

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**IMPLEMENTATION OF MONTESSORI ACTIVITY-BASED LEARNING IN MALAYSIA: TEACHERS' RETROSPECTIVE**<sup>1</sup>Padmany Gonaseran, <sup>1\*</sup>Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman<sup>\*</sup>[mohdnazri\\_ar@um.edu.my](mailto:mohdnazri_ar@um.edu.my)<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education, Universiti of Malaya, Malaysia**ABSTRACT**

*The research investigates how Malaysian kindergarten teachers apply the Montessori activity-based learning approach. Using qualitative methods, researchers interviewed three female educators between 30-35 years old, who had taught for 1-4 years. Results indicated that teachers viewed the Montessori approach favourably, noting its positive impact on children's growth across various domains including practical skills, sensory development, mathematical understanding, linguistic abilities, and cultural awareness. The study also identified several obstacles, including limited parent understanding, varying student requirements, and inadequate professional development opportunities. A significant challenge emerged from parents' expectations and misunderstandings, with some expressing concern about reduced focus on conventional academic exercises, particularly writing tasks. The research emphasizes several requirements: ongoing teacher education and programs to inform parents. The study suggests implementing more comprehensive professional development, adopting varied assessment strategies, and organizing parent education sessions to enhance understanding of Montessori principles.*

**Keywords:** Montessori, Activity-based learning, Early Childhood Education, Teachers' perspective

**INTRODUCTION**

The Montessori approach which was developed in the nineteenth century defined as early involvement for children with special needs (Danner and Fowler, 2015). It eventually was developed into a teaching method for all preschool children. The Five elements of Montessori Education are trained Montessori teachers, multi-aged classrooms, the materials which are specially designed provide a hands-on approach to learning, child-directed work and an extended period of "free choice" which enables students to work at their own pace and without interruption.

Activity-based learning provides students with an engaging and productive educational experience. Rather than passively receiving information from teachers, children participate in practical exercises that enhance their understanding of concepts. This interactive approach makes the learning process both stimulating and pleasant. Collaborative group work allows children to develop teamwork skills and exchange different perspectives. Children are encouraged to develop independent problem-solving abilities and use their imagination. This teaching method equips children with essential

skills needed for everyday situations requiring critical thinking and collaboration.

Curtis (1998) highlighted the challenge that preschool teachers face with having to cover all principles of the kindergarten curriculum and finding creative method for children to engage with the curriculum content. Montessori teachers guide children through a prepared environment; ideas are successfully transferred. Within this context, the teacher acts as a facilitator who helps children discover their way of learning. Maria Montessori's educational philosophy recognizes children as creative and active individuals who can direct their own learning journey in a Montessori environment. The Montessori approach emphasizes close observation of student progress, while teachers serve multiple crucial functions: they prepare the learning environment, provide guidance, observe student development, and offer educational leadership within the classroom setting (Aljabreen, 2017, p.54).

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Montessori teachers face several challenges. Children with diverse abilities and

language backgrounds can pose challenges for teachers who aim to meet the individual needs of each student. While the Montessori approach is valuable for teaching English to young students, there can be situations where specific educational content or learning activities do not completely match the method's principles. This can require teachers to adapt their approach quickly and employ alternative teaching techniques to ensure that all children can participate and understand the lesson. (Kai Jian & Syahtia Pane, 2020).

Furthermore, Montessori teachers who have received training in the Montessori approach often lack opportunities for ongoing professional development or in-service training. (Atli et al., 2016). Moreover, Montessori teachers also feel that mixed-age groups always make it difficult to balance the requirements of the children. (Atis-Akyol et al., 2023).

## OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The main objective of this study is to explore teachers' experiences with the Montessori Activity-based learning approach.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was applied in this study. According to Meriam.S.B (2009), education research frequently employs qualitative methodology as its primary investigative approach, enabling researchers to understand and analyze specific phenomena through data collection methods such as observations, interviews, and document reviews. The present study is to explore the experiences of teachers who are based on a Montessori activity-based learning approach. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with the teachers.

This study is comprised of three teachers who serve at a kindergarten applying a Montessori activity-based learning approach. The sampling is entirely consist of female teachers aged between 30 and 35 years. It was seen that all the teachers are degree holders in Early Childhood Education. Participants had varying duration of exposure to Montessori activity-based learning, ranging from one to four years. One had practised it for a year, another for two years, while one had four years of experience with this learning method. The interview was consist of three items covering personal information and

seven items regarding their experience and approach. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and had obtained permission for voice recording to avoid incomplete or wrong data collection. The interviews lasted for 60 minutes.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The teachers who use the Montessori approach have mixed opinions about it. Their opinions were categorized into groups and common themes were identified.

*Understanding the aim of the curriculum.* When the teachers were asked about the aim of the Montessori curriculum, all the teachers were able to describe further about the aim. When the question was asked about the core principle and key areas of the curriculum, two teachers explained the points in detail, but the teacher with one year's experience was still confused about the details.

*Basic quality requirement for teachers in the Montessori approach.* Two of the teachers stressed that those who practice Montessori teaching methods must be people with a genuine fondness for children, showing them both consideration and acceptance. Another teacher said that the teacher must know how to guide children in understanding their potential.

*Education on the Montessori activity-based learning approach.* All the teachers said that they were sent for training for six months by the organization after three months they joined. The earlier three-month period is for them to observe how the learning process by experienced teachers in the organization.

*Sufficiency of teacher's training in the Montessori activity-based learning approach.* When asked "Do u find training in the Montessori approach is sufficient?", two teachers found that the education was sufficient in both theoretical and practical terms. However, another teacher found that the teachers should engage in ongoing professional development.

*Alignment of curriculum with expectations of parents.* Two of the teachers found that the parents were satisfied with the curriculum and how the learning process was conducted. The curriculum is aligned with the parents' expectations. However, a teacher said some parents criticize the curriculum and expect writing work should be enhanced more. This is because of less awareness from the parents.

*The effectiveness of child assessment in Montessori activity-based learning approach.* Each teacher has a different view of the child assessment in the Montessori approach. A teacher found that the observational assessment is effective because it provides a holistic view of a child's learning and development. Another teacher found that children should be assessed using traditional assessment tools by giving them paper-based exams. This can reduce test anxiety when they move to primary school. Meanwhile, another teacher found that the approach should emphasise observational and traditional assessment.

*Challenges teaching in Montessori activity-based learning approach.* All the teachers found that parents' lack of awareness is one of the major challenges in this approach. The parents who are unfamiliar with the Montessori approach often express concerns about the learning process. The major complaints are about limited academic focus, difficulty in assessing progress and lack of structure and discipline.

The relevant literature examines how this Montessori approach affects child development through five key areas of study: practical life, sensorial, mathematics, language and cultural studies with positive findings (Demangeon et al., 2023); Ozerem et al, 2013). This was similar to the views of three teachers interviewed in this study. They found that there is a positive effect on child development with the Montessori approach. Meanwhile, teacher's views on engaging in ongoing professional development were similar to those found in Atli et al., (2016).

## CONCLUSION

Research into Malaysian Montessori teachers' experiences reveals significant insights about activity-based learning implementation. The educators demonstrated favourable attitudes toward the Montessori educational framework, particularly its role in supporting children's developmental progress. The study identified several key obstacles, including limited understanding among parents, varying student learning requirements, and the importance of continuous teacher training. Results indicate that although the Montessori method provides notable educational advantages, its effective implementation relies on multiple elements, such as adequate teacher training, and active participation from parents.

This study can be extended through additional research by examining how parents view and understand the Montessori educational method to facilitate better communication and collaborative relationships. The research suggests on implementation of informational sessions and educational meetings for parents to help them better comprehend the Montessori educational system while addressing their questions and misunderstandings.

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