

TEACHING INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN TASKA: BRIDGING DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

Nurul Najwa Mahadi^{1*}, Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman²

*23059861@siswa.um.edu.my¹, mohdnazri_ar@um.edu.my²

[1] Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Education, University Malaya, Malaysia

[2] Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Education, University Malaya, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the teaching and learning approaches implemented in Childcare Centres (TASKA) for infants and toddlers, focusing on how these methods address the aspirations of modern parents. The objective is to investigate how a TASKA teacher plans and applies age-appropriate teaching strategies that meet both children's developmental needs and parental expectations. A qualitative approach was employed through a semi-structured interview with one experienced TASKA teacher. The findings provide insights into practical teaching methods, parental involvement, and challenges faced in aligning educational practices with contemporary parental aspirations. This study highlights the critical role of TASKA in fostering a supportive and effective early learning environment for young children.

Keywords: Early childhood education, sensory play, infants.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education really matters, especially for children between the ages of 0 and 4. This is such a crucial time because kids go through so many important changes not just physically, but emotionally, intellectually, and even spiritually. That's why TASKA plays such an important role. It's not just a place where children are cared for while their parents work, but a warm and encouraging environment that helps support all aspects of a child's growth. TASKA sets the foundation that helps little ones flourish as they take their first big steps in learning. Nowadays, parents have really high hopes for their children's early education. They want their kids to do well academically, sure, but they also want them to grow in many other ways cognitively, physically, socially, and more. That's why it's so important for TASKA to use teaching and learning approaches that really fit the children's developmental stages, while also answering what parents are hoping for. In this study, it explores how TASKAs are and how they're teaching infants and toddlers and if those approaches meet the expectations of modern parents. Understanding this can help ensure TASKAs remain caring, safe places where children can learn, play, and thrive during these early years that matter so much.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to explore the teaching and learning practices implemented in TASKA, with a focus on how these align with the aspirations of today's parents. The primary data collection method used is a semi-structured interview conducted with one TASKA teacher, purposely selected for having the most experience in nursery education. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the teacher's perspectives, experiences, and challenges in applying developmentally appropriate teaching strategies for infants and toddlers. The participant was selected from TASKA Temanku UTM, Jalan Semarak KL, within the local area, based on her extensive experience working directly with young children. The interview questions were designed to encourage open discussion around planning, implementation, parental involvement, and the challenges faced in the classroom. The interview was conducted with informed consent and insights relevant to the research objectives. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting the voluntary nature of participation. These measures ensured the participant felt comfortable sharing honest

and detailed information, providing rich qualitative data essential for understanding effective teaching approaches in the TASKA context.

Data analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interview were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely accepted technique for qualitative research. The interview transcript was first read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the teacher's perspectives and experiences. Initial codes were then generated by identifying significant statements and ideas related to teaching approaches, challenges, and parental involvement. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes that captured patterns and insights across the data. Thematic analysis enabled a systematic interpretation of the qualitative data, revealing key concepts relevant to early childhood education in TASKA.

RESULTS

Approaches Used

The teacher interviewed has over 10 years of experience in the nursery field and is a graduate with a degree in Early Childhood Education. Throughout her career, she has cared for and taught babies and young children aged 0 to 4 years, engaging them in daily activities such as basic care, early stimulation, and learning through play. She emphasizes the importance of providing tailored activities and approaches that are developmentally appropriate, ensuring that each child's needs are met according to their age and stage.

The teacher explained that the core teaching philosophy revolves around the play-while-learning approach, which focuses on sensory stimulation, social interaction, and motor development. Activities are organized to be age-appropriate, interesting, and fun, which helps to capture the children's attention and encourages active interaction among them during learning sessions. This playful environment not only fosters engagement but also aids in developing positive social skills among infants and toddlers. Additionally, the teacher regularly observes the children during activities to identify their strengths and areas needing support. This ongoing assessment allows her to provide individualized attention; for example, if a child is slow to develop

language skills, she intensifies language activities like storytelling and singing to assist improvement. This personalized and responsive approach helps overcome developmental challenges while promoting sensory, and motor domains. Her extensive experience has allowed her to refine her skills in understanding and addressing the diverse needs of infants and toddlers in a nurturing and safe nursery environment. The teacher's approach combines important principles from both Montessori and Vygotsky. From Montessori, the focus on hands-on, age-appropriate, and child-centered activities allows children to explore and learn at their own pace while promoting independence. From Vygotsky, the emphasis on social interaction, guided learning, and scaffolding helps children develop cognitive and language skills through support from the teacher and peers. By blending these methods, the teacher creates a learning space where children benefit both from individual discovery and social engagement. This balance supports holistic development, building a strong foundation for the children's future learning and growth.

Strategies

The strategy used by the TASKA teacher focuses heavily on sensory play activities, where children explore different textures such as sand, water, and soft materials. Research shows that sensory play is crucial for brain development, helping children build strong neural pathways that support cognitive growth. These activities enhance fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and sensory integration. For children who face challenges with daily tasks, sensory play offers a safe and engaging way to develop physical and sensory abilities.

The teacher uses practical examples like playing with textured sand, water games, and sensory bins filled with soft or squishy objects to encourage exploration and creativity. Such play also fosters problem-solving skills as children manipulate different materials and experiment with cause and effect. By regularly observing and assessing each child's progress, the teacher can identify developmental milestones and adapt teaching techniques when needed, ensuring personalized support communication with parents is essential to this strategy. The teacher keeps parents informed of their child's development through regular face-to-face discussions and communication books.

This collaboration allows parents to understand their child's capabilities and developmental progress, encouraging them to engage more actively in reinforcing learning and basic skills at home. Research supports that when parents are involved and aware of their child's sensory and motor development, it strengthens the child's learning outcomes and emotional well-being. Overall, the blend of sensory play and strong home-school communication provides a holistic approach that nurtures children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth in a safe and supportive environment.

Challenges

One of the main challenges faced in implementing teaching and learning for infants and toddlers at TASKA is managing the wide range of developmental levels within a large group of children. High levels of attention and observation are crucial to ensure every child receives balanced support. Without appropriate developmental management, children may experience delays or difficulties, which is often seen in settings with many children under care.

The teacher works diligently to monitor and adjust activities for each child's needs to prevent negative impacts on their development. Another significant challenge involves the availability of resources and support systems. Regular professional training for teachers is essential to equip them with the latest knowledge and skills for early childhood education. Adequate and interactive teaching aids, alongside safe and suitable learning spaces, are vital for effective learning. Without such support, children's learning experiences can be limited, and unsafe environments may cause fear or reluctance to explore, hindering overall growth. Management support plays a key role in providing these essentials to maintain a high-quality learning environment.

Finally, communication with parents is critical to children's developmental success. Two-way communication ensures parents are informed about their child's progress and can contribute to their learning journey. If parents are not engaged or aware, it can negatively affect the child's development as they lack support at home. The teacher encourages parent involvement in their children's activities, which helps boost children's self-esteem and reinforces learning. Research shows that strong collaboration between teachers and parents leads to better developmental outcomes and

emotional well-being for children.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study are consistent with the current literature on the topic of early childhood education and the predominance of TASKA teaching methods and procedures in the focus of the research because of the significance of developmentally appropriate, individual, and play-based teaching concepts and methodology. It has been indicated that knowing the individual developmental progress of each child can help teachers design activities that address the needs of diverse children, enhancing learning outcomes and establishing positive relationships between children and teachers. Sensory play within the approach of the teacher, continuous observation of the child, and the ability to modify the approach can be seen as an exemplary practice as the studies of early childhood pedagogy point to the importance of learning that is customized and interactive to help children develop in cognitive, social, and motor aspects.

It seems that the current teaching methods in the TASKA work well with young children by providing the stimulation of their senses, social, and motor activities that allow promoting a comprehensive development. This model of play-while-learning is familiar to established early education models like Montessori and Vygotsky, which are known to support active exploration and scaffolded learning. Further contribution to learning experience is in the regular communication and collaboration with parents, which the teacher demonstrates to establish a consistent developmental setting within and outside the classroom.

This method does not only promote academic and developmental achievements but also assists in the development of confidence, independence, and social skills in children, which is essential to a lifetime learning program. These strategies also support best parental expectations, where parents are becoming more and more appreciative of a safe, nurturing and thought provoking setting in which their children can gain independence communication, and social skills as opposed to mere academic knowledge. Nevertheless, issues related to meeting various developmental needs of large populations as well as resource constraints unveil areas of improvement.

Practical implications could involve offering continuing professional education to teachers, investing in new and safe learning resources, optimizing teacher-child ratios, and enhancing parent-teacher relationships. These factors may have a positive impact on the quality and efficiency of teaching methods in TASKA and make sure that the development potential of children is embraced to the fullest according to the requirements of education standards and the desires of a parent.

CONCLUSION

The main insights of this research are that the TASKA instructor uses developmentally relevant, play-based, and individualized instructional methods that help promote the comprehensive growth of infants and toddlers. Sensory play, continuous observation, and specific interventions guide children to grow cognitively, socially and physically. The integration of Montessori and Vygotsky principles by the teacher creates an encouraging atmosphere that promotes both direct exploration and social interaction and instruction. Also, the close communication and collaboration between a teacher and the parents improves the learning of children, as they are supported regularly at nursery and at home. Altogether, the instructional strategies used in the TASKA prove to be rather effective in involving young children and developing them positively.

The play-while-learning model promotes active engagement, confidence building, and acquisition of essential skills in line with well-known early childhood educational approaches. Amidst these assets, there are obstacles like control of varying degrees of development among mass people, scarcity of resources and the necessity of the perpetual personal growth to teachers that eliminate the potential of maximizing efficiencies. It can further improve the quality of education in these areas by training more teachers, improving teacher-child ratio, and enriching learning materials. . There are weaknesses that must be noted in this study. The results are largely based on the opinion of one teacher in one TASKA environment which cannot be applied to all of the population of nurseries. The qualitative nature of the study design also limits the potential to quantify the outcomes or even to make comparisons. Future studies that include various TASKA centers, use quantitative measures and involve more

stakeholders would give a more holistic perspective of the teaching effectiveness and early childhood development of the entire childcare sector in Malaysia.

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DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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