

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS AT TASKA AL - BAGHDADI: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the teaching and learning approaches implemented at Taska Al-Baghdadi through an interview with an experienced educator. The findings reveal that the learning through play approach forms the core foundation in supporting children's holistic development, covering cognitive, physical, emotional, and social aspects. Key strengths include the use of creative teaching aids, well planned thematic activities according to age groups, and an emphasis on enjoyable learning experiences beyond academics. However, several challenges were identified, such as classroom management issues and helping new children adapt to daily routines. In conclusion, the teaching practices at Taska Al-Baghdadi reflect a strong commitment to providing high quality early childhood education aligned with child development theories and parents' aspirations for their children's wellbeing and overall growth from an early age.

Keywords: *Children's Holistic Development, Learning Approaches, Creative Teaching Aid.*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is a crucial requirement in ensuring that the development of infants and toddlers occurs holistically from an early age. This is particularly important for children from birth to six years old, which is considered a critical period in laying the foundation for growth and overall development. At this stage, children are undergoing rapid development in cognitive, emotional, social, and physical aspects. According to Jean Piaget's theory of development, infants and toddlers fall within the sensorimotor and early pre-operational stages, where they learn primarily through direct experiences and interaction with their environment. During this age, social and emotional development is also heavily influenced by close relationships with caregivers or teachers. Therefore, childcare institutions (Taska) serve not only as daily care centres but also as foundational platforms to provide appropriate stimulation that supports balanced and holistic development.

Despite the increasing number of childcare centres across the country, concerns regarding inconsistent quality of care and education remain prevalent, especially when some centres fail to meet the guidelines and standards set by the authorities. Furthermore, modern parents' aspirations for early childhood education are steadily increasing in line with changing lifestyles and the challenges of the 21st century.

They seek a childcare environment (Taska) that is not only safe and hygienic but also capable of supporting the holistic development of their children, including communication skills, moral values, and early literacy. Therefore, teachers or caregivers, particularly in Taska, must be equipped with knowledge, pedagogical skills, and a deep sensitivity to child development in order to plan and implement activities that are appropriate to the age and individual needs of each child. This study aims to explore the approaches and implementation of teaching and learning in Taska, to evaluate the extent to which they

meet the expectations and needs of today's parents. The study also considers key aspects such as the teaching methods used, the roles of caregivers or educators, and the appropriateness of activities in relation to the developmental stages of children. By examining these elements, this study hopes to provide a clearer picture of whether the current approaches practised in Taska are effective in supporting holistic child development and align with the expectations of modern parents who increasingly emphasise the quality of early education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. Identify the teaching and learning approaches implemented in childcare centres (Taska) for infants and toddlers.
2. Aims to evaluate the extent to which these approaches align with and fulfil the aspirations and expectations of modern parents, who increasingly emphasise the importance of holistic child development within a safe, stimulating, and high-quality environment.
3. The study seeks to propose relevant improvements to strengthen the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices in Taska, ensuring they are more in line with the developmental needs of early childhood.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative method using a structured interview approach to obtain in depth information regarding the teaching and learning approaches implemented at a private childcare centre, namely Taska Al-Baghdadi Sandakan, Sabah. This childcare centre (Taska) was selected due to its active enrolment of infants and toddlers, and its team of experienced educators and supervisors. The interview was conducted with a supervisor who has extensive experience in managing the operations of the Taska and is directly involved in the implementation of teaching and learning activities at the centre. The interview was carried out face to face at the

Taska, with the respondent's consent, to gain insights into their views, experiences, and actual practices in planning and conducting activities with infants and toddlers. The research instrument used was a set of interview questions developed based on the study's objectives, covering aspects such as teaching approaches, appropriateness of activities, the role of caregivers, and perspectives on the aspirations of modern parents. The information and findings obtained were analysed and discussed in greater depth.

RESEARCH FINDINGS IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Based on the interview conducted at Taska Al-Baghdadi, several key themes were identified regarding the teaching and learning approaches practised at the institution. The findings indicate that the approaches used by educators are not limited to basic daily activities, but also include early stimulation methods that are appropriate to the developmental stages of infants and toddlers. The respondent shared their experiences, insights, and challenges in striving to meet the holistic developmental needs of children, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects. Among the points highlighted were the importance of providing a safe and enjoyable learning environment, the need to understand each stage of child development, and the role of the educator as a facilitator in the learning process.

Based on the interview with Teacher Hana at Taska Al-Baghdadi, it was found that the centre adopts a variety of teaching and learning approaches that focus on the holistic development of children through systematically planned activities. One of the main approaches used is the play-based learning concept, which emphasises informal learning in a fun and interactive environment.

In addition, both fine motor and gross motor activities are incorporated to stimulate children's physical development

and coordination. Activities such as block stacking, drawing, and playing in outdoor play areas help strengthen these skills. Sensory activities such as exposure to different smells, colours, and sounds are also implemented to stimulate the senses and support more effective learning. An example of an activity carried out for toddlers is a hands-on learning experience called "Moo-ving", where children simulate milking a cow using a replica and then taste the milk, allowing them to feel as though they are in a real-life scenario. This activity stimulates multiple senses, particularly touch and taste, and also provides opportunities for role playing, which is an important element in social and imaginative development.

Furthermore, the Taska provides designated learning and play areas, such as the Busy Corner and Quiet Corner. The Busy Corner is intended for active, creative, and exploratory activities such as block building, role play, or drawing. The Quiet Corner, on the other hand, is designed as a calm space for activities like reading, resting, or focused individual tasks. These designated areas allow children to choose activities based on their interests and needs, while also supporting learning in a more flexible and responsive environment.

Based on the interview with Teacher Hana also, besides providing early exposure to literacy and numeracy through basic activities such as recognizing letters, numbers, shapes, and colors using worksheets or pencils, they also design various engaging teaching aids made from recycled materials. This approach aims to make learning sessions more interesting and to prevent boredom among children. Additionally, learning activities are planned thematically with a more systematic and structured approach.

In addition, the respondent noted that activities are differentiated by age group, particularly between infants and toddlers. For infants, activities focus more on sensory and emotional stimulation, such as touch, soft music, and basic interactive

activities. For example, in the daily routine, infants and toddlers start their day with 'Circle Time,' during which infants also participate under the guidance of the teacher. Meanwhile, activities for toddlers become more complex and involve more active movement and social interaction, in line with their growing abilities. According to Teacher Hana, such teaching and learning approaches can have a more significant impact, especially for parents who expect holistic development for their children. She emphasized that the Taska does not focus solely on academic aspects but stresses the overall development of the child. She also linked this approach to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory, which introduces eight main types of intelligence, including linguistic, logical mathematical, visual spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence. Therefore, by understanding that each child has different strengths and learning styles, teachers can plan more suitable activities that support the unique potential of every individual.

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The implementation of teaching and learning in early childhood centres(Taska) inevitably faces various challenges, particularly when it involves young children who are still in the early stages of development. Findings from an interview with Teacher Hana revealed several important issues faced by educators in their efforts to implement effective teaching approaches at Taska Al-Baghdadi. One of the main challenges identified isensuring that children especially those who are new to the taska are able to adapt to the daily learning routines.

This adjustment process does not occur instantly, as each child comes from different backgrounds, with varying early experiences and levels of readiness. Some children may display signs of anxiety when separated from their parents, feel shy or fearful in a new environment, and show a

high level of dependency on their caregivers. In such situations, teachers need to adopt a supportive approach, including giving individual attention and building secure and nurturing relationships to help children transition more smoothly into the new environment.

Another challenge highlighted by Teacher Hana relates to classroom and behaviour management. Managing a group of active children with diverse personalities, attention spans, and levels of emotional maturity requires strong pedagogical skills and emotional regulation on the part of the teacher. Children may exhibit challenging behaviours such as screaming, fighting over toys, refusing to cooperate, or struggling to focus during group activities. This situation demands that teachers remain alert, flexible, and creative in adjusting their teaching strategies to suit the children's needs and emotional states. Overall, the findings of this study provide insight into the implementation of teaching and learning at this taska. In addition to planning activities that are appropriate to the developmental stages of young children, teachers also face various daily challenges. Therefore, this highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach in supporting early childhood education not only in terms of curriculum, but also in aspects such as behaviour management and fostering positive relationships between teachers and children.

SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

Establishing a consistent daily routine is a highly effective approach in helping children adapt to life at the nursery, especially those who are just entering formal care and early education settings. Children need a structured environment to feel safe and confident in new surroundings. When daily activities such as meal times, play, learning, and nap times are carried out consistently, children are able to anticipate what comes next. This, in turn, helps reduce feelings of fear, anxiety, and distress that are commonly

experienced when separating from their parents. A study by Selman (2023) also emphasized that in challenging environments, routines can serve as an important protective factor in supporting emotional stability and the overall well-being of children. A consistent routine also helps children become more emotionally and mentally prepared, which reduces excessive dependence on caregivers or teachers. For example, if children know that after playtime there will be learning activities such as reading, singing, or art, followed by meals and nap time, they will feel calmer and more settled. Furthermore, it also makes it easier for teachers to plan and implement teaching and learning activities effectively.

Next, to overcome behaviour problems, teachers need to adopt various effective and child-friendly strategies. Among them are setting simple and clear rules and using visual aids such as pictures or symbols to help children understand and remember these rules. In this context, the use of both positive and negative reinforcement is also highly effective. Positive reinforcement includes rewards like praise, stickers, or extra playtime when children display desired behaviors, while negative reinforcement involves the removal of unpleasant stimuli. Both methods help shape better behavior through social learning.

Additionally, in managing challenging behaviors, approaches such as 'time in' and calm-down corners that are educational rather than punitive can help children better regulate their emotions. According to a study by Holden et al. (2022), the 'time in' technique has been proven effective in helping children manage their emotions and behaviors more positively. The study emphasizes that approaches involving emotional support and close interaction between teachers and children can enhance self-regulation skills and reduce challenging behaviors. Therefore, daily activities should be planned with a balanced mix of active and quiet tasks, tailored to children's interests and attention levels to promote better engagement and discipline

during learning sessions.

DISCUSSION

The teaching and learning approaches implemented at Taska Al-Baghdadi demonstrate several notable strengths. The play based learning approach used is well suited to the natural developmental needs of young children, who learn through direct experiences and interaction with their environment. Activities such as fine and gross motor play, sensory stimulation, and early exposure to literacy and numeracy effectively support the holistic development of children cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially.

In addition, the differentiation of activities based on the developmental stages of infants and toddlers shows a clear effort to tailor teaching methods according to the needs and abilities of each age group. The approach used at Taska Al-Baghdadi also shares significant similarities with the Montessori education philosophy, which emphasizes learning based on the natural development of children and encourages freedom within a structured environment. One of the core principles of the Montessori approach is "follow the child", which means allowing children to learn at their own pace and according to their interests. At Taska Al-Baghdadi, children are given the opportunity to choose activities that interest them for example, deciding whether they want to play with building blocks, do coloring, or engage in sensory play. Although the taska plans learning activities, teachers do not force children to participate. Instead, they guide and support children based on their individual interests. This freedom to choose encourages natural learning that aligns with each child's interests and developmental stage.

In addition, the prepared environment provided at the taska aligns with another key Montessori principle. Teachers create a learning space that is organized, safe, and equipped with stimulating materials such as educational

toys, reading corners, and physical activity areas. For instance, a sensory play corner using sand and water helps stimulate sensory development and fine motor coordination. Such an environment allows children to explore freely while still being within a structured and well managed setting. Furthermore, the differences in activities according to the age levels of infants and toddlers demonstrate the nursery's efforts to respect the individual development of each child. For example, infants are more often exposed to simple sensory play, while toddlers are given the opportunity to engage in gross motor activities such as stacking large blocks or playing on slides. This proves that Taska Al-Baghdadi tailors its teaching approach to suit the natural developmental abilities of children, in line with the Montessori principle of valuing the uniqueness of every individual.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the interview-based study conducted at a private childcare centre provides a comprehensive overview of the management, daily practices, and early childhood education approaches implemented. The findings indicate that Taska Al-Baghdadi strives to provide a safe, child-friendly environment that supports holistic development, encompassing cognitive, physical, emotional, and social aspects. The educators also demonstrated a strong commitment to their roles in guiding and educating children using approaches tailored to the age and individual developmental needs of each child. The use of play-based learning, the incorporation of creative teaching aids made from recycled materials, and theme-based activity planning all reflect their dedication to making learning more enjoyable and meaningful. Despite facing various challenges, the teachers showed ongoing efforts in supporting and guiding the children effectively. This study not only highlights the realities and strengths of teaching practices in private childcare centres but also provides valuable insights that can serve as a

guide for continuous improvement. In addition, the study is expected to contribute to the enhancement of early childhood education practices in Malaysia and to fulfil the aspirations of modern parents, who increasingly prioritise high-quality learning environments, the holistic development of their children, and strong early support systems to ensure a better future.

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