

RESEARCH ARTICLE

MEETING PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS: ENHANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN TASKA**Dayang Intan Farahiah Almurid^{1*}, Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman²*****23003412@siswa.um.edu.my, mohdnazri_ar@um.edu.my²**^{[1]*} Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University Malaya, Malaysia^[2] Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University Malaya, Malaysia**ABSTRACT**

This study explores parents' aspirations and expectations for teaching and learning approaches in TASKA (childcare centres) for children aged 12 to 36 months. The research aims to identify how parents perceive the effectiveness of play-based learning and the overall quality of early childhood education provided. A survey using Google Forms was conducted with 20 parents as respondents. Data were collected using a Likert scale and analyzed to determine trends in parental expectations. Findings reveal that parents prioritize holistic development, emphasizing independence, communication, social skills, and emotional growth. They also value a safe and caring environment with well-trained teachers who use interactive and age-appropriate learning activities. The study recommends that TASKA strengthen communication with parents, enhance teacher training in early childhood development, and provide a balance between play-based, outdoor, and academic learning. These efforts will ensure that early education aligns with parental aspirations and supports children's overall well-being.

Keywords: *TASKA, early childhood education, parental expectations, play-based learning, holistic development*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education in Malaysia has been strengthened through the establishment of TASKA (Taman Asuhan Kanak-Kanak), which provides care and education for children aged 0–4 years. TASKA plays an important role in supporting infants and toddlers during their early developmental years. Children between 12–36 months experience rapid growth in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical areas. At this stage, stimulating and developmentally appropriate teaching and learning approaches are essential. TASKA must therefore go beyond basic care to provide meaningful early education. The aspirations of parents are central in shaping childcare practices. Today's parents expect their children to receive a holistic education—covering language, thinking skills, emotional control, social abilities, physical growth, religious values, and safety. Their

expectations guide TASKA in planning daily activities.

This study has three main objectives: (1) to identify parents' expectations for their children's learning and development in TASKA, (2) to explore effective teaching and learning approaches for infants and toddlers, and (3) to provide recommendations for TASKA improvement. The focus is on children aged 12–36 months in TASKA. The study highlights parents' perspectives while examining approaches such as play-based learning, Montessori activities, Islamic practices, and outdoor learning. It aims to connect parental aspirations with best practices in early childhood education in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood development theories provide the foundation for teaching infants and

toddlers (12–36 months). Piaget's sensorimotor stage highlights infants' learning through sensory exploration and action, which explains why hands-on, sensory-rich activities are crucial at this age (Cheng & Cheng, 2022). Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective emphasises social interaction and guided participation, supporting teacher scaffolding and parent–teacher collaboration in TASKA (Cheng & Cheng, 2022). Behaviourist views (Skinner) justify the use of routine, reinforcement and modelling to shape early behaviours, while Erikson's early trust vs. mistrust and autonomy stages remind educators to prioritise secure relationships and opportunities for safe independence (Cheng & Cheng, 2022).

Montessori principles—focusing on self-directed, sensory materials and a prepared environment—align well with sensorimotor learning in the 12 – 36 month range and have been adapted by Malaysian practitioners with attention to teacher training and parent understanding (Ismail et al., 2021). Play-based learning is widely recommended for infants and toddlers because it supports cognitive, language, social and motor development simultaneously. Recent Malaysian work shows growing acceptance of play-based approaches but also notes implementation challenges such as resource limits, educator preparedness, and parental expectations for early academic skills (Radzi et al., 2023). Studies on curriculum and spatial design in Malaysian early years settings argue that well-designed play areas and materials significantly enhance learning opportunities and should be integrated deliberately into TASKA planning (Shaari et al., 2020). Moreover, hybrid models that combine play-based principles with structured Montessori elements are being explored locally to balance child-led exploration and measurable developmental outcomes (Mutmainna et al., 2024).

The Islamic approach and values-based education are also prominent in Malaysian childcare contexts, where many parents expect early introduction to religious practices, manners, and moral stories. Malaysian reviews and regional studies indicate that integrating religious routines (simple prayers, nasheed, moral storytelling) into daily activities can strengthen family–centre alignment, but successful integration requires culturally sensitive pedagogy and collaboration with parents (Mohamed & Jasmi, 2021). Research on character and tolerance education in

early childhood settings in the region highlights practical strategies for embedding values into play, routines, and teacher modelling—strategies that are relevant for Muslim-majority settings such as many TASKA centres (Mohamed & Jasmi, 2021).

Empirical studies of parents' aspirations in Malaysia show consistent themes: safety and hygiene, caring teachers, holistic development (language, social skills, motor skills), and clear communication between centres and families. National and multi-state surveys and qualitative studies report that while parents value play and socialisation, some still expect early readiness for school and basic academic exposure, creating tension for TASKA staff who must balance play-based pedagogy with parental expectations (Tang et al., 2022). Recent Malaysian reviews also emphasise parental involvement as a key predictor of child outcomes and recommend structured communication practices (Wong et al., 2023).

In summary, the Malaysian literature from 2020–2025 supports a child-centred, play-rich approach for 12–36 month olds—augmented where appropriate by Montessori-style materials and culturally responsive religious/value education—while highlighting practical barriers such as educator training, parental expectations for academics, and resourcing in TASKA. These findings point to the need for clear parent–centre communication, teacher professional development, and curriculum designs that respect developmental theory and local parental aspirations (Lachman et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method approach that primarily utilised a parent survey, supported by insights from a literature review. The survey was designed to capture parents' aspirations and expectations for teaching and learning approaches in TASKA, while the literature review provided theoretical and empirical background related to infants and toddlers aged 12–36 months. The survey was distributed through Google Form and received responses from 20 parents with children enrolled in TASKA. The target group included parents with children between 12–36 months.

The survey consisted of four sections: demographic information, parents' aspirations and expectations, preferred teaching and learning approaches, and open-ended questions on suggestions for improvement.

For data collection and analysis, survey items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure parents' level of agreement with various expectations. Descriptive analysis, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, was applied to identify trends in parental aspirations and preferred approaches. Open-ended responses were analysed thematically to highlight recurring suggestions and concerns. This mixed-method design ensured that both quantitative insights (from the survey) and qualitative understanding (from open-ended responses, supported by the literature review) informed the findings, providing a comprehensive view of parents' perspectives and relevant teaching and learning approaches in TASKA.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected from 20 parent respondents through a Google Form survey. The survey explored parents' demographic backgrounds, their aspirations and expectations for their children's learning, preferred teaching and learning approaches, and their personal opinions on improving early education in TASKA. The results are organized into four sections: (A) Demographic Information, (B) Parents' Aspirations and Expectations, (C) Teaching and Learning Approaches, and (D) Parents' Open-Ended Opinions (refer appendix A-D). Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into how parents perceive and expect the implementation of early childhood education for infants and toddlers aged 12-36 months in TASKA.

Section A: Demographic Information

Demographic Information	Details	Responses (n)	Percentage
Parent's Age	20–29 years	11	55%
	30–39 years	9	45%
	40 years and above	0	0%
Employment Status	Full-time employee	14	70%

Number of Children in TASKA	Housewife	4	20%
	Self-employed	2	10%
	1 child	12	60%
	2 children	6	30%
Age of Children in TASKA	More than 2 children	2	10%
	12–18 months	4	20%
	18–24 months	8	40%
	24–30 months	7	35%
	30–36 months	8	40%

Table 1: Section A (Demographic Information)

Overall, parents' main expectations for their children's learning in TASKA focus on the holistic development of early childhood skills. Most parents emphasize the importance of social and communication skills, as well as independence in learning and daily activities. Many also hope their children will develop gross and fine motor skills, confidence, and positive behavior such as sharing, respect, and cooperation. In addition, parents expect a safe, caring, and nurturing environment where children can explore, play, and learn happily. Some parents also express their desire for early exposure to basic literacy and numeracy, while others highlight the need for teachers to be attentive and supportive of their children's individual needs. Overall, parents want their children to enjoy learning, feel secure, and grow holistically—socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively—through meaningful, play-based experiences in TASKA.

Section B: Parents' Aspirations & Expectations

Survey Question	Most Preferred Response	Second Most Preferred Response	Third Most Preferred Response
I want my child to quickly learn to say basic words.	Agree (9 = 45%)	Strongly Agree (6 = 30%)	Neutral (5 = 25%)

I want my child to be introduced to colors, shapes, and basic numbers.	Agree (11 = 55%)	Strongly Agree (9 = 45%)	-
I want my child to be exposed to storytelling and singing activities to encourage language development.	Agree (10 = 50%)	Strongly Agree (9 = 45%)	Neutral (1 = 5%)
I want my child to learn how to share and play with peers.	Agree (10 = 50%)	Strongly Agree (8 = 40%)	Neutral (2 = 10%)
I want my child to be guided in managing emotions (e.g., anger, crying).	Agree (12 = 60%)	Strongly Agree (8 = 40%)	-
I want my child to be more confident and independent.	Strongly Agree (11 = 55%)	Agree (9 = 45%)	-

I want my child to be actively involved in gross motor activities (e.g., running, jumping, climbing).	Agree (12 = 60%)	Strongly Agree (8 = 40%)	-
I want my child to engage in fine motor activities (e.g., stacking blocks, holding a pencil, drawing).	Strongly Agree (12 = 60%)	Agree (8 = 40%)	-
I want my child to be taught religious values from an early age (e.g., daily prayers, manners).	Strongly Agree (12 = 60%)	Agree (8 = 40%)	-
I want teachers to set a good example for children through their behavior.	Strongly Agree (14 = 70%)	Agree (6 = 30%)	-
I want my child to learn in a safe and clean environment.	Strongly Agree (12 = 60%)	Agree (8 = 40%)	-
I want teachers to always supervise children during playtime.	Strongly Agree (11 = 55%)	Agree (8 = 40%)	Neutral (1 = 5%)

Table 2: Section B (Parents' Aspirations & Expectations)

This section presents parents' aspirations and expectations regarding their children's development and learning experiences in TASKA. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, and most responses ranged between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree", showing strong parental support for holistic early learning. Most parents agreed that early communication and basic academic exposure are important. A total of 45% agreed and 30% strongly agreed that they want their children to quickly learn to say basic words. Similarly, 55% agreed and 45% strongly agreed on the importance of introducing colours, shapes, and basic numbers. Meanwhile, 50% agreed and 45% strongly agreed that storytelling and singing should be part of daily learning to promote language development. These findings indicate that parents value early exposure to literacy and numeracy in playful ways.

Parents also emphasised the importance of social interaction and emotional growth. Half of the respondents (50%) agreed that they want their children to learn to share and play with peers, while 60% agreed that teachers should guide children in managing emotions such as anger and crying. Confidence and independence were also highly prioritised, with 55% strongly agreeing and 45% agreeing that they want their children to be more confident and independent. This reflects a shared desire for well-rounded social and emotional development.

Parents showed strong agreement on the importance of physical activities. 60% agreed and 40% strongly agreed that their children should engage in gross motor activities such as running and climbing. For fine motor skills, 60% strongly agreed and 40% agreed, highlighting parents' awareness of the importance of hands-on activities like stacking blocks and holding pencils. These results suggest that parents appreciate active, movement-based learning experiences.

Moral and religious education were seen as highly important. 60% strongly agreed and 40% agreed that children should be taught religious values such as daily prayers and manners. Additionally, 70% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that teachers should serve as good role models for children's behaviour. This finding shows that parents expect TASKA to support both moral and character

development from an early age.

Almost all respondents expressed strong concern for their children's safety. 60% strongly agreed and 40% agreed that children should learn in a safe and clean environment. Likewise, 55% strongly agreed and 40% agreed that teachers must always supervise children during playtime. Only 5% remained neutral, indicating that safety and cleanliness are non-negotiable expectations among parents.

Overall, parents expressed very positive aspirations for a balanced, holistic education that covers cognitive, physical, emotional, moral, and safety aspects. They prefer active learning environments where teachers act as caring guides and positive role models. These expectations align closely with current early childhood education frameworks in Malaysia, which emphasise play-based and values-oriented learning in a safe and nurturing environment.

Section C: Teaching and Learning Approaches

Teaching Method	Responses (n)	Percentage
Islamic activities (daily prayers, nasheed songs, moral stories)	17	85%
Montessori (self-directed, sensory activities)	16	80%
Learning through play (play-based learning)	14	70%
Outdoor learning	12	60%
Music & movement activities	7	35%

Table 3: Section C (Teaching and Learning Approaches - Preferred Teaching Methods)

Most parents (85%) preferred Islamic-based activities to be integrated into daily routines. Many also valued Montessori and play-based learning (80% and 70%), which focus on exploration and hands-on experiences.

Activity Type	Responses (n)	Percentage
Social activities (group play, role-play)	8	40%
Reading and basic vocabulary activities	5	25%
Arts and creative activities (drawing, coloring, clay play)	5	25%
Physical activities (ball games, jumping, climbing)	2	10%

Table 4: Section C (Teaching and Learning Approaches - Expected Activities for Children in TASKA)

Parents showed the highest interest in social activities (40%), followed by reading/vocabulary and creative arts activities (25% each), reflecting their wish for a balance between social, cognitive, and creative development.

Frequency	Responses (n)	Percentage
Monthly	12	60%
Weekly	7	35%
Daily	1	5%

Table 5: Section C (Teaching and Learning Approaches - Preferred Frequency of Teacher-Parent Communication)

The majority of parents (60%) preferred monthly updates from teachers regarding their child's progress, suggesting a need for consistent but manageable communication.

Teacher Quality	Responses (n)	Percentage
Loving and caring	20	100%
Knowledgeable in child development	18	90%
Patient	16	80%
Creative and innovative	15	75%
Firm but approachable	7	35%

Table 6: Section C (Teaching and Learning Approaches - Qualities Expected from TASKA Teachers)

All respondents (100%) emphasized that teachers should be loving and caring, followed closely by being knowledgeable (90%) and patient (80%). Parents also valued creativity and innovation (75%), showing their expectations for engaging and thoughtful educators.

Section D: Open-Ended Questions (Parents' Opinions)

Based on the parents' responses, the main expectations for their children's learning in TASKA revolve around developing independence, communication, and social skills within a safe, caring, and play-based environment. Many parents emphasized the importance of gross and fine motor skill development, allowing children to become more confident and expressive in their daily interactions. Several respondents hoped that their children would learn basic literacy and numeracy skills, alongside positive values such as respect, sharing, and adaptability. Overall, parents expressed a strong desire for their children to enjoy learning through play, build confidence, and develop holistically—socially, emotionally, and cognitively—while being guided by caring and supportive teachers. Parents provided several valuable suggestions to improve the teaching and learning of infants and toddlers in TASKA. The majority emphasized the need for more play-based, hands-on, and sensory learning activities that encourage exploration, creativity, and enjoyment while supporting children's overall development. Many parents also suggested Integrating outdoor and creative

activities such as music, art, and storytelling to enhance engagement and self-expression. A number of respondents highlighted the importance of individualized lesson plans that consider each child's unique developmental pace, ensuring learning remains joyful and meaningful. Additionally, parents recommended stronger communication and collaboration between teachers and parents, including regular progress updates. Finally, some parents proposed smaller group settings, more attentive teachers, and continuous professional training to ensure high-quality early childhood education aligned with the aspirations of today's families.

DISCUSSION

The survey results show that parents most want a holistic, safe, and nurturing learning environment for infants and toddlers ($n = 20$). Top priorities included loving and caring teachers, safety and supervision, language and social skills, independence, motor development, and early values or religious teaching. Parents also expressed preference for a blend of approaches—including Islamic activities, Montessori, and play-based learning—combined with regular but not daily communication (typically monthly) from teachers. These findings indicate that parents prioritize emotional security and developmentally appropriate learning rather than an early focus on academics alone (survey data; $n = 20$).

These parental aspirations align closely with established developmental theories. Piaget's sensorimotor stage supports parents' emphasis on sensory-rich, hands-on experiences for 12–36-month-olds, while Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains why parents value social interaction, teacher scaffolding, and collaboration between parents and educators (Cheng & Cheng, 2022). Erikson's psychosocial theory highlights the importance of fostering trust and autonomy, which corresponds to parents' expectations for nurturing yet independence-promoting environments. Behaviourist principles, as proposed by Skinner, also help explain parents' support for consistent routines, supervision, and positive modelling by teachers (Cheng & Cheng, 2022; Ismail et al.,

2021).

When compared with recent Malaysian studies, the results show strong alignment. Local research consistently reports that parents desire safe environments, caring staff, play-based learning, and moral or religious education, while also grappling with expectations for early academic readiness (Tang et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2023). The strong parental preference for Islamic activities in this study reflects findings from Mohamed and Jasmi (2021), who emphasized the importance of culturally responsive practices that align TASKA activities with family and community values. Meanwhile, the growing interest in Montessori and hybrid models reflects a national trend towards balancing child-led exploration with measurable developmental outcomes (Mutmainna et al., 2024; Radzi et al., 2023).

Regarding whether current TASKA practices meet these expectations, evidence suggests partial alignment. While many TASKA centres advocate play-based and blended curricula, parents' feedback indicates gaps in teacher training, communication, and resource allocation. Malaysian studies have similarly identified these challenges, particularly in maintaining low teacher-child ratios and providing consistent progress updates (Radzi et al., 2023; Shaari et al., 2020). The survey's emphasis on monthly communication and individualized attention underscores parents' desire for more structured, ongoing engagement between home and centre.

Several key challenges emerge from both the survey and literature. First, TASKA must balance parental expectations for early academic skills with research-backed play-based pedagogy, as some families still prioritize early literacy over exploratory learning (Tang et al., 2022). Second, limited resources and staffing continue to constrain the implementation of creative and outdoor-based programs (Radzi et al., 2023; Shaari et al., 2020). Third, integrating religious and value-based education in a way that remains developmentally appropriate requires careful planning and parent collaboration (Mohamed & Jasmi, 2021). Lastly, maintaining safety,

supervision, and manageable group sizes remains an operational challenge frequently noted by both parents and scholars.

In summary, parents envision TASKA as a space that nurtures secure, engaging, and culturally grounded early learning, fostering growth across social, language, motor, and moral domains. These aspirations correspond closely with major developmental theories and current Malaysian early childhood education frameworks. However, to fully meet these expectations, improvements in teacher professional development, resource support, communication systems, and curricular balance are essential (Cheng & Cheng, 2022; Radzi et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that parents highly value a holistic approach to early childhood education, emphasizing emotional well-being, safety, and cognitive stimulation. Most parents aspire for TASKA to provide a nurturing environment where infants and toddlers can learn through play while feeling loved and secure. They expect teachers to be caring, patient, and professionally trained in handling young children's developmental needs.

To meet these expectations, TASKA should enhance communication with parents through regular feedback sessions and progress updates. Implementing more play-based and outdoor learning can support children's physical and social growth while keeping learning fun and engaging. Teachers should receive continuous training in child psychology and early childhood pedagogy to ensure effective, age-appropriate instruction.

Furthermore, TASKA should maintain a balanced curriculum that integrates religious, cognitive, physical, and emotional elements. This will help develop well-rounded children who are confident, compassionate, and ready for future learning. By aligning its practices with parents' aspirations, TASKA can strengthen trust and ensure quality care and education for every child.

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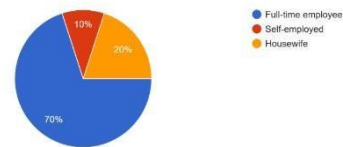
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APPENDIX A

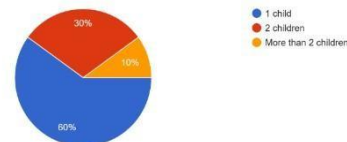
Parent's Age
20 responses



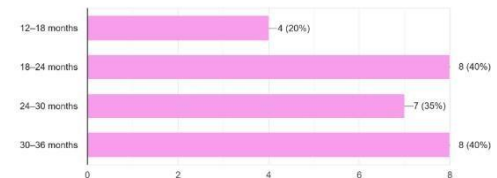
Employment Status
20 responses



Number of children enrolled in TASKA
20 responses



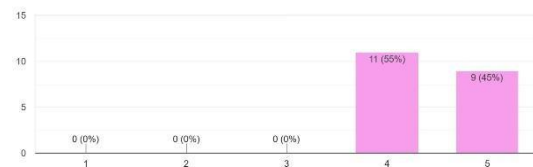
Age of your child/children in TASKA (you may select more than one)
20 responses



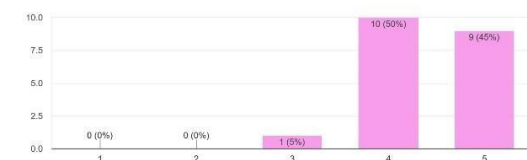
APPENDIX B

I want my child to quickly learn to say basic words.
20 responses

I want my child to be introduced to colors, shapes, and basic numbers.
20 responses

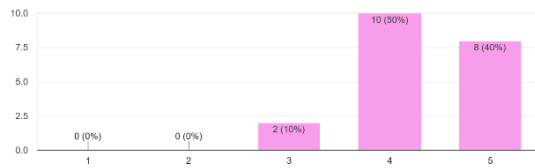


I want my child to be exposed to storytelling and singing activities to encourage language development.
20 responses



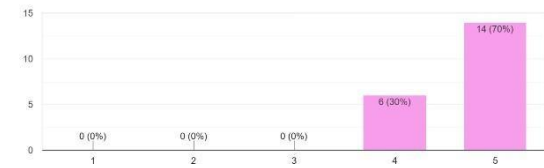
I want my child to learn how to share and play with peers.

20 responses



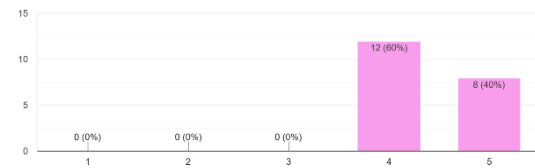
I want teachers to set a good example for children through their behavior.

20 responses



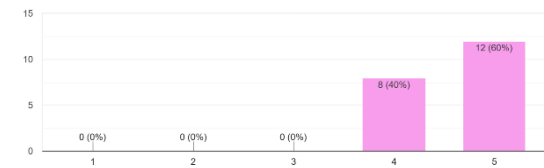
I want my child to be guided in managing emotions (e.g., anger, crying).

20 responses



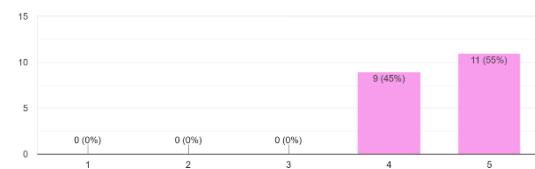
I want my child to learn in a safe and clean environment.

20 responses



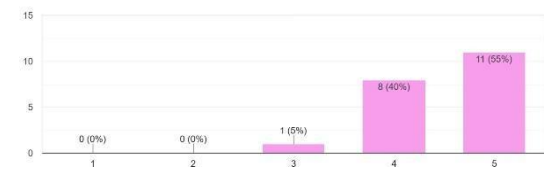
I want my child to be more confident and independent.

20 responses



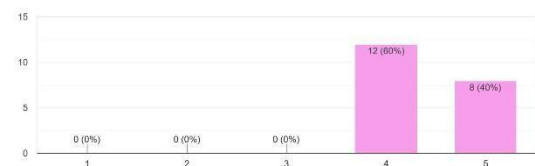
I want teachers to always supervise children during playtime.

20 responses



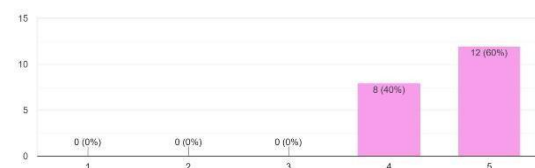
I want my child to be actively involved in gross motor activities (e.g., running, jumping, climbing).

20 responses



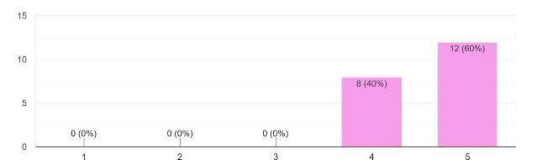
I want my child to engage in fine motor activities (e.g., stacking blocks, holding a pencil, drawing).

20 responses



I want my child to be taught religious values from an early age (e.g., daily prayers, manners).

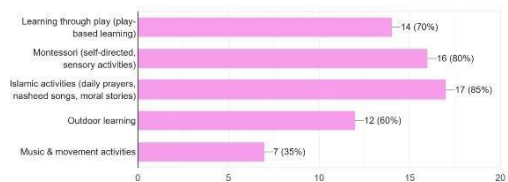
20 responses



APPENDIX C

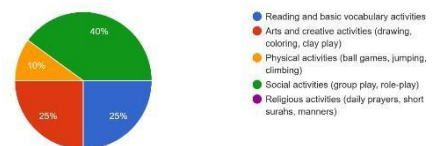
What teaching methods would you like teachers to use with your child? (You may select more than one)

20 responses

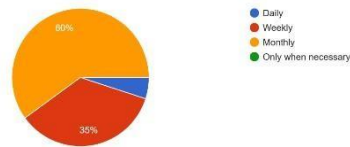


What type of activities do you expect most for your child in TASKA?

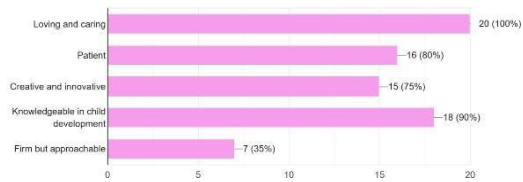
20 responses



In your opinion, how often should teachers communicate with parents about their child's development?
20 responses



What qualities do you expect most from TASKA teachers? (You may select more than one)
20 responses



APPENDIX D

What are your main expectations for your child's learning in TASKA?
20 responses

gross motor skills and independent skills
to be more expressfull
independent in learning
I expect my child to learn basic communication, social skills, and independence through play-based activities in a safe and caring environment. I also hope they gain early literacy, numeracy, and good values such as respect and sharing.
My main expectation is that my child can develops strong social and communication skills through play in a safe and nurturing environment.
I hope my child can grow in confidence, learn to interact well with others, and build good habits while enjoying fun and meaningful learning experiences suited to their age.
I expect my child to feel happy and safe while learning basic skills such as communication, sharing, and problem-solving, as well as developing curiosity and love for learning.
-
Can write and read
to learn about being sociable and improve their gross and motor skill
caring about my son and give space to my son in learning
I want my child to enjoy learning, make friends, and build confidence while exploring new things every day.
able to be independent
social and communication skills
I hope my child can learn to be independent, build confidence, and develop good social skills while enjoying early exposure to numbers, letters, and creative activities.

social skills and language for communication

I expect my child to learn in a safe and caring environment where they can develop independence, social skills, and early learning abilities such as communication, creativity, and problem-solving through play.

My main expectation is that my child feels safe, happy, and cared for while developing basic skills such as communication, social interaction, and independence. I also hope the teachers will nurture my child's curiosity and love for learning.

Communication

MY CHILDREN CAN LEARN HOW TO ADAPT WITH SITUATION IN A CORRECT WAY

What suggestions would you give to improve the teaching and learning of infants and toddlers in TASKA?
20 responses

-

individual lesson plan

explore more creativity within kids

prepare more creative activities

I suggest more hands-on and play-based activities that match the child's age, with a balance of physical, social, and cognitive development. Teachers could also give regular progress updates to parents and use creative materials, music, and storytelling to make learning more engaging.

A suggestion to improve the teaching and learning of infants and toddlers in TASKA is to implement more play-based and sensory learning activities, as these can help stimulate early cognitive, emotional, and physical development while keeping the children engaged and curious.

I suggest adding more creative activities like music, art, and storytelling, as well as providing regular feedback to parents so we can follow our child's progress closely.