

Developing a Core Competency for Educarists in Guangdong, China

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the core competency of Educarists in early childhood education (ECE) in Guangdong, China. The objective of this core competency model is to enhance their professional development and subsequently to improve the quality of learning for both infants and toddlers during their early education stage.

Design/methodology/approach: The study employs a mixed-methods research design comprising document review and analysis, interview techniques, and a questionnaire survey. Data are collected from recruitment information on Educarists. In addition, series of interview were conducted to gauge the internal perspective of the core competency. In addition, this study also applied the questionnaire survey among the Educarists in Guangdong, China. The questionnaire is to identify the factors that influence the professional development of Educarists and their competencies. Both approaches were designed to achieve the objective of this study which is to develop the core competency of Educarists in ECE.

Findings: The findings highlight the importance of love, patience, good communication skills, and a passion for working with children, as well as a solid understanding of child development and the ability to design appropriate activities and adapt to individual needs. A competency model for Educarists is proposed, categorized into foundational, intermediate, and advanced competencies. These findings can assist the designing the training programs as well as to design of high-quality early childhood education programs in China.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to the context of Guangdong, China, and its findings may need to be more generalizable to other regions or countries. Future research could replicate the study in other contexts to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Practical implications: The proposed competency model can serve as a framework for identifying the critical competencies required for Educarists in ECE, which can aid in recruitment, training, and performance evaluation. This study's results can also inform policy

decisions and promote the overall improvement of the quality of early childhood education in China.

Originality/value: This study can guide the development of training programs and professional development for Educuarists, as well as the design and implementation of high-quality early childhood education programs in China. The study's findings can also serve as a foundation for future research in the field of early childhood education.

Keywords: Educuarists, Early Childhood Education, Core Competency Model, Human Resource Management.

1. Introduction

In response to China's rapidly growing population and the evolution of the early childhood education (ECE) system, the role of Educuarists has emerged to provide education and care for babies aged 0-3. "Educuarist" is a term created by combining "Educare," a term used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to describe the integration of education and care in early childhood settings (OECD, 2012), with "specialist" to describe professionals who specialize in early childhood education and care. This term emphasizes the importance of high-quality care and education in the early years of a child's life and the need for specialized training and expertise in this area. The term reflects the unique nature of the work of early childhood Educuarists who are responsible for providing high-quality care and education to infants and young children during a critical period of their development. Hence, in this paper, we use the term 'Educuarist' to refer to a profession that provides professional services for the care, education and early development of infants and younger children.

Early childhood education is generally defined as care and education for children from birth through age eight, including programs that span the zero to three-year-old age range (Barth, R. P., & Liggett-Creel, K, 2014). Early childhood education programs serving children from birth to age three are typically called infant-toddler programs or Early Head Start programs (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2017, p. 2). Hence, we adopt that Educuarists are specialized ECE Educuarists responsible for educating and caring for infants and toddlers aged 0-3. They play a critical role in guiding infants and toddlers' physical and mental development, promoting their emotional growth, and creating a safe and nurturing learning environment. The Educuarist role emerged due to the Chinese government's recognition of the importance of early childhood education and the need for specialized Educuarists to provide high-quality education and care for infants and toddlers. The State Council of the People's Republic of China recently issued a guideline titled "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Infant and Child Care Services for Children Under Three" aimed at establishing a policy and regulatory framework and promoting the development of infant and child care services in China, with the goal of meeting the increasing demand for such services from the general public (Xinhua News, 2019).

The term "Educuarist" highlights the importance of integrating education and care in early childhood settings, a vital principle of the educare approach. This approach emphasizes the importance of high-quality care and education in the early years of a child's life. It recognizes that both are essential for promoting children's development and preparing them for lifelong learning (OECD, 2012). However, despite the importance of their role, Educuarists'

professional development in China faces various challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the need for a comprehensive and standardized competency model for Educators. The absence of such a model limits their professional development and hinders their ability to provide high-quality education and care for infants and toddlers. Furthermore, the lack of clarity around their professional competencies and standards leads to a lack of consistency in their practices and assessments, ultimately hindering their career development. Another significant challenge is China's increasing demand for high-quality early childhood education and care services. The Chinese government recognizes the importance of early childhood education and has introduced policies to expand access to such services. Meanwhile, the demand for Educators has outstripped the supply, leading to a shortage of qualified professionals. The resulting quality issues may impact the development of infants and toddlers negatively. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged Educators' professional development. The shift to online learning platforms has created communication difficulties between Educators and young learners, requiring new skills and competencies. The shift has also made it difficult for Educators to maintain an emotionally supportive and stimulating learning environment, which is crucial for developing infants and toddlers.

According to the policies issued by Chinese administrative departments, Educators need to possess a wide range of competencies, including knowledge of child development, psychological understanding, and caregiving skills (Berger, L. M., & Font, S. A., 2015). They must provide children with a warm, secure, and stimulating environment to encourage healthy development.

In contrast to traditional ECE educators, Educators have a more significant responsibility to provide education and care for infants and toddlers. Educators must ensure that the children receive a quality education and meet the children's daily needs, including feeding, diaper changes, and maintaining a hygienic environment. The dual responsibilities of Educators require specialized training and competencies beyond what is typically required for ECE educators.

This study aims to explore the professional competencies of Educators in Guangdong, China, a province with a high demand for quality early childhood education and care services, and develop a competency model to enhance their professional development and improve the quality of learning for infants and toddlers in early education. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods research design comprising document review and analysis, interview techniques, and a questionnaire survey was employed. The study participants were Educators working in public and private early childhood education and care institutions in Guangdong, one of the most populated provinces in China.

The study found that the critical competencies for Educators in early childhood education include love, patience, effective communication, passion for working with children, expertise in child development, and the ability to design developmentally appropriate activities and adapt to individual needs. A proposed competency model categorizes these competencies into foundational, intermediate, and advanced levels, and these findings can provide guidance for the development of training programs and high-quality early childhood education programs in China.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the professional competencies of Educators in Guangdong, China, and provides a competency model to enhance their

professional development. The findings of this study have practical implications for the professional development of Educuarists and the quality of early childhood education and care services in Guangdong, China, and potentially in other regions of China and beyond.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, scholars have paid a lot of attention to the idea of professionalism in early education. The main goal has been to improve the quality of education by improving the skills and knowledge of ECE teachers. Even though some of the literature doesn't directly talk about Educuarists, we can still use the literature about ECE educators to learn more about what Educuarists can do. Hence, in the literature review, we will refer to some of the ECE educator's job functions in relation to the educational attributes of the Educuarist.

2.1. The professionalism of Educuarists in China

China has put in a lot of work over the past few years to improve the quality of early childhood education. Xin Zhou (2011) said that the Chinese government has taken important steps to improve how babies and young children are cared for and learn. Kanokorn et al. found in 2014 that it is important for early childhood education to progress for early childhood educators to learn soft skills. There has been a remarkable increase in enrollment in preschool programs in China. In 2020, the preschool enrollment rate for migrant children aged 3 to 5 was 86.1%, slightly higher than the overall national preschool enrollment rate of 85.2% (Gong, J., & Rao, N, 2023).

However, there are still issues of concern regarding the professionalism of educators in ECE field and preschools in China. Owens et al. (2002) noted that the overly restrictive behavior of educators negatively affects children's learning experiences and mental health. Therefore, educators need to possess strong communication skills to interact with children appropriately and be kind. In particular, they are educators and caregivers who guide the development of babies and young children. Educators need to create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere to improve their teaching skills. Listening ability is also crucial for educators, as the lack of soft skills is one of the significant challenges affecting their professional development (Gong, J., & Rao, N., 2023). So, if teachers want to make teaching and learning better, they need to listen to and understand their students' concerns. In addition to caring for infants and young children, as with educators, Educuarists are also required to undertake professional initiation work in their daily work.

Moreover, disciplinary problems are another indication of educators' lack of professionalism. Thus, providing educators with various forms of training, such as seminars, workshops, retreats, and conferences, is crucial to enhance their overall professionalism (Cheville, R. A et al., 2021).

2.2. Factors Influencing the Professionalism of Educuarists

Several factors influence the professionalism of educuarists. Goldsmith et al. (2014) identified eight elements that contribute to the professionalism of Educuarists, including teaching experiences, prior knowledge, societal impact, persuasion, employment qualifications for occupations in high demand and specialized, task return (teacher's salary and social status), view of the teaching profession as a whole, and creating better company standards and

projecting the correct corporate image within the teaching profession. The comprehensive study of Rinantanti et al. (2019) investigates cultural differences in teacher professionalism in all education systems. They found that professionalism protects the learning and teaching environments and makes education better as a whole.

Other scholars have looked at the skills of educarists in specific ways. Abacioglu et al. (2020) argued that creativity plays a crucial role in the quality of early education teachers. Their research showed that teaching experience and educational background significantly influence early childhood teachers' creativity, while income does not significantly influence their creativity. Madani, R. A. (2019) researched the relationship between teacher preparation and child outcomes in ECE programs and believed that teachers with at least a bachelor's degree in ECE provide better quality preschool experiences for infants and young children than those with less education.

The literature review highlights the significance of professionalism in the field of education, with a particular focus on educarists. Developing soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, listening, and time management, is essential for educarists to create a welcoming and conducive learning environment for young children. Zhou, X (2011) stated that the Chinese government has taken significant initiatives to increase the professionalism of early childhood Educarists by organizing training courses for Educarists and establishing criteria for hiring qualified individuals.

Moreover, a study found that various factors influence the professionalism of Educarists, including teaching experience, prior knowledge, societal impact, persuasion, employment qualifications for occupations in high demand and specialized, task return, view of the teaching profession as a whole, and creating better company standards (Fauziah et al.,2021).

The literature review shows that there is still much to be done to improve the professionalism of educarists in China. Future research should investigate the current competency model for Educarists to ensure that it aligns with the quality of educarists and early education institutions' needs.

2.3 Concept Boundaries

The concept of professionalism in education is grounded in the theoretical framework of professionalization, which is the process by which an occupation evolves from a non-professional status to a professional one. This process involves establishing standards of competency, developing a specialized body of knowledge, the creation a code of ethics, and establishing formalized training and certification programs. In education, professionalism refers to developing Educarists' competencies and skills, which enable them to deliver quality education.

The concept of professionalism has defined boundaries in the education sector. Professionalism focuses on developing Educarists' competencies and skills to enable them to provide quality education. These competencies and skills include pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, communication skills, classroom management, and assessment practices (Darling-Hammond, 2021). The boundaries of professionalism also include establishing standards of practice, codes of ethics, and professional development programs.

The literature review has examined various studies that explore the professionalism of Educators in China. The Chinese government has made significant efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education, including organizing training courses for Educators and establishing criteria for hiring qualified individuals. Developing soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, listening, and time management is crucial for Educators to create a welcoming and conducive learning environment for young children.

The review also identified factors that influence the professionalism of Educators, including teaching experience, prior knowledge, societal impact, persuasion, employment qualifications, task return, and creating better company standards. The concept of professionalism in education is grounded in the theoretical framework of professionalization, which involves the establishment of standards of competency, the development of a specialized body of knowledge, the creation of a code of ethics, and the establishment of formalized training and certification programs.

Future research should investigate the current competency model for Educators in Guangdong, China to ensure that it aligns with the quality of Educators and early education institutions' needs. By improving the professionalism of Educators, we can enhance the quality of education and provide young children with a solid foundation for their future academic and personal success.

3. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the competencies of Educators and the construction of their models. Specifically, we utilized documentary reviews, interviews, and questionnaires as our primary data collection methods.

3.1 Recruitment Information Collecting

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the competencies valued by prominent early education agencies in Guangdong province, we adopted a systematic approach. Firstly, we searched for job postings on 51job (www.51job.com), a popular Chinese professional recruitment website. To ensure the relevance of our search results, we employed targeted keywords such as "early education teacher" and "Educator."

After identifying the relevant job postings, we conducted a thorough analysis of the requirements listed by the agencies, with a specific focus on the competencies and qualities they sought in Educators. We extracted and synthesized common factors across multiple job postings to achieve this, generating a comprehensive list of competencies.

Several fundamental principles, including objectivity, rigor, and transparency in data collection and analysis, guided our approach. To ensure the validity and reliability of our findings, we employed a systematic and transparent process that was documented and subject to review by independent experts in the field.

Overall, our data collection approach allowed us to gather rich and comprehensive information on the competencies valued by early education agencies in Guangdong province. By analyzing job postings and identifying common factors, we generated a comprehensive

list of competencies that could inform our subsequent research activities, such as developing interview questions and survey instruments.

The detailed information on the identified competencies has been arranged in a table and can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 Interview Method

We conducted semi-structured interviews with six Educarists from early education institutions located in Guangzhou and Foshan. As shown in Table 1, the sample included one male and five females, with two holding bachelor's degrees and four possessing junior college diplomas. Educarists with varying educational backgrounds and work experience were selected to ensure the diversity of the sample.

Table 1 Information of interviewees

Interviewee	Interview Time	Place	Education Background	Major	Working Experience
Mr.Li	2022/5/1	Guangzhou	Bachelor	Early Education	3
Mrs.Song	2022/5/1	Guangzhou	Bachelor	Education	2
Mrs.Li	2022/5/1	Guangzhou	Junior College Diploma	English	3
Mrs.Luo	2022/5/1	Guangzhou	Junior College Diploma	Music	5
Mrs.Chen	2022/5/2	Foshan	Junior College Diploma	Graphic Design	4
Mrs.Huang	2022/5/2	Foshan	Junior College Diploma	Sports	2

A set of interview questions was developed to explore the Educarists' work motivation, core competencies, and challenges faced on the job. The design of interview questions was based on a literature review of relevant theories and empirical studies that identified key concepts and competencies associated with Educarists' roles. Potential interview questions were then brainstormed, followed by a review by experts in early childhood education to ensure relevance and appropriateness. The questions were pilot-tested with a small sample of Educarists to identify any issues or problems with the questions, and revisions were made as necessary. Based on the feedback from the pilot testing, the interview questions were finalized, ensuring clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the research objectives and participants, thereby ensuring that the interview questions were valid and reliable for use in the research.

In the design of the interview questions, the competency-based education theory was used to guide the selection of competencies that are relevant to Educarists' roles. The constructivist learning theory was used to guide the selection of questions that explore the Educarists' models of child development and learning, based on the suggestion that learners construct their knowledge through experiences and interactions with the environment. Self-efficacy theory guided the selection of questions that explore the Educarists' confidence in their abilities to perform their roles effectively, emphasizing the importance of self-belief in achieving success. Lastly, the social cognitive theory was used to guide the selection of

questions that explore the Educarists' perceptions of the role of social interaction and modeling in child development and learning, emphasizing the role of social interaction and modeling in learning and behavior.

Specific interview questions are listed in Appendix 2.

3.3 Questionnaire Survey

The current study aimed to investigate the job quality and competencies of Educarists in Guangdong Province, China. To achieve this objective, a questionnaire survey was conducted among Educarists working in early education institutions in the region. The survey's target respondents were Educarists and the questionnaire was designed to gather data on basic demographic information, job quality and competencies, job satisfaction and challenges.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections; the details are attached as Appendix 3. Section 1 collected basic information such as gender, age, education level, and years of work experience in early childhood education. Section 2 focused on job quality and competencies, with participants asked to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The statements covered areas such as a passion for working with children, the importance of professional knowledge, the role of patience in educating infants and young children, and the ability to promote positive social-emotional development in this age group. Section 3 of the questionnaire explored job satisfaction and challenges. Participants were again asked to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree—the statements related to job satisfaction, fulfillment, and the ability to overcome challenges in the workplace.

The questionnaire was distributed online to Educarists working in early education institutions in Guangdong Province. The online platform (<https://www.wjx.cn/>) was selected as the distribution channel for its convenience and accessibility to potential respondents. The snowball sampling approach was also employed to recruit participants through referrals from existing respondents.

In conclusion, the current study employed a questionnaire survey to investigate the job quality and competencies of Educarists in Guangdong Province, China. The questionnaire was distributed online through <https://www.wjx.cn/> and through a snowball sampling approach. The survey was designed to gather data on basic demographic information, job quality, competencies, job satisfaction, and challenges.

4. Findings

4.1 Job Postings Analysis: Varied Requirements and Valued Competencies in Early Education Institutions in Guangdong Province

Based on the information in Appendix 1, we can identify the educational backgrounds, majors, work experiences, responsibilities, and other requirements for Educarists in two prominent early education agencies in Guangzhou.

BBUGO requires junior college diplomas or above in education-related fields and at least one year of work experience in early childhood education. The responsibilities of Educarists at BBUGO include making teaching plans, teaching courses according to the center's curriculum content, timely adjusting and solving problems in the teaching process, maintaining and managing the classroom and teaching aids, communicating with parents according to children's performance in class, and other tasks assigned by the superior. BBUGO also values Educarists who love education, love children, have patience, affinity, good communication skills, and strong learning ability and desire.

On the other hand, MyGym prefers Educarists with a bachelor's degree or above, with priority given to those with majors in Children's Education or English. MyGym does not specify a minimum work experience requirement. The responsibilities of Educarists at MyGym include delivering courses of high quality, maintaining teaching equipment in normal service condition, providing professional child-rearing information to parents, and assisting with marketing promotion. MyGym values Educarists with excellent command of English, love, patience for working with children, outgoing, energetic, passionate, cheerful personality, and availability to work on weekends.

These findings suggest that prominent early education agencies in Guangzhou have varying requirements for Educarists' educational background and work experience. However, they share common values regarding love, patience, good communication skills, and a passion for working with children. These findings can further inform the design of interview questions and survey instruments to explore Educarists' competencies and challenges in their roles.

4.2 Interview Study: Importance of Understanding Child Development and Individualized Approach to Children's Needs

The findings revealed that Educarists believed that an effective Educarist is passionate, patient, and possesses good communication skills. They emphasized the importance of a solid understanding of child development and the ability to design developmentally appropriate activities. They also highlighted the need to adapt to the needs of individual children, including those with diverse cultural backgrounds and special needs.

Educarists described using a range of strategies to ensure all children were engaged and participating in learning activities. These included incorporating technology into their teaching, using creative approaches such as storytelling and role-playing, and providing opportunities for hands-on learning. They also discussed the importance of collaboration with parents and other Educarists to ensure continuity in the child's learning and development.

Educarists reported facing various challenges in their work, including addressing challenging behaviors in children, balancing the needs of different children in the classroom, and keeping up-to-date with current research and best practices in early childhood education. They described the importance of ongoing professional development and staying connected with peers in the field to address these challenges.

Overall, the findings of this study provide insights into the competencies and experiences of Educarists in early education institutions in Guangzhou and Foshan. These findings have implications for developing training programs and ongoing professional development for

Educarists, as well as for designing and implementing high-quality early childhood education programs in China.

4.3 Questionnaire Survey: Demographic Characteristics, Competencies, and Challenges Faced by Educarists in Guangdong Province

4.3.1 Basic Information

Table 2 below presents the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. 361 Educarists from Guangdong Province, China, participated in the survey. Most respondents were female (85.87%), while only 14.13% were male. In terms of age, most respondents were between 20 to 39 years old (91.96%), with the highest percentage being in the 30-39 age group (57.06%). The respondents had varying work experience in early childhood education, with 52.35% having 1-3 years of experience. Most respondents had a junior college diploma (43.49%), followed by those with a bachelor's degree (33.8%). A small percentage of respondents had a master's degree or doctoral degree.

Table 2 Basic Information of Questionnaire Survey

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	51	14.13%
Female	310	85.87%
Other	0	0%
Age		
Under 20	0	0%
20-29	126	34.90%
30-39	206	57.06%
40-49	19	5.26%
50+	10	2.77%
Work Experience		
0-1 years	83	22.99%
1-3 years	189	52.35%
3-5 years	75	20.78%
5-10 years	14	3.88%
10+ years	0	0%
Education Level		
High School	72	19.94%
Junior College Diploma	157	43.49%
Bachelor's Degree	122	33.80%
Master's Degree	5	1.39%
Doctoral Degree	5	1.39%

The demographic characteristics of the survey respondents provide valuable insights into the profile of Educarists in Guangdong Province. These findings can inform policy and decision-making in early childhood education in the region. For instance, the high percentage of respondents with a junior college diploma suggests that there may be a need to provide more opportunities for professional development and training for Educarists in the region.

Additionally, the relatively young age of the respondents highlights the importance of attracting and retaining young talent in early childhood education.

4.3.2 Descriptive analysis

As shown in Table 3, the descriptive analysis of the data from section 2 Job Quality and Competencies, on a 12 to 5 scale, revealed that the mean scores for all 12 competencies were above the midpoint of 2.5, indicating that the Educarists who participated in the survey agreed with these statements to a moderate to a great extent. The highest mean scores were observed for the statements "I have the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children" and "Even though I did not major in early education at university, the practical knowledge and professional training I have accumulated in work can still enable me to do this job well," with mean scores of 3.839 and 3.828, respectively.

These findings suggest that professional knowledge, practical skills, and the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children are considered essential competencies for Educarists. The mean scores for statements related to patience, good communication skills, confidence in ability to teach, creating a safe and healthy environment, promoting positive social-emotional development, and having knowledge and skills related to infant and children care were also high, with mean scores ranging from 3.817 to 3.731.

However, the mean score for the statement "I have the ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and young children" was relatively lower, with a mean score of 3.673, indicating that Educarists may feel less confident in this competency. Overall, these findings provide valuable insights into the key competencies of Educarists and can inform the development of training programs and professional development opportunities for early childhood education professionals.

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis of Section 2

Items	N of samples	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
I love children and want to work with them.	361	1.000	5.000	3.792	1.226	4.000
Passion and interest are the strong motivation for my work and the primary consideration for my job	361	1.000	5.000	3.814	1.268	4.000
Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educarist.	361	1.000	5.000	3.745	1.257	4.000
Even though I did not major in early education at university, the practical knowledge and profession	361	1.000	5.000	3.828	1.249	4.000
Patience plays a vital role in the education of infants and young children.	361	1.000	5.000	3.817	1.192	4.000
Good communication skills enable me to communicate with children and parents smoothly, and this skill	361	1.000	5.000	3.723	1.211	4.000
I am confident in my ability to teach infants and young children.	361	1.000	5.000	3.787	1.250	4.000
I have knowledge and skills related to infant and children care.	361	1.000	5.000	3.731	1.226	4.000
I have the ability to create a safe and healthy environment for infants and young children.	361	1.000	5.000	3.787	1.246	4.000

Items	N of samples	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
I have the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children.	361	1.0005.000	3.839	1.216	4.000	
I have the ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and yo	361	1.0005.000	3.673	1.206	4.000	
I have the ability to promote positive social-emotional development in infants and young children.	361	1.0005.000	3.748	1.261	4.000	

As shown in Table 4, the descriptive analysis for section 3 of the questionnaire on job satisfaction and challenges shows that the Educacist respondents have a moderate level of satisfaction with their job in early childhood education, with a mean score of 3.798 and a standard deviation of 1.232. They also find their job fulfilling and meaningful, with a mean score of 3.814 and a standard deviation of 1.221.

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis of Section 3

Items	N of samples	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
I am satisfied with my job in early childhood education.	361	1.0005.000	3.798	1.232	4.000	
I find my job in early childhood education fulfilling and meaningful.	361	1.0005.000	3.814	1.221	4.000	
I face challenges in my job in early childhood education, but I am able to overcome them.	361	1.0005.000	3.762	1.217	4.000	

However, they face challenges in their job, but they are able to overcome them, with a mean score of 3.762 and a standard deviation of 1.217. Overall, the respondents have a positive attitude towards their job in early childhood education, although they face challenges. This information can be helpful for Educacists and policymakers to improve job satisfaction and retention in the early childhood education workforce.

4.3.3 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to analyze relationships among a large number of variables and to explain these variables in terms of their standard underlying dimensions or factors. In the context of our research on the competency qualities of Educacist, we have decided to use factor analysis on the 12 items in section 2 of our questionnaire related to job quality and competencies. Before conducting the factor analysis, we first performed a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. As shown in Table 5, the KMO test showed a value of 0.977, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a p-value of 0.000, indicating that there was the sufficient correlation between the variables to conduct a factor analysis.

Table 5 KMO and Bartlett test

KMO	0.977
Approx. Chi-Square	3577.039
Bartlett test	<i>df</i> 66
	<i>p</i> value 0.000

As shown in Table 6, the factor analysis of the section 2 questions on job quality and competencies revealed a high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.977) and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity (approx. Chi-Square = 3577.039, df = 66, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the data is suitable for factor analysis. The total variance explained showed that the first factor explained 69.279% of the variance. The factor loading (rotated) table shows that all the items have factor loadings above 0.8, indicating a strong correlation with the first factor. Additionally, the communalities for each item were all above 0.6, indicating that the first factor explains a large proportion of the variance in each item.

Table 6 Factor loading (Rotated)

Items	Factor	Communalities
	loading	Factor 1
I love children and want to work with them.	0.828	0.686
Passion and interest are the strong motivation for my work and the primary consideration for my job	0.834	0.696
Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educuarist.	0.836	0.698
Even though I did not major in early education at university, the practical knowledge and profession	0.845	0.713
Patience plays a vital role in the education of infants and young children.	0.817	0.668
Good communication skills enable me to communicate with children and parents smoothly, and this skill	0.817	0.668
I am confident in my ability to teach infants and young children.	0.837	0.700
I have knowledge and skills related to infant and children care.	0.837	0.701
I have the ability to create a safe and healthy environment for infants and young children.	0.830	0.688
I have the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children.	0.843	0.710
I have the ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and yo	0.829	0.686
I have the ability to promote positive social-emotional development in infants and young children.	0.835	0.697

Note: Blue indicates that the absolute value of loading is greater than 0.4, and red indicates that the communality is less than 0.4.

Therefore, the first factor can be interpreted as the key competencies of Educuarist, including their love for children, passion and interest for the job, professional knowledge, practical skills, patience, good communication skills, confidence in teaching, knowledge and skills related to children care, ability to create a safe and healthy environment, ability to identify and respond to developmental needs, ability to design and implement appropriate activities, and ability to promote positive social-emotional development.

As shown in Table 7, the results of the factor analysis show that the 12 competency statements related to early childhood education were highly correlated with each other, indicating that they can be explained by a single factor. The KMO value of 0.977 and the Bartlett test's significant p-value support the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The factor analysis results showed that all the items had factor loadings higher than 0.4 on the single factor extracted, indicating good construct validity. The factor loading ranged from 0.817 to 0.845, and the communalities ranged from 0.668 to 0.713. The component score

coefficient matrix shows that all the items had similar component scores, suggesting that the 12 competency statements are equally crucial for Educacist's job quality and competencies.

Table 7 Component Score Coefficient Matrix

Items	Component 1
I love children and want to work with them.	0.100
Passion and interest are the strong motivation for my work and the primary consideration for my job	0.100
Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educacist.	0.101
Even though I did not major in early education at university, the practical knowledge and profession	0.102
Patience plays a vital role in the education of infants and young children.	0.098
Good communication skills enable me to communicate with children and parents smoothly, and this skill	0.098
I am confident in my ability to teach infants and young children.	0.101
I have knowledge and skills related to infant and children care.	0.101
I have the ability to create a safe and healthy environment for infants and young children.	0.100
I have the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children.	0.101
I have the ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and yo	0.100
I have the ability to promote positive social-emotional development in infants and young children.	0.100

Hence, the findings suggest that Educacist should possess a range of competencies, including a love for children, passion, and interest in the field, professional knowledge, practical skills, patience, communication skills, confidence, knowledge of child care, ability to create a safe and healthy environment, ability to identify and respond to developmental needs, ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities, and ability to promote positive social-emotional development.

4.3.4 Pearson Correlation

Pearson correlation analysis is a statistical technique used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between variables.

Based on the Pearson correlation analysis, there are some interesting findings in relation to the variables studied. As shown in table 8, the variables "Education Level" and "Years of Work Experience in Early Childhood Education" show a significant positive correlation with the item "I have knowledge and skills related to infant and children care" ($r = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that individuals with higher education levels and more years of work experience in early childhood education are more likely to possess knowledge and skills related to infant and children care. Additionally, the item "Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educacist" shows a weak negative correlation with the variable "Years of Work Experience in Early Childhood Education" ($r = -0.060$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that as the years of work experience increase, the importance of professional knowledge may decrease. Finally, gender and age do not appear to have significant correlations with the items

studied, except for a weak positive correlation between age and the item "Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educuarist" ($r = 0.029$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 8 Pearson Correlation

	Age	Gender	Education Level	Years of Work Experience in Early Childhood Education
I love children and want to work with them.	0.053	0.055	0.076	0.018
Passion and interest are the strong motivation for my work and the primary consideration for my job	-0.020	0.016	-0.022	-0.026
Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educuarist.	0.029	0.000	0.081	-0.060
Even though I did not major in early education at university, the practical knowledge and profession	0.013	0.040	0.081	-0.077
Patience plays a vital role in the education of infants and young children.	-0.045	0.011	0.033	-0.007
Good communication skills enable me to communicate with children and parents smoothly, and this skil	0.030	0.019	-0.017	-0.016
I am confident in my ability to teach infants and young children.	-0.008	0.001	0.062	-0.045
I have knowledge and skills related to infant and children care.	0.032	0.028	0.105*	-0.096
I have the ability to promote positive social-emotional development in infants and young children.	-0.010	-0.012	0.037	-0.020
I have the ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and yo	-0.046	0.035	0.021	-0.052
I have the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children.	0.017	0.064	0.042	-0.038
I have the ability to create a safe and healthy environment for infants and young children.	-0.041	0.058	0.041	-0.049

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the competencies and requirements for Educuarists in early education institutions in Guangdong Province, China, using various methods. The study employed job postings analysis, interview studies, a questionnaire survey, descriptive analysis, factor analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis to explore the key competencies, experiences, challenges, and demographic characteristics of Educuarists.

The results of the job posting analysis revealed that the two prominent early education agencies in Guangzhou, BBUGO and MyGym, have varying requirements for Educuarists in terms of educational backgrounds and work experience. However, both agencies value the importance of love, patience, good communication skills, and a passion for working with children.

The findings of the interview study supported the importance of these values. Also, they emphasized the need for Educuarists to have a solid understanding of child development, the ability to design developmentally appropriate activities for children, and the ability to adapt

to the needs of individual children, including those with diverse cultural backgrounds and special needs.

The questionnaire survey results provided valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of Educators in Guangdong Province, with the majority of respondents being female and having a junior college diploma. The descriptive analysis of the data showed that Educators considered professional knowledge, practical skills, and the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children to be important competencies. Educators also faced challenges in their work, including addressing challenging behaviors in children, balancing the needs of different children in the classroom, and keeping up-to-date with current research and best practices in early childhood education. The results of the factor analysis revealed that the critical competencies of Educators can be explained by a single factor, including their love for children, passion and interest for the job, professional knowledge, practical skills, patience, good communication skills, confidence in teaching, knowledge, and skills related to children care, ability to create a safe and healthy environment, ability to identify and respond to developmental needs, ability to design and implement appropriate activities, and ability to promote positive social-emotional development. Additionally, the results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed that education level and years of work experience in early childhood education had a significant positive correlation with knowledge and skills related to infant and child care. In contrast, the importance of professional knowledge decreased with increasing years of work experience.

Hence, the present study highlights the importance of love, patience, good communication skills, and a passion for working with children as critical competencies for Educators in early education institutions in Guangdong Province. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for Educators to possess a solid understanding of child development, the ability to design developmentally appropriate activities for children, and the ability to adapt to the needs of individual children.

In order to present Educator's competencies in a more straightforward way, we have categorized and graded the competencies distilled from the research. The classification of the competencies in the table into three levels is based on the hierarchy of competencies that are necessary for Educators to perform their job effectively. As shown in Table 9, it presents a competency model for Educators in early education institutions in Guangdong Province, China. The model is divided into foundational, intermediate, and advanced competencies. Foundational competencies include love for children, passion for the job, professional knowledge, practical skills, patience, and the ability to communicate with children. Intermediate competencies include designing developmentally appropriate activities, identifying and responding to developmental needs, promoting positive social-emotional development, creating a safe and healthy environment, and having good communication skills. Advanced competencies include leadership and management skills, the ability to conduct action research, develop and implement innovative curriculum, effectively communicate with parents and other Educators, train and mentor other Educators, and address challenging behaviors in children. The competencies were selected based on their relevance to Educators' job requirements, as identified through job postings, interviews, and a survey of Educators in Guangdong Province.

Table 9 Educator's Competency Model

Level 1: Foundational Competencies	Level 2: Intermediate Competencies	Level 3: Advanced Competencies
Love for children Passion and interest for the job Professional knowledge Practical skills Patience Ability to communicate with children ——	Ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and young children Ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children Ability to promote positive social-emotional development in infants and young children Ability to create a safe and healthy environment for infants and young children Good communication skills Confidence in ability to teach Knowledge and skills related to infant and children care	Leadership and management skills Ability to conduct action research to improve teaching practice Ability to develop and implement innovative curriculum Ability to effectively communicate with parents and other Educarists Ability to train and mentor other Educarists Ability to address challenging behaviors in children Ability to work with children from diverse cultural backgrounds and special needs

The study's findings can inform the development of training programs, ongoing professional development for Educarists, and the design and implementation of high-quality early childhood education programs in China. Based on the study results, a competency model for Educarists in early education institutions in Guangdong Province can be proposed, emphasizing the importance of the critical competencies identified in the study.

Appendix 1 Recruitment Information

Company name	Education Background	Major	Work Experience	Responsibilities	Other requirements description	Website
BBU GO	Junior College Diploma or above	Education Related	1 year or above Fresh graduate also can be accepted	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make teaching plans and teach courses according to the curriculum content of the center to ensure the quality of teaching; 2. Timely adjust and solve the problems in the teaching process; 3. Maintain and manage the classroom and teaching AIDS, sort and file students' works; 4. Timely communicate with parents according to children's performance in class, and provide effective parenting guidance; 5. Other tasks assigned by superior. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love education, love children, love, patience; 2. Affinity, outgoing, standard Mandarin; 3. Strong learning ability and desire; 4. Good communication skills and teamwork spirit. 	https://jobs.51job.com/guangzhou-thq/140155830.html?s=sou_soulb&t=0_0
MyGym	Bachelor degree & above	Priority to major in Children Education or English	None	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responsible for delivering courses in high quality; 2. Responsible for maintaining teaching equipment in order to made them in normal service condition; 3. Providing professional child-rearing information to parents; 4. Assisting for the marketing promotion. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Excellent command of English (CET4/CET6/TEM4 or above) , 2. Love and patient, enjoy working with children; 3. Outgoing, energetic, passionate, and cheerful; 4. Available for working at weekends. 	https://jobs.51job.com/guangzhou-hzq/138826686.html?s=sou_soulb&t=0_0

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

1. How do you define an effective Educator?
2. Can you describe the most important competencies an Educator should possess?
3. How do you balance the needs of different children in a classroom?
4. What are some strategies you use to ensure all children are engaged and participating in learning activities?
5. Can you describe a time when you had to adapt your teaching approach to meet the needs of a particular child?

6. How do you stay up-to-date with current research and best practices in early childhood education?
7. Can you provide an example of how you have incorporated cultural diversity into your teaching?
8. Can you discuss your approach to communication and collaboration with parents and other Educarists?
9. Can you describe a time when you had to address a challenging behavior in a child? How did you handle it?
10. How do you incorporate technology into your teaching? Can you give an example of a successful use of technology in your classroom?

Appendix 3 Questionnaire Survey

Section 1: Basic Information

- Gender: Male / Female / Other
- Age
- Education Level: High School / Junior College Diploma / Bachelor's Degree / Master's Degree / Doctoral Degree
- Years of Work Experience in Early Childhood Education

Section 2: Job Quality and Competencies

Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

1. I love children and want to work with them.
2. Passion and interest are the strong motivation for my work and the primary consideration for my job choice.
3. Professional knowledge plays an essential role in the work of Educarist.
4. Even though I did not major in early education at university, the practical knowledge and professional training I have accumulated in work can still enable me to do this job well.
5. Patience plays a vital role in the education of infants and young children.
6. Good communication skills enable me to communicate with children and parents smoothly, and this skill is essential in my work.
7. I am confident in my ability to teach infants and young children.
8. I have knowledge and skills related to infant and children care.
9. I have the ability to create a safe and healthy environment for infants and young children.
10. I have the ability to identify and respond to the developmental needs of infants and young children.
11. I have the ability to design and implement developmentally appropriate activities for infants and young children.
12. I have the ability to promote positive social-emotional development in infants and young children.

Section 3: Job Satisfaction and Challenges

Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

13. I am satisfied with my job in early childhood education.
14. I find my job in early childhood education fulfilling and meaningful.
15. I face challenges in my job in early childhood education, but I am able to overcome them.

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your feedback is valuable to our research.

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