

RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAY-BASED TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS AT DARUL AULAAD NURSERY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the teaching and learning approach (PdP) for infants and toddlers at TASKA and its relationship with the aspirations of today's parents. This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews with TASKA teachers and is supported by highlights from early childhood education literature. The results of the study show that the main approach used is learning through play and child-centered activities, which are proven to help children's language, physical, social, emotional and self-confidence development. Parents' aspirations are now not only focused on safety aspects, but also emphasize the development of communication, socialization and readiness for preschool. However, some challenges were identified such as high teacher-child ratios, differences in individual developmental levels and time constraints that affect the effectiveness of PdP. Overall, the existing approach is seen to be successful in meeting the majority of parents' expectations, but still requires improvement in terms of communication, teacher training and parent cooperation to support the holistic development of children.

Keywords: *Early childhood education, learning while playing approach, parents aspirations, (Childcare Centres) TASKA.*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an important foundation that forms the overall development of a person. The baby and toddler phase (0–3 years) is considered the "golden age" because it is during this period that brain development occurs most rapidly. Neurological studies have found that early childhood experiences, whether positive or negative, will leave long-term effects on cognitive, language, emotional, and social formation (Chaudry & Sandstrom, 2020).

Therefore, the implementation of the teaching and learning approach (PdP) in TASKA needs to be systematically planned, responsive, and developmentally friendly to meet the needs of children in this phase. Today's parents' aspirations for early childhood education are increasing due to awareness of the importance of the early years of life to the formation of their children's personality, academic abilities, and social ability (Salam & Zubir, 2024). In the Malaysian context, TASKA not only functions as a daycare place for babies and toddlers, but also as an early education institution that plays a role in forming the basis of their early skills.

Therefore, TASKA teachers bear a great responsibility in ensuring that the PdP approach used is developmentally friendly, effective and capable of meeting parents' expectations.

However, the implementation of this approach often faces challenges, such as time constraints, large numbers of children, different levels of development, as well as high expectations from parents. This study was conducted to review how TASKA teachers implement the PdP approach for infants and toddlers and evaluate the extent to which the approach meets the aspirations of today's parents. This study uses teacher interview methods and library research support to provide a comprehensive overview of practices at TASKA.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is to identify the teaching and learning approach used by TASKA teachers in educating infants and toddlers. This study aims to evaluate the appropriateness of teaching and learning approaches with the developmental level of infants and toddlers. This article aims to identify teachers' views on parents' aspirations for their children's development at TASKA.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses qualitative approach with design case studies, which examines in depth the experiences of nursery teachers in implementing teaching and learning approaches for infants and toddlers. The selection of this design is relevant because it allows the researcher to understand more comprehensively how the teaching method is applied in the real environment, in addition to providing space to research the factors that influence the successful implementation of the approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative approach is also important in the context of early childhood education research because it allows educators' voices, real experiences and challenges they face to be analyzed in depth, rather than just based on numbers or quantitative data. Participants: This study involves a TASKA teacher as the main respondent, namely Cik Nur Ainun Aqilah binti Che Kamarudin, aged 24, who is a teacher at TASKA Darul Aulaad. She has three years of experience in the field of early childhood education, and actively runs a group of infants and toddlers. Among the children at the center, she is affectionately known as "Teacher Qila", a caring and dedicated educator in ensuring that the teaching and learning process (PdP) runs in a fun and appropriate way according to the level of development of the children.

Data Collection Strategy

In this study, the main data collection method is a semi-structured interview with a nursery teacher who has experience handling babies under 12 months and toddlers aged 1 to 3 years. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide a balance between guiding questions prepared by the researcher with opportunities for teachers to share views and experiences more openly (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This method can gather detailed information about teaching approaches, daily challenges, PdP adaptation strategies according to children's developmental levels, as well as teachers' perceptions of current parents' aspirations. In addition to interviews, this study is also supported by research which includes journal articles, academic books, and previous reports related to early childhood pedagogy, specifically about infant and toddler learning

approaches. The supporting data from this article is important to strengthen the findings of interviews with teachers as well as provide a comparison of whether teachers' experiences in kindergarten are consistent with theories or best practices reported by scholars.

Data Analysis

Overall, the design of this qualitative case study allows the researcher to delve into the experience of a nursery teacher, understand the practical challenges faced, as well as evaluate the alignment of PdP practice with the theory and aspirations of parents. With this approach, the study not only produces a rich picture of the real situation, but also provides a solid basis for making recommendations for improvements in the implementation of the PdP approach for infants and toddlers in Malaysia.

RESULTS

The interview results show that Teacher Qila uses a child-centered approach and learning through play as the main basis of teaching and learning (PdP). According to the teacher, babies and toddlers learn best through concrete experiences, senses and interaction with the environment. Therefore, PdP activities are planned in the form of sensory games, music, fine and gross motor movements, as well as daily routine activities that promote natural learning. To support language development, Teacher Qila also uses a lot of singing, reading picture books, and daily conversations with the children. One of the activities carried out is that every morning, the teacher will start the learning session with activities circle time where children sit in a circle to sing good morning songs, have a short conversation and learn about the day and the weather. This activity not only creates a cheerful and friendly atmosphere, but also helps children's social, language and self-confidence development.

For physical development, teachers provide activities such as crawling, walking with assistance, playing blocks, as well as balance and coordination games. From a social aspect, teachers encourage children to share toys, play in groups and wait their turn, while for emotional development, teachers often give hugs, positive words and encouragement so that children feel safe and loved.

According to Teacher Qila, today's parents have high aspirations for their children's development. They not only emphasize the

aspect of care, but also want the children to receive quality early education. Parents hope that children speak quickly, are good at interacting, are independent, and have the basics of learning before entering preschool. Teachers think that the PdP approach practiced at TASKA has now succeeded in fulfilling most of those expectations.

However, teachers admit that there are some major challenges in the implementation of PdP. Among them is the difference in the Among the suggestions for improvement include increasing the number of teachers to reduce the student ratio, providing continuous professional training, as well as adding teaching aids suitable for the age of infants and toddlers. The teacher also stressed that parental support at home is very important to ensure the continuity of learning.

DISCUSSION

The interview findings show that the learning through playing approach is the main basis of PdP at TASKA. This is in line with the views of Salam and Zubir (2024) who assert that play is a natural characteristic of children and the most effective learning medium to build early skills. According to Li (2020), the play approach is not only fun but also stimulates cognitive, social, emotional, and language development simultaneously. The findings show that teachers also integrate learning in daily activities such as meal times, bathing and sleeping. This approach is supported by Mustaffa (2023) who explains that routine-based learning helps shape children's self-discipline and independent skills.

In addition, Vygotsky's developmental theory (1978) also emphasizes the importance of social interaction in early learning. The study found that there is a gap between the high aspirations of parents and the reality of PdP implementation at TASKA. Although parents hope that children will quickly master the language and become independent, teachers explain that children's development varies according to individual. This is in line with the views of Hassan et al. (2022) that each child has a unique rate of development that is influenced by the environment and stimuli received. Based on the findings and literature, several steps can be implemented to strengthen PdP at TASKA. Among the main recommendations are to increase the professional training of teachers, improve the teacher-child ratio, and strengthen

the involvement of parents.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study found that the teaching and learning approach implemented at TASKA for infants and toddlers is based on the concept of learning through play and routine-based learning. This approach is proven to be in line with the nature of children's development and able to meet most of the aspirations of today's parents who want their children to develop comprehensively in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects.

However, this study also found that there are some challenges that need attention, including the large number of children, differences in developmental levels, as well as teachers' time constraints. These challenges can be overcome through continuous professional training for teachers, improvement of the teacher-child ratio, and active involvement of parents in supporting children's development at home. This study provides an important contribution in understanding the reality of the implementation of PdP for infants and toddlers in TASKA. The results of these findings are expected to be a reference for nursery management and early childhood educators, as well as policy makers to strengthen higher quality teaching practices and meet the aspirations of parents and the needs of children in Malaysia.

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DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nik Aulia Insyirah Bt Ismail do not work for, consult, own shares in, or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this manuscript, and have disclosed no affiliations other than those noted above.

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