) Observe and evaluate children's development.	2.37	.808	2.36	.555	2.43	.682	2.39	.489	2.26	.642	1.54	.190
8) Build relationships with parents and the community in professional activities.	2.37	.808	2.30	.948	2.35	.604	2.38	.850	2.33	607	18.7	.000
9) Apply information technology, use foreign languages and demonstrate artistic ability in professional activities	1.60	.497	1.61	.527	1.74	.564	1.71	.457	1.60	.530	2.30	.061
10) Ability to self-study, self-assessment in professional activities	2.20	.406	2.26	.464	2.38	.705	2.29	.407	2.28	.559	3.23	.102
11) Ability to develop profession and career	2.26	.443	2.31	.523	2.45	.799	2.32	.602	2.32	.665	1.93	.103
12) Demonstrate civic responsibility, moral qualities, and standard pedagogical style.	3.20	.632	3.19	.622	3.24	.649	3.20	.582	3.14	.667	0.39	.816

From the figures in Table 2, some comments can be drawn as follows:

- Students rated the highest level of professional performance, with GPA ranging from  $1.74 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.24$ . Out of 12 surveyed criteria, up to 10 criteria are evaluated at level 2 (Average), 1 criterion is evaluated at level 1 (Weak), and 1 criterion is assessed at level 3 (fair).
- Managers, lecturers, alums and employers rate the performance of students' ability relatively evenly and lower than the group of students, with an average score ranging from  $1.58 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.14$ . Of the 12 criteria surveyed,

up to 9 standards were evaluated at level 2 (Average), there were 2 two criteria assessed at level 1 (Weak), and only one standard was set at level 3 (fair).

Looking at the column  $\bar{X}$ , we can see that:

- The level of competency expression "Demonstrating civic responsibility, moral qualities and standard pedagogical style" was rated by the survey groups at the highest level, with an average score ranging from  $3.14 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.24$
- The capability level of "Understanding children with special needs and inclusive education" and "Applying information technology, using foreign languages and

demonstrating artistic ability in professional activities” were rated the lowest by survey groups, with average scores ranging from  $1.58 \leq \bar{X} \leq 1.87$ .

PostHoc LSD test results show a statistically significant difference when comparing expression levels of “Knowledge about nurturing, caring, ensuring a safety and comprehensive development education” and “Problem-solving skills, flexibility and creativity” between two groups of employers and students. This proves that in 5 groups of participants, these two groups are different in the level of assessment, sig là 0.001,  $p < 0.05$ . (Mean Difference (I-J) is -0.343 và -0.538). Thus, employers believe that these students' competencies are still weak and do not meet the practical requirements they need.

From the research results, we outline some professional competencies that need to be focused on and developed for students as follows:

- Knowledge of nurturing, caring, ensuring safety and educating children for comprehensive development.
- Knowledge of children with special needs and inclusive education.
- Ability to solve problems, be creative and self-critical in professional activities
- Ability to apply information technology and use foreign languages in professional activities;
- Applying new scientific achievements of early childhood education in professional activities

Thus, the survey results show that the professional capacity of students in early childhood education in some universities in Vietnam is still relatively low. There are many reasons leading to this situation; through our assessment, one main cause is shown as:

- The training program's content in Early Childhood Education is still heavy on theory, little on practice, has not been innovated in time and has not kept up with reality.
- The teaching organisation, according to the capability approach in the training of the preschool education sector, has not been given due attention. It has not promoted practical skills and learners' capacity.
- The checking and evaluation of learning results are still slow to innovate and lack comprehensiveness.
- Funds for the training program are limited, and facilities and teaching equipment of schools are lacking and not synchronous.
- The coordination and training link between the school and its users is still loose, not sustainable and effective.

### 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Evaluating the professional competence of students majoring in Preschool education is the process of collecting, analysing and processing information obtained from learners, thereby making objective judgments about their competence and professional capacity according to the output standards, models, goals and training requirements of schools. This is one of the essential critical factors for schools to take adequate measures to improve the quality of teaching. Although the scope of research on assessing the professional capacity of students in early childhood education is not comprehensive, the reseacomprehensiverch results have partly brought

relatively complete and detailed information about the current state of the quality of training students in early childhood education, at the same time, it helps to detect some students' insufficient competencies that do not meet practical requirements.

To improve the professional capacity of students majoring in Early Childhood Education in Vietnamese universities, educational administrators and lecturers need to pay attention to several solutions such as:

- Do a good job of communicating education to raise awareness for managers, lecturers and students about teaching according to the capability approach.
- Improve and build the training programs according to the output standard capacity.
- Innovating objectives, content, and teaching methods and organising support activities to help students acquire competencies suitable to practical requirements.
- Strengthen solutions to improve management staff's capacity and lecturers' quality.
- Building a cohesive relationship between training institutions and employers and pedagogical schools, aiming at the motto "training to meet the needs of the employer of labour resources".
- Ensure the conditions of teaching facilities and equipment, and create favourable conditions for students to achieve the best efficiency.

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