

RESEARCH ARTICLE

LIBRARY RESEARCH ON IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING AND PLAY-BASED LEARNING IN MALAYSIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS (TASKA)

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ABSTRACT

This library research investigates the implementation challenges of responsive caregiving and play-based learning in Malaysian childcare centers (TASKA) for infants and toddlers, focusing on alignment with parental aspirations from 2020 to 2025. By reviewing recent studies on holistic pedagogical methods, parental involvement, staff professionalism, and implementation barriers, the study highlights the essential components of quality early education in TASKA: responsive caregiving, play-based learning, qualified educators, and engaged families. The findings identify significant challenges including resource constraints and training gaps, and offer practical recommendations to enhance program quality, thereby supporting developmental outcomes and meeting modern parental expectations.

Keywords: *childcare professionalism, early childhood education, parental aspirations, play-based learning, responsive caregiving*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a critical developmental period characterized by rapid growth across cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains. In this context, Malaysian TASKA centers serve as pivotal environments that provide essential care and education to infants and toddlers, facilitating their holistic development. Contemporary literature underscores the significance of responsive caregiving, defined as caregivers' timely and sensitive responses to children's behavioral and emotional cues, alongside play-based learning which fosters exploration, creativity, and active engagement (Nur et al., 2023; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022). These pedagogical approaches are widely acknowledged as integral to delivering high-quality early childhood education.

Despite recognition of their importance, TASKA centers encounter multiple challenges impeding the consistent application of these approaches, including inadequate professional training for caregivers, resource limitations, linguistic

diversity, and variable parental involvement (Ahmad & Lee, 2024; Zalina, 2021). While previous studies have documented these issues, there remains a paucity of comprehensive synthesis that systematically examines how these factors specifically impact the quality of caregiving and play implementation within the Malaysian TASKA context. Additionally, the integration of recent governmental policies and educational resources has not been adequately interrogated to produce actionable insights.

This study endeavors to address these research gaps by critically reviewing literature, policy frameworks, and educational materials covering the period 2020 to 2025. Employing thematic synthesis, it aims to identify principal obstacles affecting responsive caregiving and play-based learning practices. The study further seeks to advance early childhood education by proposing evidence-informed recommendations to enhance program delivery in alignment with developmental science and the evolving expectations of

Malaysian parents.

The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to delineate the principal challenges TASKA centers face in implementing responsive caregiving and play-based learning; (2) to analyze the extent to which government policies and educational resources facilitate or constrain these practices; and (3) to provide strategic recommendations for improving early childhood program quality and outcomes. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the primary barriers to the implementation of responsive caregiving and play-based learning in TASKA centers?
2. How do policies and resources from 2020 to 2025 address these barriers?
3. What interventions can be proposed to enhance caregiving and learning quality in Malaysian TASKA settings?

The guiding hypothesis posits that targeted improvements in caregiver training, resource provision, and parental engagement will substantially enhance the fidelity and effectiveness of responsive caregiving and play-based learning, thereby improving developmental outcomes for infants and toddlers in TASKA centers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a library research design involving the comprehensive review and thematic synthesis of secondary data sources pertinent to early childhood education in Malaysian TASKA centers. This approach allows an in-depth understanding through existing peer-reviewed journals, government publications, and credible educational resources, aligning with the objective to critically analyze implementation challenges identified in recent literature from 2020 to 2025.

Participants

The study subjects are secondary data documented in academic publications and policy reports

addressing early childhood education settings, primarily focusing on infants and toddlers attending TASKA centers in Malaysia.

Data Collection Strategy

Data were gathered through systematic searches using keywords related to responsive caregiving, play-based learning, parental aspirations, and professional challenges within Malaysian early childhood care. Inclusion criteria required sources to be published between 2020 and 2025 and to contain relevant empirical or policy-based findings on the studied themes. Thematic synthesis was employed to analyze and categorize the data.

Data Analysis

The analysis involved qualitative thematic synthesis of the coded findings from the gathered literature. No primary data collection or statistical testing was conducted, consistent with library research methodology.

RESULTS

The literature review indicates several obstacles facing Malaysian TASKA centers in embedding responsive caregiving and play-based learning. Insufficiently trained educators often struggle to apply responsive techniques consistently, hampered by workload pressures and lack of ongoing professional development. Play-based learning practices are curtailed by limited physical space, inadequate educational resources, and uneven knowledge about the pedagogical function of play among staff. Parental aspirations emphasize safe and nurturing environments, yet communication gaps persist between parents and caregivers, complicating the alignment of educational goals. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic diversity introduces additional complexities in engagement and shared understanding. Despite supportive policy frameworks, enforcement and practical support for effective grassroots implementation remain inadequate.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight that while TASKA centers recognize the significance of responsive caregiving and play-based learning, implementation is hindered by systemic challenges, including educational resource shortages and personnel training deficits. These gaps undermine the consistency and quality of care delivered to young children. Parental involvement, although valued, is inconsistent due to socio-economic and communication barriers, emphasizing the need for stronger family engagement practices. Given Malaysia's linguistic and cultural diversity, pedagogical approaches must be adaptable and culturally sensitive. Policy efforts should prioritize professional development, family partnerships, and resource allocation to enhance equity and quality in early childhood education. This research contributes to filling knowledge gaps about operational constraints in TASKA and informs strategies to foster environments that promote holistic child development aligned with family expectations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, TASKA centers in Malaysia form an essential foundation for early childhood development, particularly for children aged 0 to 4 years. Progress toward professionalization, such as the requirement for diploma-qualified educators by 2025, supports the delivery of quality education encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical domains. The holistic curriculum integrating play-based learning meets contemporary parental aspirations and encourages active family participation. Nonetheless, challenges persist, especially in ensuring regulation compliance and equitable access to resources. The Malaysian Education Ministry's draft legislation mandating compulsory preschool education signals future improvements in quality assurance and inclusivity. Sustained efforts in educator training, family engagement, and policy enforcement are crucial for achieving consistent, high-quality early childhood education in TASKA centers nationwide.

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DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Lyanashika Binti Junie does not work for, consult, own shares in, or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this manuscript, and has disclosed no affiliations other than those noted above.

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