

RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN CHILDCARE CENTRES (TASKA): ADDRESSING MODERN PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This is a literature review of modern day teaching and learning strategies in childcare centers (TASKA) of infants and toddlers with specific reference to how the teaching and learning strategies are correlated with the contemporary desire of parents. According to the analysis, effective TASKA initiatives have begun to embrace relationship-based, play-based pedagogies with a family collaboration strategy and professional workforce development. The main strategies encompass responsive models of care that emphasize safety, developmentally adequate practice, and shared care with families.

Keywords: *Childcare centers, infants-toddlers, parents' aspirations*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, early childhood care and education (ECCE) has transformed in order to fulfill the requirements of contemporary families. Parents are no longer interested in a secure home to leave their children but seek childcare centers that can offer significant learning experiences that help their children to grow in a comprehensive manner. This literature review discusses teaching and learning approaches in infants and toddlers in TASKA (childcare centers) and how the approaches address the expectations of the contemporary parents. In Malaysia, registered childcare center refers to any establishment where the care is offered on a fee basis to four or more children, below the age of four years old, and belonging to more than one homestead (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). TASKA are the initial formal learning environments of children younger than four years of age in Malaysia. The strategies employed are designed to assist the development of children in all aspects cognitive, language, social-emotional and physical and ensure that they feel secure and nurtured. Most of the current practices emphasize play-based

learning, responsive caregiving, developing motivating environments that combine guided learning activities and free exploration. Parents also have been found to put a value on programs that have both care and learning. They desire that their children acquire not only early learning principles, but also valuable life skills. This stresses the need of childcare centers to not only satisfy parents but also adhere to the national and international ECCE guidelines and frameworks, including the Malaysia guidelines, Nurturing Care Framework, and ECCE goals of UNESCO.

Research objectives:

1. To analyze the existing teaching and learning strategies that are applied in the Malaysian children care centres (TASKA) on infants and toddlers.
2. To examine how the approaches are consistent with and address the hopes and expectations of the contemporary parents.
3. To find out what are the strengths, challenges, and implications of existing pedagogical practices in terms of national and international early childhood models, including the

PERMATA model and the UNESCO ECCE model.

METHODOLOGY

This research study applied a qualitative library research design which is the investigative design involving an integrative literature review to examine the application of teaching and learning methods with respect to infants and toddlers in Malaysian child care centers (TASKA). This was done to determine the extent to which these strategies are in accordance with the hopes of contemporary parents and the existing early childhood education (ECCE) models.

The research design of the library was selected as it is possible to make a thorough synthesis of the existing knowledge and theoretical framework without field work. The design is appropriate to achieve the aims of the study, which are studying the pedagogical practices, workforce variables, and parental expectations based on reliable, peer-reviewed sources and government policy files. It is a methodology that focuses on critical interpretation and thematic analysis, not on empirical measurement, which is why it is the best approach to comprehending trends and challenges in the ECCE context.

DISCUSSION

CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES IN INFANT-TODDLER CARE

Relationship-Based Approaches

In relationship-based approaches, the idea is to identify the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Liu et al. 2008). It has been found out that excellent teaching and caregiving of infants and toddlers are based on good, reliable relationships between the caregivers and their children. Care giving activities like feeding, bathing or putting a child to sleep are not seen as either different or independent of education as part of education, but relevant learning opportunities. These everyday interactions contribute to emotional and social stability, physical dexterity and cognitive development in children. Children feel secure and attached

to their caregivers, which means that they tend to explore their environment, and they become active participants in learning experiences (Aspden et al., 2021). This concept is implemented in Malaysia in the PERMATA curriculum, which focuses on *asuhan dan didikan bersepadu* (integrated care and education), where routines are perceived as vital to nurturing as well as educating young children.

Major Pedagogical Frameworks

There are numerous international pedagogical models that have shaped TASKA in Malaysia approach to designing their infant-toddler programs. The most popular one is the Reggio Emilia approach that promotes child-initiated exploration, the importance of the environment as a third teacher, and close relationships between educators, parents, and society. This documentation of experiences of children is also a central characteristic, which enables schools educators and parents to cogitate upon the progress in learning. Studies indicate that children in Reggio-inspired programs have been found to demonstrate better social-emotional abilities than in normal care-giving environments (Schweinhart & Weikart, 2005).

Special Pedagogical Characteristics

In addition to adhering to international practices, TASKA in Malaysia are also incorporating local factors to enhance quality of infant and toddler education. One is on environmental design where classrooms are designed to be secure and open to allow children to move freely, and there are quiet space areas where children can rest. Creativity and open-ended play is supported by natural materials and loose parts, whereas physical development of children is supported by outdoor spaces. This conforms to the Malaysian ECCE guidelines that encourage safe, stimulating and child friendly environments. The other essential characteristic is routinely based learning, in which the everyday events of feeding, diapering, and sleeping are perceived as learning and interaction opportunities. Such routines provide the children with a feeling of stability and also to build up their language and social and problem solving skills. Rationally organizing family-centred early

education content and ensuring adequate space for children contribute to the development of effective strategies that promote positive discipline (Jiang & Yuan, 2020). This can be attributed to the PERMATA curriculum that every interaction is a development opportunity. TASKA is also becoming document and assessment-oriented. The national policy focus on family involvement is followed by teachers, who now use observations and portfolios to document the progress of children and engage parents in it. In general, these tactics indicate that TASKA in Malaysia are following global best practices, but remain aligned with national outlines like PERMATA and KSPK, so that the programs are aligned to the objectives of the policy, as well as the needs and expectations of the modern family.

ALIGNMENT WITH MODERN PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS

Parental Expectations In The Modern Context

Malaysian studies together with international research findings indicate that the contemporary parents have formed distinct priorities in their selection and assessment of childcare services. Parents are significantly concerned with safety and health care, qualifications and competence of the staff and the open communication between the caregivers and the families. They also appreciate developmentally suitable learning experiences, convenient and easily accessible places and cultural sensitivity in the program (Tang et al., 2022). These are expectations of the dual role that parents want TASKA to effortlessly achieve to fulfill the role of ensuring that children are well cared for and also offer worthwhile educational prospects that could make them successful in future.

Academic Achievement And School Preparation

The other passion that is very powerful among the parents is the assurance of the high-quality education experiences. Families are also demanding programs based on evidence-based curricula that are meant to facilitate holistic early education. They desire their children not only to be academically prepared to further their education but also socio-emotionally and

problem solving. Parents also acknowledge the value of stimulating environments in which age-related cognitive challenges are found. It has been found that these goals are not only congruent with play-based and intentional teaching methods which prove to promote early literacy, numeracy and social skills but also make learning interesting and developmentally appropriate (Flannigan & Dietze, 2018). This aligns with the objectives of the PERMATA curriculum and the KSPK framework in the Malaysian context which emphasizes the balance between care, play and structured early education.

Partnership And Transparency

The partners with childcare providers are also anticipated in the modern Malaysian families. Parents desire frequent updates of their children's activities and development, which they normally get by way of daily reports, mobile applications or WhatsApp groups. Others enjoy the chance to be directly involved with the center, in parent-teacher meetings, workshops or participation in cultural and religious events. Policies like fee structure, safety measures and curriculum planning are greatly appreciated as they instill confidence. Notably, the parents demand respect to their family values and cultural practices. Examples are Muslim families demanding halal-only menus as well as prayer time regimes, or Chinese or Indian families wanting such cultural celebrations as Chinese New Year or Deepavali included in the center program. It has been proved that successful father- and mother-collaborations are based on the orderly communication channels and the actual respect to the views of parents (Kong, 2023). In the case of TASKA, these partnerships will not only reinforce the relationship between parents and providers, but also provide children with continuity and consistency between home and center.

STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Workforce Development

The preparation and continuous promotion of the workforce is a key to the successful implementation of the high-quality pedagogical methods in infant-toddler care. Professionals working in TASKA should be trained to work with infants and toddlers

particularly focusing on attachment theory and responsive caregiving. They also need to acquire observation, documentation, and assessment skills so that they can keep track of the progress of children. Hamid et al. (2020) found that the workforce in the government childcare centre had more staff with educational and professional qualification as well as experience. So this can thereby contribute to higher quality care and learning outcomes. The cultural competency and family engagement approaches are also significant especially in multicultural Malaysia, where diversity in family background is paramount. Availability of quality teaching materials and up to date pedagogical materials also helps educators to provide meaningful and developmentally appropriate experiences. In Malaysia, a foundation to childcare providers is Kursus Asuhan dan Didikan Awal Kanak-Kanak (KAAK), a requirement of the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), yet continuous professional development is among the priorities to facilitate quality in TASKA.

Program Structure And Environment

Childcare program environment and structure also become the key elements in shaping the experiences of children. The study suggests that early childhood professionals need to engage in self-reflection to understand their own preferences and play experiences, consider how these influence their teaching practices, and meaningfully integrate play-based activities into their classrooms (Shin, 2023). The physical environments in high-quality infant-toddler settings are safe, stimulating, and age-related. Spaces are to encourage exploration and movement, use of natural materials and light, as well as offer flexible spaces that can be transformed into active play and passive contemplation. Outdoor activities are becoming a recognized and important aspect through which nature learning and physical growth is possible. Besides the physical planning, routine activities are the main pillars of successful programs. The consistency in the schedules offers security and steadiness to children and at the same time flexibility to meet individual needs. Long and continuous play with learning activities integrated into daily care processes can offset structure and freedom. Fluency in the transitioning between activities is also significant and helps children regulate their

emotions and reduce stress. The research findings confirm the importance of adopting a flexible and individualized approach to early childhood education, one that thoughtfully integrates both traditional practices and innovative methods to meet the diverse needs of young children (Krivosheeva, 2024). The practices can be said to be based on the principles of the PERMATA curriculum which sees the importance of combining care, play and planned learning in a safe and conducive environment.

Family Engagement Strategies

Effective relationships with families are known as one of the major characteristics of good infant-toddler care. Good communication mechanisms can make parents aware of what is happening to their children on a daily basis and how they are developing. This usually extends beyond regular care reports to detailed documentation, pictures and contemplative accounts of child learning. Some centers are digital and use applications and mobile communication opportunities, including the WhatsApp group or childcare management systems to update and stimulate a conversation in time. In multicultural settings with multilingualism as is the case with Malaysia, communication offered in the languages of parents can aid in inclusivity and trust. Opportunities of involvement are not limited to communication, as centers promote participation of the family in classroom activities, cultural celebrations and even in curriculum development. These partnerships are additionally reinforced through parent education programs and support sessions to provide families with methods of extending learning and care at home. These interaction methods do not only foster trust, but also bring about a continuity in-between home and center, which facilitates overall wellbeing and development in children.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Workforce Challenges

The workforce is one of the major obstacles in introducing high-quality pedagogical strategies in infant and toddler care. The gaps in the qualifications and training are always mentioned in research as the main limitation, and the lack of special programs with the

concentration on infant-toddler development. Most practitioners come into the field with the bare minimum requirements in childcare certification, which restricts them in their knowledge of attachment-based practice, responsive caregiving, and developmentally appropriate pedagogy. The high rates of staff turnover also hamper the continuity of programs and low rates of compensation make it hard to attract and retain qualified professionals. This occurs even when the staff are experienced and the best practices are not uniformly applied; hence, different settings are not guaranteed of similar quality. Outside of the initial training, there is a problem with access to further professional development. There are several areas where specialized knowledge is needed including child development and observation strategies, as well as cultural competence and family engagement strategies. Nevertheless, such training is usually scarce, expensive, or unavailable, especially to educators based in the rural regions. Career progression in the early childhood sector is not very clear as well, which also deters long-term commitment to the workforce, which leads to the cycle of poorly prepared practitioners and imbalanced service provision.

Financial And Material Limitations

There are also financial and resource-related barriers, which make the implementation of high-quality practices even more complicated. High staff-to-child ratios are expensive to maintain and many TASKA have small budgets, relying on fees paid by parents. Other costs like specialized materials, age appropriate equipment, and physical environment modifications are beyond the budget of smaller centers. Funding is also needed to support the cost of professional development programs and training workshops and can be challenging to maintain without outside subsidies. Further costs of technology and communication systems- necessary to maintain documentation, parent engagement and monitoring- are not accessible to every center. Limitation of infrastructure is another significant issue. A lot of these facilities are placed in rented or converted areas, which do not provide a sufficient amount of room to take part in flexible learning activities, safe outdoor activities, or natural play environments. Although safety and licensing

rules are required to ensure child safety, they can at times be incompatible with pedagogical objectives and therefore providers struggle to establish both licensing-compliant and developmentally enriching environments.

Cultural And Contextual Barriers

Lastly, the cultural and contextual aspects also pose more problems especially in a multi-ethnic society such as Malaysia. Some of the most accepted pedagogical paradigms are based in the West and will have to be modified to the local cultural values, traditions and community demands. This process of adapting is not as easy and the practices that are backed by the research might contradict the parental taste or even the social rules. As an illustration, although play-based learning has been strongly supported in early childhood studies, other parents might emphasize early academic learning, whereby the centers are pressured to teach literacy and numeracy early at the expense of whole-child development. Differences in language and communication are also factors that pose challenges in communicating with families who have different cultural backgrounds and it is thus necessary to offer multilingual communication and culturally aware practices. Moreover, communities might be very unaware of what is meant by developmentally appropriate practice and parent education efforts may be necessary to close the gap between the research-based practice and the local expectations. To achieve sustainable quality improvement, the balancing of evidence-based pedagogy and cultural relevance, therefore, is a complicated yet a needed one.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, It takes a wide and balanced approach to provide high-quality teaching and learning within TASKA centers with infants and toddlers. Care and education must collaborate with each other with evidence-based practice, responsive care giving, strong family engagement, as well as ongoing educator training. Effective programs tend to have a number of similar characteristics. Their relationship-based and developmentally suitable practices, staff training and support, safe and engaging environments, and establishing a solid line of communication with families. They also make

it a habit of self-improvement in constant reflection and assessment. These strengths notwithstanding, there are still obstacles. Limited workforce capacity, financial constraints, and policies that are not necessarily best practices are some of the problems that many centers have to deal with. In the future, there is a chance to enhance the quality of the TASKA programs further by means of new opportunities, including the use of technology, sustainable practices, inclusive approaches, and better community partnerships. Ultimately, the research and the current expectation of modern parents match closely. Due to the emphasis on relationships, family partnerships, and the quality of the profession, TASKA centers are able to support the needs of the current families and provide young children with an optimal start in life.

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