

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENHANCING INFANT AND TODDLER EDUCATION: RESEARCH INTO EFFECTIVE TASKA METHODS ALIGNED WITH PARENT EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education in Malaysia is divided between TASKA (for children aged 0-4) and preschools (for children aged 4-6). TASKA centres play an essential role in providing nurturing care and early education for infants and toddlers. However, despite the growing awareness of the importance of early learning, TASKA centres in Malaysia still face challenges such as limited teacher training, unequal quality among urban and rural areas, and increasing parental expectations. This study explores the ways TASKA can strengthen infant and toddler education to align with parental aspirations and current educational trends. The findings show that TASKA has improved in areas of safety and health but must also prioritise holistic learning through play-based and interactive approaches. Strengthening teacher training, parent partnerships, and curriculum design will ensure that TASKA continues to meet the needs of Malaysian families and contributes to lifelong learning success.

Keywords: *TASKA, early childhood education, infant and toddlers, parental expectations, play-based learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a critical role in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. In Malaysia, early childhood education is divided into two main categories: TASKA (Taman Asuhan Kanak-kanak) for children aged 0-4, and preschools for children aged 4-6. TASKA centres provide care and education to infants and toddlers, catering to the needs of working parents. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of early childhood education, TASKA centres face various challenges, including inconsistent quality of care, inadequate teacher training, and increasing parental expectations. As parents become more involved in their children's education, they expect TASKA to provide not only basic care but also to contribute to their children's early learning and development.

This study aims to explore the current state of TASKA centres in Malaysia and to identify ways in which they can better align with parental expectations and educational trends. The research will examine teaching methods, parental expectations, and policy frameworks to recommend strategies for improving the quality of early childhood education in TASKA centres

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this report are to:

1. Identify the current teaching and learning methods used in TASKA centres in Malaysia.
2. Understand the expectations of parents towards early childhood education and care.
3. Analyse the policies and regulations that influence TASKA operations.

4. Recommend strategies for improving the alignment between TASKA practices and parental expectations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown that early childhood education plays a foundational role in shaping a child's future learning and development. Studies indicate that quality early childhood education improves children's emotional stability, communication skills, and self-regulation (Mat Seri et al., 2020). Parental involvement has also been found to contribute significantly to positive developmental outcomes for young children (Ahmad Sobri et al., 2020). In Malaysia, the Child Care Centre Act 1984 regulates TASKA centres, while the National ECCE Policy 2021 emphasizes integrating care and education. Despite these frameworks, there are challenges in implementing effective teaching strategies, especially regarding play-based learning. Research has highlighted that many TASKA educators lack adequate knowledge in play-based pedagogy, which is crucial for fostering cognitive and social development in children (Fong Jia Yean & Izawati Ngadni, 2024). The introduction of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education in early childhood is also gaining momentum, but there are barriers to its widespread adoption in TASKA centres.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach, primarily based on secondary data from journal articles, government reports, and credible publications from 2020 to 2025. The data were collected from various sources, including the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), and the Ministry of Health (MOH). The data were analysed thematically, focusing on three main areas: current teaching and learning methods in TASKA, parental expectations, and the regulatory framework governing TASKA centres. This research provides a comprehensive view of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improving the quality of

early childhood education in TASKA centres.

FINDINGS

The findings reveal several key points about the state of TASKA centres in Malaysia. First, while most TASKA centres adhere to the health and safety standards set by the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), there are significant differences between urban and rural centres. Urban TASKA centres tend to have better-trained staff and more resources, while rural centres often face challenges such as limited facilities and higher staff turnover. Second, there is a wide variation in teaching approaches across TASKA centres. Some centres implement structured programmes like Montessori or thematic play, which foster holistic child development, while others focus mainly on routine care with minimal structured learning. This inconsistency in teaching methods creates a disparity in the quality of early childhood education across TASKA centres. Third, parental expectations have evolved significantly. Many parents now expect TASKA to provide not only care but also to nurture emotional, social, and language skills. However, there is still a gap in understanding the importance of play-based learning, and communication between parents and educators is often inconsistent. As a result, parents may misunderstand the value of play-based learning and expect more structured academic teaching instead.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it is clear that while TASKA centres have made progress in terms of safety and basic care, there is still much to be done to align with parental expectations and international standards of early childhood education. One recommendation is to strengthen play-based and child-centred learning approaches. Play is crucial for cognitive, emotional, and social development, and TASKA centres should integrate sensory play, storytelling, and outdoor exploration to foster curiosity and creativity. Another key recommendation is to provide continuous professional development for educators. Many

caregivers still lack an in-depth understanding of early childhood education theories and practices. Providing regular training in developmental milestones, inclusive education, and communication skills will better equip teachers to meet the needs of children and parents. TASKA centres should also enhance partnerships with parents by building stronger communication channels. Educators and parents must work together to support the child's development and share insights on how to best meet the child's needs both in and outside the centre. Furthermore, TASKA centres should ensure that their environments are stimulating, safe, and well-resourced. A well-designed learning environment can have a significant impact on a child's development and overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, TASKA centres in Malaysia play a vital role in the early development of children, but there are several areas that require improvement to better align with parental expectations and global educational standards. The study finds that while TASKA centres have improved in terms of safety and basic care, there is still much work to be done in terms of curriculum design, teacher training, and parent engagement. By embracing play-based learning, strengthening educator training, and fostering better communication with parents, TASKA centres can better meet the evolving needs of Malaysian families. This will ensure that young children receive the best possible foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.

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