

RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPLEMENTING HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES THROUGH PLAY-BASED LEARNING FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN TASKA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of holistic development approaches through play-based learning for infants and toddlers in TASKA. The research emphasizes the significance of play as a foundation for nurturing children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language growth. The primary goal is to investigate how holistic components can be successfully incorporated into regular educational activities to promote development that is both balanced and meaningful. An early childhood educator was interviewed using a qualitative approach to learn more about their practices, comprehension, and difficulties when implementing play-based learning. The results show that play-based learning improves positive educator-child interactions while fostering creativity, problem-solving, communication, and emotional well-being. Overall, the study concludes that implementing holistic, play-centered methods contributes significantly to the comprehensive development of young children and improves the quality of early childhood education in TASKA settings.

Keywords: early childhood, holistic development, play-based learning, infants, toddlers

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a crucial time in human development when interactions and experiences lay the groundwork for wellbeing and lifelong learning. In Malaysia, childcare centres or well known as TASKA are essential for fostering the development of young children by providing them with loving surroundings that promote holistic development from early ages. Instead of concentrating only on academic success, the holistic approach in early childhood education also emphasizes the balanced development of a child's physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral domains. Today's parents prefer childcare centres to be more than just taking care of their children. In order to meet the challenges of a world that is changing quickly, they expect the centres to serve as an early education institution that fosters independence, social skills and resilience in their children. This also aligns with the goals of the Malaysian government in their curriculum that emphasises integrated learning and character development from a young age. Teachers are also encouraged by this framework to create lessons that cater each child's potential, interests and developmental needs. In

conclusion, it is essential to investigate and explore how holistic development-centered approaches are being used in infant and toddler education at TASKA in order to ascertain how well these methods satisfy the goals and expectations of modern parents.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to investigate how holistic development-centered approaches are used in Malaysian childcare centres (TASKA) to educate infants and toddlers. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: To investigate how TASKA's infant and toddler education incorporates holistic, development-centered methods. To determine how play-based learning supports young children's balanced development in the areas of their physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. To investigate how play-based learning in TASKA satisfies parents' expectations and aspirations regarding children's holistic development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with these objectives, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: How do educators use play-based learning strategies to support the overall development

of TASKA's infants and toddlers? How does play-based learning promote children's balanced growth in the areas of morality, social skills, physical development, and cognitive development? What are the aspirations and expectations of parents regarding play-based learning as part of early education in TASKA?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood education serves as the primary basis for developing a healthy person in all aspects such as physical, emotional, social and mental from early ages. In this context, the holistic development approach becomes crucial since it considers children's social, emotional, physical, artistic and spiritual aspects in addition to their cognitive and intellectual growth (Gordon, 2022 ; Mustard, 2010). It is anticipated that children raised with this method will develop into a whole, balanced adult who can adjust to future challenges and changes. The development of critical thinking skills later on is greatly impacted by early brain development since a child's brain grows rapidly and is extremely sensitive to outside stimuli (Campbell et al., 2014).

This can be proven by positive interactions with parents, carers and the environment because it will help children in developing their social skills, self-esteem and learning attitude. Other than that, early childhood education also has a significant impact on a child's moral beliefs and personality (Ramirez-Garcia et al., 2021). Good experiences in this age can also help children to cope with stress and build resilience, which will help them later on when dealing with any challenges (Pratiwi et al., 2020). Holistic-development approaches in early education are also strongly correlated to the physical health of the child. It is important for each child because physical well-being will support the energy and learning capacity needed to explore their environment (Arrizki, 2021). Children's imagination and creativity are also fostered by early stimulation through educational games, creative projects and social interaction with friends. These two aspects seem to be important to help the children in problem solving and change adaptation. Furthermore, a child's vocabulary and communication skills are enhanced by early exposure to language, music and reading since

these are two more vital life skills for school later on (Matsui, 2021). Thus, parental perceptions are important when it comes to defining quality in childcare centres. Instead of relying only on structural behaviours, parents frequently evaluate quality based on their observations of caregiver interactions and the surrounding environment (Weaven & Grace, 2010). They believe that open communication, warmth, and responsiveness foster confidence and trust between families and carers. In the end, parents see quality as a comprehensive idea that encompasses the physical environment as well as the loving care that promotes their child's overall growth.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was selected for this research report since the report's focus is on comprehending ideas, attitudes and behaviours rather than quantifying numerical data. Since early childhood holistic development involves a number of interconnected domains, it is best studied through descriptive analysis of current theories and experiences. This study employed a library research method to examine the implementation of a holistic development approach in the teaching and learning of infants and toddlers at TASKA in Malaysia.

The method is also able to offer diverse perspectives from both local and international scholars that can support a deeper qualitative understanding on how holistic development approaches are implemented in Malaysian childcare settings. Data were collected from academic journals, articles and reputable online databases that focus on early childhood education and childcare practices. Other than that, semi-structured interviews with teachers were also used in this qualitative study to acquire detailed information on how holistic development practices are being implemented in TASKA or childcare centres. This method was chosen because it allows participants to provide data by sharing their experiences, perceptions and challenges in their own words. In this context, the main participant was a teacher who has served for two years at a childcare centre in Penang. A set of questions was also provided for this interview session to help the teacher in providing more details and clear responses.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The study has conducted an interview with a TASKA teacher, Puan Siti Aisyah binti Mahadi, who has served for two years at Teetaku Baby Care & Development Centre, a childcare centre that accommodates children aged 0 to 4 years old, located at Sungai Nibong, Pulau Pinang. Her main responsibility focuses on managing and educating children aged 12 to 18 months. Based on her observations, Puan Aisyah believes that the holistic development approach can fulfil the expectations of modern parents, who want their kids to be capable of adjusting to everyday life and not just be academically bright. Additionally, according to her, this method enables children to receive individualised, comprehensive attention that helps them grow in a balanced way and gain the skills they need for the next level of education.

CONCEPTS OF HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

As we all know, holistic development is an overall growth of a child in all aspects in life which are physical, mental, emotional, language, cognitive and social and it also emphasizes the interconnection between these domains, recognizing that learning and development in each area influence growth in others. According to Puan Aisyah, she is aware of the concepts of holistic development, which emphasizes the uniqueness and interconnectedness of each child and how it is connected to each other. This gives her the opinion that the learning environment for the kids needs to be secure, engaging, and conducive to their growth. This is because children can grow in a balanced way and be more ready for the subsequent phases of their education and lives in such an environment.

ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHILD'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Puan Aisyah added that she incorporates the integrated or play-based approach into all of the activities that she planned for the children. According to her, she plans group activities at the playground to promote cooperation and sharing among the kids and creates activities like arranging puzzles and shapes to spark their creativity and critical thinking. To help the kids develop their self-control and confidence, Puan Aisyah also encourages them to sing and tell stories during

activities. Other than that, Puan Aisyah also organises storytelling exercises and has daily conversations with the kids to improve their vocabulary and comprehension in order to support their language domain.

Additionally, activities like running and jumping are done to improve their body coordination and muscle strength, while activities like kneading dough are meant to improve hand-eye coordination and finger strength. These activities seem to be important in contributing to the children's development. This is because according to Rieber, Smith, and Noah (1998), play is an essential learning process that supports lifelong learning. In order to assist students in developing a more meaningful, personalised, and productive understanding, learning environments should incorporate serious and focused play. In addition, through play, children will develop their capacity to solve problems, share, cooperate, and negotiate with others, as well as to take turns, exercise self-control, collaborate with peers, and get along with others (Ashiabi, 2007).

ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED BY THE TEACHER

In Teetaku Baby Care & Development Centre, Puan Aisyah also uses activity portfolios, developmental records, and daily observations to evaluate the kids' growth. She mentioned that she used these types of assessments especially observations to evaluate the children's social and emotional development by watching how they interact with their teachers and peers, as well as their cognitive domain problem-solving skills, fine and gross motor skills through physical play and dough activities, and language development through the use of songs and storytelling in class activities.

According to reports, this approach assists Puan Aisyah in thoroughly identifying each child's strengths as well as the areas in which they require assistance and improvement. Since every child develops at a different rate, teachers must determine each child's developmental stage in order to create lesson plans that work and foster positive relationships with parents and students.

Teachers can also adapt their lesson plans to meet the needs of each individual student by understanding the reasons behind undesirable behaviours. According to Guddemi

(2003), who discusses the importance of quality assessment in young children, both formal and informal assessments are beneficial and crucial for the growth of infants, toddlers, nursery children, and preschoolers.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE TEACHER

Based on her experience, Puan Aisyah said that the primary obstacle to using this method is the variations in the needs and developmental stages of the children. This is because some children might pick things up quickly, while others might need more time and guidance from the teacher. It was also difficult for Puan Aisyah to deal with children who had short attention spans and difficult daily time constraints.

In order to overcome these obstacles, she makes an effort to organise daily activities in a flexible and gradual way, splitting the kids up into multiple groups based on their ages and skill levels and offering one-on-one assistance to those who require it. By using this method, she is able to guarantee that every child is at the same level of proficiency despite their varying developmental stages, which makes this a good strategy. In order to keep children's interest and engagement throughout the learning sessions, Puan Aisyah also designs enjoyable and interactive activities. According to her, she believes that each child can develop holistically based on their unique abilities if all the necessary steps are taken.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the implementation of holistic development approaches in childcare centres (TASKA) plays a vital role in fostering the balanced and well-rounded growth of infants and toddlers. This method, which is exemplified by Mrs. Aisyah's methods at Teetaku Baby Care & Development Centre, guarantees that a child's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic development is supported through experiences that are meaningful, play-based, and developmentally appropriate. Children are inspired to explore, communicate, and express themselves with confidence in a safe, stimulating, and encouraging environment, which lays the groundwork for lifelong learning. Furthermore, this strategy closely reflects the goals of today's parents, who want to see their kids excel academically as well as acquire critical

life skills, emotional fortitude, and constructive social values.

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