

RESEARCH ARTICLE

FROM DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS TO PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS: TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN TASKA

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ABSTRACT

This library research explores the implementation of teaching and learning approaches for infants and toddlers in Malaysian childcare centres (TASKA) and examines how these practices meet the aspirations of today's parents. The study focuses on identifying developmentally appropriate strategies that support the holistic growth of children under the age of four. Using a library-based method, various academic sources, journals, and policy documents were analysed to gain insights into effective teaching practices, theoretical foundations, and the expectations of modern parents. The findings reveal that TASKA aim to promote early stimulation, emotional security, and foundational learning through play-based and interactive approaches. However, several challenges persist, including limited resources, high teacher–child ratios, and a mismatch between parental expectations and pedagogical principles. To address these issues, this report suggests strengthening parental awareness, enhancing teacher training, improving facilities, and fostering stronger family–centre collaboration. The research concludes that balancing developmental appropriateness with parental aspirations is key to improving the quality of early childhood education in Malaysia.

Keywords: *childcare centres, infants, toddlers, teaching and learning approaches, parental aspirations*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education has become a vital component of Malaysian society, reflecting parents' growing awareness of the importance of learning during the first few years of life. Childcare centres, or Taman Asuhan Kanak-Kanak (TASKA), cater to infants and toddlers aged from birth to four years old. These centres provide not only care and safety but also structured learning experiences that shape children's cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development. According to the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM, 2023), there are more than 5,000 registered TASKA nationwide, underscoring their essential role in supporting working families and early education (Taha et al., 2020).

Modern parents expect more than basic childcare

services. They aspire to programmes that encourage early academic readiness, bilingual communication, character development, and digital literacy. At the same time, they value safety, hygiene, and emotional well-being, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened awareness about children's holistic needs. These evolving expectations place new demands on TASKA to balance developmental appropriateness with modern aspirations (Ardoin, & Bowers, 2020).

The challenge for educators lies in aligning these expectations with research-based early childhood principles that emphasize play, exploration, and social interaction. This study examines how teaching and learning approaches in TASKA are designed to meet these aspirations while ensuring

that infants and toddlers develop at their natural pace.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this library research are as follows:

1. Identify key teaching and learning approaches implemented in Malaysian TASKA for infants and toddlers.
2. Examine how these approaches meet the aspirations of modern parents.
3. Analyse the challenges faced by educators in implementing these approaches effectively.
4. Propose recommendations to improve the quality of teaching and learning in TASKA.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Malaysia has evolved rapidly to meet parents' growing expectations for high-quality childcare that integrates safety, learning, and holistic development. With an increasing number of dual-income families, many parents now view TASKA not just as care centres but as the foundation for early education. The Ministry of Education (2020) reports that parents expect programmes to nurture early literacy, social skills, and emotional well being, preparing children for preschool and lifelong learning (Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

Educational theories provide a foundation for understanding effective teaching and learning approaches in TASKA. Piaget's cognitive development theory (1952) explains that infants and toddlers in the sensorimotor stage learn best through exploration and sensory experiences. Activities such as water play, stacking blocks, and manipulating objects allow children to construct knowledge actively. Teachers who follow this approach encourage curiosity and discovery rather than focusing on academic drills.

Erikson's psychosocial theory (1963) complements this by emphasising the need for trust and autonomy in the first three years of life. Caregivers who respond consistently and encourage independence foster emotional security and confidence. For

example, allowing toddlers to choose toys or self-feed promotes self-esteem and decision-making skills (Gross, 2020).

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (1978) highlights the role of social interaction in learning. Through guided participation, or scaffolding, children acquire new skills with adult support. In TASKA, teachers scaffold learning by modelling actions, giving verbal cues, and engaging in meaningful conversations. Language-rich interactions such as singing, storytelling, and responding to children's vocalisations strengthen both communication and thinking skills.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) offers a broader view, recognising that children's development is shaped by family, community, and culture. Malaysian parents often expect childcare settings to reflect cultural and moral values, including respect, cooperation, and bilingual communication. Strong partnerships between parents and teachers are essential to ensure that learning experiences in TASKA are consistent with those at home.

The PERMATA National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2016) provides the national guideline for childcare education in Malaysia. It promotes holistic development across physical, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and spiritual domains through play-based learning and meaningful interactions. The framework also stresses parental involvement and continuous observation as tools for assessing children's progress.

Research by Mutalib et al., (2024) highlights that quality assurance in ECCE depends on professional teacher training and adherence to national standards. Effective educators combine theoretical knowledge with reflective practices to support children's learning and strengthen family-centre collaboration.

In summary, the literature shows that effective teaching and learning approaches in Malaysian TASKA are grounded in play, relationships, and holistic development. Theories by Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson, and Bronfenbrenner provide a strong foundation for designing programmes that

meet both developmental needs and parental aspirations. The PERMATA framework and national regulations further ensure consistency and cultural relevance in early education. Continuous collaboration among teachers, parents, and policymakers is crucial to maintaining quality and supporting the holistic growth of infants and toddlers in Malaysia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative library research design to explore effective teaching and learning approaches for infants and toddlers in childcare centres (TASKA) that align with the expectations of modern parents. The research relied entirely on secondary data sources, including academic journal articles, scholarly books, policy documents, and credible online databases such as Google Scholar and ERIC.

To ensure the findings reflect current trends and practices in early childhood education, the reviewed materials were limited to materials published between 2015 and 2024. Key national references, such as the PERMATA Curriculum Framework (2007) and the National Child Care Standard Guidelines, were also analyzed to provide relevant insights into Malaysia's policy framework and standards for early childhood care and education.

All collected information was organised thematically into several major categories, including play-based learning, holistic and child-centred approaches, learning through daily routines, and parental expectations. A thematic analysis approach was applied to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and best practices across different sources. Through this process, the study developed a comprehensive understanding of how TASKA implements effective pedagogical strategies that support the holistic development of infants and toddlers while meeting parents' aspirations for high-quality early education.

FINDINGS

The findings from this library research reveal several teaching and learning approaches currently

practised in Malaysian childcare centres (TASKA) to promote holistic development in infants and toddlers.

The first and most fundamental approach is play-based learning. Activities such as water play, block stacking, and pretend play allow children to explore and understand their surroundings. These experiences develop fine and gross motor skills, foster creativity, and support problem solving. Teachers design play sessions that are flexible yet purposeful, integrating elements of language, math, and social interaction naturally within the play (Babik et al., 2022).

The second finding is the emphasis on relationship-based and interactive learning. Teachers build trust and emotional security through consistent routines, eye contact, and positive reinforcement. Singing, storytelling, and physical closeness help establish bonds that are critical during early development. This reflects Erikson's view that emotional attachment lays the foundation for confidence and exploration. (Babik et al., 2022)

Third, TASKA encourages language-rich environments to promote communication. Teachers engage children in conversations during daily routines, play, and diaper changes—to build vocabulary and understanding. Many centres also incorporate bilingual exposure to align with parents' aspirations for multilingual competence.

Fourth, integrated thematic learning is applied to connect experiences across developmental domains. For example, a theme such as "Animals" can involve sound imitation (language), movement games (physical), and picture matching (cognitive). This method aligns with the PERMATA Curriculum's goal of holistic development.

Finally, family-centre collaboration is a key component. TASKA frequently shares progress updates, organises parenting workshops, and encourages home-based learning activities. This partnership supports Bronfenbrenner's ecological model by strengthening the relationship between home and childcare environments. Overall, these findings suggest that Malaysian TASKA utilise play-based, relationship-focused, and culturally responsive practices that balance developmental

appropriateness with parental expectations.

DISCUSSION

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

Gap between Parental Expectations and Child Development

One of the major challenges faced by TASKA is balancing parental aspirations with the developmental readiness of infants and toddlers. Many parents expect their children to master early academic skills such as reading, counting, or even writing at a very young age. However, developmental psychology emphasises that children in the infant-toddler stage learn primarily through sensory exploration and play. This mismatch between expectations and pedagogical practices creates tension, as parents may perceive play-based learning as insufficient compared to academic instruction. (Moges, 2019).

Limited Resources and Facilities

Another challenge relates to the availability of resources and facilities. Not all childcare centres have access to high-quality teaching aids, safe outdoor spaces, or well-equipped classrooms. Limited financial capacity often restricts the purchase of innovative learning materials or the maintenance of safe environments. These limitations can affect the quality of teaching and learning experiences offered to children, potentially falling short of parental expectations for a stimulating and enriching environment (Ali et al., 2024).

High Teacher-Child Ratios

Many TASKA face the problem of high teacher-child ratios, where one teacher is responsible for a large number of children. This situation makes it difficult to provide individualised care and attention, which are crucial during the early years of development. High ratios also lead to increased workload and stress among teachers, affecting the quality of interactions and the ability to scaffold learning effectively. Parents, on the other hand, expect personalised care and consistent

communication about their child's progress. (Hussein et al., 2020).

Lack of Parental Understanding of Pedagogy

Parents often misunderstand the principles of early childhood pedagogy, particularly the value of play-based learning. Some view structured academic instruction as superior to exploration and play, failing to recognise that these methods are developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers. This lack of understanding may cause dissatisfaction with TASKA programmes and create pressure on teachers to prioritise academic goals over holistic development (Ali et al., 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Parental Education and Awareness Programmes

To address the gap between expectations and reality, TASKA should organise workshops, seminars, and regular communication sessions with parents. These initiatives can educate parents about child development, the importance of play-based learning, and realistic milestones for infants and toddlers. When parents have a better understanding of pedagogy, they are more likely to align their aspirations with developmentally appropriate practices. (Liu, et al., 2021).

Enhanced Professional Training for Teachers

Continuous professional development for teachers is essential to ensure quality education in TASKA. Training should include child psychology, early childhood pedagogy, classroom management, and innovative teaching strategies. Well-trained teachers are better equipped to scaffold children's learning, manage classrooms effectively, and communicate with parents confidently, thus building trust and credibility (Toivonen, et al., 2020).

Investment in Facilities and Resources

Improving the quality of learning environments is critical. Government support, private investment, and community partnerships can help TASKA obtain safe infrastructure, stimulating materials, and child-friendly facilities. Access to high-quality resources not only enriches the learning experience but also reassures parents that their children are in a

safe and supportive environment. (Eden, et al., 2024).

Strengthening Family-Centre Collaboration

TASKA should foster strong partnerships with families by maintaining open channels of communication and involving parents in decision-making processes. Activities such as parent teacher meetings, joint events, and collaborative projects can enhance trust and cooperation. When parents and teachers work together, it creates consistency between home and centre practices, ensuring that children's development is supported in both environments (Eden, et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the implementation of teaching and learning approaches for infants and toddlers in childcare centres (TASKA) and how these practices align with the aspirations of today's parents. The findings highlight that TASKA plays a vital role in providing not only custodial care but also structured, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that lay the foundation for lifelong growth. Grounded in the developmental theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson, and Bronfenbrenner, effective approaches in TASKA emphasise play-based learning, child-centred interaction, nurturing socio-emotional development, and the integration of family and community values.

It is evident that parental aspirations today are broader and more complex than in previous generations. Parents expect TASKA to deliver safe and hygienic environments, early academic exposure, bilingual opportunities, and moral or religious grounding. While these aspirations reflect a positive concern for children's futures, they sometimes create challenges when they do not align with children's developmental readiness. The study identified four key challenges: the gap between parental expectations and pedagogy, limited resources, high teacher-child ratios, and a lack of parental understanding of early learning approaches. These issues can restrict the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices if not adequately addressed.

At the same time, this study has also presented viable recommendations to strengthen early childhood education in Malaysia. These include empowering parents through education and awareness, providing continuous professional development for teachers, improving resources and facilities, and enhancing collaboration between families and centres. Together, these strategies can create a more integrated, holistic, and sustainable approach to early education.

In conclusion, the implementation of teaching and learning approaches in TASKA demonstrates significant potential to meet the evolving aspirations of modern parents. However, achieving this requires careful balancing between developmental appropriateness and parental expectations, supported by investment in teacher training, facilities, and parent-centre partnerships. By bridging these gaps, TASKA can ensure that infants and toddlers receive nurturing, meaningful, and future-oriented educational experiences, ultimately contributing to the development of a resilient, competent, and well-rounded generation. Therefore, TASKA remain an essential platform for nurturing future generations and supporting Malaysia's vision for holistic early childhood education.

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