

# TASKA Teachers' Perception of PERMATA Early Childhood Nursing and Education Course Certification

(PERMATA TASKA Course)

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## Article Info

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**Abstract:** TASKA teachers in childcare centres or TASKA play a very important role in shaping children's foundation, including the aspects of personality, knowledge, and worldview. TASKA teachers are not only responsible for taking care of children but also for influencing the children on the basics of life and education. In Malaysia, to be certified as a TASKA teacher, the candidate must fulfill the minimum eligibility requirement, which is earning the Kursus Asuhan PERMATA (KAP) certificate. This qualitative study explores TASKA teachers' perception of KAP certification as the minimum requirement to qualify as registered teachers and certified by Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM). This survey involved four teachers from several registered TASKA at Bandar Baru Bangi. The data collection method involved interviews, observation, field notes, and document analysis. The finding indicates that KAP certification benefits TASKA teachers and equips them with basic knowledge in early childhood education. KAP certification also helps teachers to understand their roles and responsibilities in nurturing children during their precious ages.

## Article History

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## 1. Introduction

Recently, Malaysia's high demand for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes has grown tremendously. Therefore, the demand for qualified early childhood educators is also increasing. The ECCE Council was established in 2010 under the Economic Transformation Programme aimed at enhancing the professionalism and quality of the ECCE industry. Many public and private higher learning centres offer early childhood education programmes such as Certificates, Diplomas, and Bachelor's Degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Bachelor of Education specializing in early childhood education. There are currently institutions that also offer Master's degrees and PhDs in Early Childhood Education. Graduates with Certificates, Diplomas, or Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education can teach at kindergartens or nurseries. Currently, more than 70 programmes related to early childhood education are offered at 42 public and private institutions listed in the Malaysian Qualifications Register or the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) Portal (Syed Chear, 2017).

All pre-schoolers under the Ministry of Education Malaysia have required teachers to have a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education as a minimum qualification to ensure quality and professionalism in early childhood education. The government also encourages early

childhood educators in the private sector to have a Diploma in Early Childhood Education as a minimum academic qualification. Due to competition and to ensure the quality of service, the Kindergarten and Quality TASKA (TASKA) are hiring graduates with a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education to serve in their organization.

A career as a TASKA teacher in Malaysia is generally not an optional profession. However, now a career as an early childhood educator is seen as increasingly important and attention-gaining, in line with the rapid development of the Education and Early Childhood Parenting industry in Malaysia in particular and the world in general. The demand for TASKA services is increasing, especially to meet the high demand among working parents. The government's proposal to increase labour participation among women by 59% by 2020 will encourage many women to return to work. This phenomenon has prompted the government to encourage more nurseries to be opened to enable women to return to contribute their energy and expertise in driving the country's progress. By January 2020, all government agencies and departments are urged to establish nurseries in their respective workplaces, and priority is given to government agencies with shift work, such as hospitals and schools. Since the beginning of 2019, a total of 56 workplace nurseries have been approved for establishment. A further 101 applications to open nurseries in the workplace were proposed. The situation shows that NURSE plays a very important role in providing support systems to working parents to care for and manage their children throughout their working life. The establishment of TASKA can help working mothers obtain care and education services that promote the overall and balanced development and growth of children (Rokis, 2004). In addition, nurseries indirectly support parents to work more committedly and thus result in good productivity in their services.

This phenomenon has been one of the catalysts to encouraging the fast-growing Early Childhood Education industry and gaining government support through the Ministry of Family and Community Women Development and the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Since parenting and early childhood education combine two main aspects, namely parenting and education, these two ministries play an important and responsible role in the jurisdiction provided by law. The increasing demand for more nurseries has increased job opportunities for TASKA teachers. The increasing demand for TASKA teachers not only increased in terms of quantity but also the quality of TASKA teachers required.

Among the issues related to TASKA teachers in Malaysia are as follows:

**a) Lack of Qualified TASKA Teachers**

The trend of working mothers and fathers is causing high demand for childcare needs by both working parents (Chang, Chen, & Lan, 2013). This phenomenon has stimulated the existence of childcare centres or nurseries, especially in large cities or in areas with dense settlements. The existence of a large number of nurseries will lead to high demand for TASKA teachers. However, according to statistics from the Department of Social Welfare, the parenting industry and early childhood education are faced with a lack of registered nannies. As of June 2018, the number of caregivers serving in childcare centres registered with the JKM was 16,873. Based on that number, more than 80% or 13,700 nurseries have yet to meet the minimum

qualification, i.e. pass the PERMATA Basic and Early Education Course as stipulated by the TASKA Act 1984 (BERNAMA, 2018).

TASKA teachers who have qualification requirements in the field of parenting and early childhood education can provide quality services as well as ensure the safety and welfare of children in nurseries are always maintained. The lack of a poor TASKA teacher impacts children's quality and safety assurance. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia census projections in 2010, the estimated number of children aged 0-4 years in 2018 reached 2.3 million people (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Meanwhile, it is estimated that 50% of the children need TASKA services. This means that a further 38,333 nurseries are needed to accommodate the demand based on the number of needy children. However, the statistics for the registration of TASKA JKM only show that the number of registered nurseries is 4,302 or (11.22%) only.

According to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Ismail, in his opening remarks during the opening ceremony of TASKA Day 2018, the availability of nurseries is very important in providing support systems to working parents in managing their children. TASKA indirectly plays a role in assisting the government's efforts to increase labour force participation among women by 59% in 2020 (Wan Ismail, 2018).

#### **b) Accident Cases in TASKA**

The Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development stated that most cases of child accidents occur in unregistered nurseries and are also caused by the failure of TASKA teachers serving in nurseries to attend the PERMATA Early Childhood Care and Education Course (Abu Bakar, 2017). Failure to comply with the minimum guidelines or standards set by the Department of Health also contributes to cases of neglect and abuse of children in nurseries. Nabiha Gul Hassan, Hayati Kadir @ Shahar, Hajar Abdul Rahman, in his study entitled "Knowledge of Caregivers for the Prevention of Injuries Among Children in Daycares Centres In Putrajaya and Selangor in 2016", aimed to identify the caregiver's knowledge on safety and accident prevention in child care centres in Malaysia. The summary of the study found that most caregivers involved in the study conducted in Putrajaya and Selangor had insufficient knowledge (61.4%) of the prevention of accidents among children in nurseries (Hassan, Kadir Shahar, & Abdul Rahman, 2016).

Accidents can happen anywhere, and children are the most at risk of accidents and illnesses. Therefore, safety and health care factors are important to be given attention in nurseries. Nurseries need to provide a clean and safe environment whereby the environment of care plays an important role in the health and safety of children (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2013). Every TASKA operator and teacher is responsible for implementing safety and health care measures to prevent the occurrence of accidents, injuries, or deaths of children in nurseries. This responsibility is in line with the roles and responsibilities of TASKA teachers explained through the TASKA Regulations 2012, 15 (1) (d) on the last page.

As is also commonly known, every child has the right to protect a safe environment and is protected from any injury or abuse. This is as stated in one of the main objectives of the National Children's Policy (NSC), which is to ensure that every child has the right to live by being given care, care, love, health services, support, and social assistance (Department of Social Welfare, 2016). Despite the rights, an estimated 2,400 children die daily from accidents and abuse. Meanwhile, according to UNICEF, an estimated 5.3 million children under the age of five died in 2018 (UNICEF.org, 2019). Malaysia's total population in 2019 is estimated to be 32.6 million people; out of that number, 9.3 million people are estimated to be children under 18. Selangor is the state with the highest number of children under the age of 18 years at 1.8 million. In 2018, the number of deaths of children under the age of 5 in Malaysia was 4,427 compared to 4,295 in 2017. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017)

The high demand for childcare centres by working parents (Chang, Chen, & Lan, 2013) caused accidents among children in care centres to show improvement and attention in most countries (Kopjar & Wickizer, 1996). Therefore, all nurseries registered under the Department of Health must monitor the health of children sent to nurseries. TASKA teachers are responsible for monitoring and checking the health of children present at nurseries daily. Children's temperature readings and physical examinations will be recorded and stored as TASKA documents. If it is found that a child is unwell or there are any suspicious physical signs, the TASKA teacher is responsible for informing the entrepreneur, parent, or guardian immediately. TASKA teachers also have the right to refuse or disallow entry for sick children, especially those with highly contagious diseases.

### **c) High Turnaround Rate for TASKA Teachers**

One of the causes of the shortage of TASKA teachers is the high turnover rate of work among them. According to Dr. Wan Azizah, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, there are a total of 5,720 nurseries that have passed the PERMATA Early Nursing and Education Course in 2013. Only 2,171 remain in the childcare industry, and the rest are unlikely to be involved in early childhood education. This very high turnover of work is believed to be one of the causes that contribute to the non-compliance to the conditions of owning Kursus Asuhan Permata (KAP).

Many factors contributed to the turnaround among TASKA teachers. Most studies agree that the issue of low and insufficient pay is one of the main causes of high employee turnover rates in childcare centres. Schonkoff & Phillips (2000) and Whitebook & Bellm (1999) supported this claim, noting that low pay was a factor identified as the main reason teachers left their jobs. In addition, inaccurate selection of employees and poor relationships among colleagues were also the cause of job turnover (Bloom, 1997; Greengard, 1995; Steele & Jenks, 1977).

In Malaysia, most TASKA teachers only accept the offer of a minimum wage of RM 1,100 per month. However, beginning in January 2020, the government has ordered the enforcement of the minimum wage rate to be increased from RM1,100 to RM1,200 per month in 57 designated urban regions. The minimum wage rate in the area other than unspecified is unchanged at RM 1,100 per month (BERNAMA, 2019). The study of 399 TASKA teachers conducted in Putrajaya and Selangor found that 56.4% of the study participants received minimum wage

payments, and 51.67% of the study participants at least received education to secondary school (Hassan, Kadir Shahar & Abdul Rahman, 2016). The level of education of caregivers in Malaysia as a whole, 93% of them have only Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) qualifications. This factor has limited them to earn a higher salary than the minimum wage.

In the United States, early childhood educators are among the professional jobs that receive the lowest payouts. According to the U.S. Department of Labour, in 2011, preschool teachers and employees' median salary at childcare centres was between \$7.90 and \$9.53 an hour (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2019). This turnover was lower than the income earned by parking attendants, cooks, and cashiers and lower than kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers (Barnett, 2003; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Cassidy, Lower, Kinter-Duffy, Archana, & Shim (2011) reported that early childhood teachers received 1/3 of a lower income than kindergarten teachers in public schools even though they had similar educational qualifications. Not only did receiving unpaid pay, but lack of rewards such as pensions, health insurance, and payments for training opportunities (Hale-Jinks, Knopf, & Kemple, 2006) were also identified as reasons why early childhood educators left their jobs (Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009).

Turnover is a process of switching employees from one organization to another. Ivancevich & Matteson (1993) note that high turnover has a negative impact on an organization. It can result in an organization having to incur significant losses if the turnover rate is critical.

Guinding et al. (2014) stated that the problem of turnover of work involves increased new recruitment expenses, training costs, additional equipment costs, loss and deterioration of production, and increased risk of accidents. The annual turnover rate for the childcare workforce in the United States stands at 30% (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2004). Not only in the United State but the problem of high turnaround rates among early childhood workers is also identified to occur in other countries such as Australia and Japan (Fenech, 2013). The turnover rate for staff involved in childcare is an important indicator closely related to the childcare centre's program (Cassidy, et al., 2008).

Most studies state the consensus that quality childcare and education programs will deliver quality results to children (Dunn, 1993). Quality care centres are allegedly able to help children achieve high cognitive and social abilities and can prepare children to step into KINDERGARTEN and school well (Public Policy Forum, 2007). The problem of high teacher turnover negatively affects children and the relationship between parents and teachers (Cassidy, Lower, Kinter-Duffy, Archana, & Shim, 2011). In addition, it also negatively affects children's social, emotional, and language development (Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010). The turnover frequency among early childhood teachers will prevent the existence of a love affair between children and teachers (Raikes, 1993).

Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes (2001) conducted a six-year study to look at the turnaround of early childhood teachers and their effects on several childcare centres. The findings show that participants who participated in the study in 1994 found that 76% of them no longer worked with their original job (teacher) in 1996, while 82% of those who participated

in the study had left their jobs in 2000. The study found that the average annual turnover rate is 30% or 0-100%, depending on the care centre.

However, some studies show low employee turnover rates among teachers with early childhood training. A follow-up study by the Child Development Associate (CDAs) found that over 90% of accredited teachers would continue their teaching careers (Bailey, 2004).

According to Vygotsky, children need new skills and information when they are in a zone known as the Zone of Proximal (ZPD). While in this zone, the child finds the task given is difficult to solve on their own without the help of others. However, getting help from an adult or a peer with higher skills and knowledge allows the child to solve the problem or difficulties faced. People who help children solve their problems can be parents, teachers, or peers (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). Vygotsky called them MKO or More Knowledgeable than Others. This idea introduced by Vygotsky has given a new idea in early childhood education.

The act of assisting children when they are in the ZPD zone is named scaffolding. Scaffolding refers to the temporary assistance provided to the child so that he can perform or master the task. The temporary assistance provided is coordinated, either added or reduced, depending on the skill level of the child. Once the child has mastered the skills, the scaffolding aid can be stopped.

Providing assistance when students are in the ZPD zone is a very important and effective time. Teachers need to determine that the child is in the ZPD zone to help him learn something new. In this study, researchers looked at the relevance of this theory to the situation experienced by TASKA teachers undergoing KAP training. When they attended KAP, they were assumed to have previous knowledge of their work experience in TASKA. Attending KAP courses like them are in the ZPD zone and need help from more discerning people to enable them to understand more about early childhood upbringing and upbringing.

Trainees, coordinators, and peers are people who can help TASKA teachers gain the understanding, experience, and skills needed while they jointly carry out activities throughout their KAP courses. Attending classes and having discussions, preparing teaching aids, preparing for the planning and implementation of activities, working in groups and practical training are scaffolding assistance as stated in Vygotsky's theory that allows them to understand things that were previously unclear under the guidance of trained people and sharing information with more experienced friends.

KAP courses attended by prospective entrepreneurs are the same as those attended by caregivers, entrepreneurs, or supervisors. This is stated in the TASKA Regulations 2012, where all employers, managers, supervisors, and caregivers are required to attend and pass the PERMATA Care Course within twelve months of work. Thus, having a KAP certificate is one of the conditions for any individual interested in opening TASKA.

## **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

To find out the views of TASKA teachers on the KAP certification.

1. To identify how TASKA teachers practice KAP knowledge in their daily work.

## 1.2 Study Questions

1. What are the views of TASKA teachers on the KAP certification?
2. How far can TASKA teachers practice the knowledge learned from KAP in their daily tasks?

## 2. Literature review

The selection of nurseries by parents is considered important to determine that children get an appropriate environment for their cognitive, social, and psychological development of children (Santrock, 2009). A study entitled "Knowledge of Caregivers for the Prevention of Injuries Among Children in Day Cares Centres in Putrajaya and Selangor" in 2016 found that the majority of caregivers involved in the study conducted in Putrajaya and Selangor had insufficient knowledge (61.4%) on the prevention of accidents among children in nurseries (Hassan, Kadir Shahar, & Abdul Rahman, 2016). Caregivers are also advised to improve their knowledge and skills in educating children, especially in times of emergency. While caregivers have a basic knowledge and good practice on safety, safe environments should always be emphasized to ensure the safety of children (Sarnon, Ali, & Zakaria, 2017).

Basically, the quality of early childhood care and upbringing can be improved by the increasing commitment among caregivers. A study conducted in November 2016 found that TASKA carers performed their roles well in line with the guidelines of the PERMATA Negara curriculum. Improvements in the quality of early childhood care and upbringing need to be adjusted to encourage TASKA caregivers to stay in their careers (Azizan, Roslan, Konean, Ahmad, & Zainal, 2016).

Regarding policies, philosophies, goals, and regulations in TASKA institutions in Malaysia, a group of researchers through a study entitled "Study on the Implementation of NURSEAs in Malaysia: Implications on Policies and Programmes provided" 2003 found that almost all TASKA institutions in their studies did not have clear directions or goals. This study recommends that the Social Welfare Department provide a standard guide for establishing a suitable task to be implemented in the context of the Malaysian community. TASKA entrepreneurs and assistants need to be trained. The government is required to provide courses and training to anyone operating a TASKA institution. Intensive courses should be given from time to time in preparation for teachers to enrich their knowledge. The government must also determine the salaries, rewards, or incentives of teachers and assistants to match their education and responsibilities (Kamaruddin, Ibrahim, Muhammad, Nordin, & Samad, 2003)

Early childhood education should also be emphasized by parents who are the children's first teachers. With the support of teachers from the early stages, the formation of an excellent generation can be started from the very beginning (Mohd Hamidin, Md Isa, Abd Rahman, & Hamdi, 2017). Mariani Md. Nor (2006), in a study entitled "The Reality of Trends and Issues In Early Childhood Education" stated that parental involvement is very significant in children's educational process. In addition, the children's environment greatly influences their development and growth in the learning process, such as family, social networking, society, and the educational aspect itself. Various issues such as management, social, cultural, and emotional diversity of children are still the issue of discussion of the experts of the child

educator. The Ministry of Education is recommended to continue to play a serious role in determining the effectiveness of the learning process of children in preschool can be carried out successfully.

### 3. Methodology

This study is a qualitative study. Sample selection is based on several criteria that have been set to ensure that the data and information required to meet the requirements of the study. The number of samples was small and involved only four participants. The study participants consisted of TASKA carers serving in TASKA centres. Two of them served in Bandar Baru Bangi, one in Ampang and the other in Negeri Sembilan. Researchers contacted the selected TASKA operators, meeting face to face as well as meeting via phone call to inform them of the research conduction and request permission to interview their employees. The chosen TASKA operator has agreed and verbally consented to the researchers to conduct the study without requiring the researcher to issue a formal application letter to the TASKA operators involved. The selected participants must meet the criteria set by researchers, such as having served in TASKA registered with the JKM, serving in TASKA for more than 12 months, being permanent employees in TASKA, aged 18 years and above, having attended KAP courses, and Malaysian citizens.

**Table 1. Demographics of the participants**

Study Participants	Age	Education Stage	Marital Status	Position	Length of Service	of Take a KAP course
P1	25	M	Bachelor	Supervisor	3 years	Already
P2	20	M	Bachelor	Teacher	2 years	Already
P3	33	M	Married	Supervisor	8 years	Already
P4	31	STPM	Married	Teacher	6 years	Already

The study used instruments commonly used in other qualitative studies: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Research equipment used includes interview protocols and observation protocols that provide interview and observation guidelines.

The interview was conducted at the premises where the participants worked. The opportunity to meet with participants enabled researchers to make observations throughout the interview. As for the other two participants, researchers interviewed them through phone calls and WhatsApp messages. All information obtained from the interviews is recorded and recorded as formidable audio recordings and recorded. The interview questions contained questions about the participants' views, experiences, and explanations of KAP certification. The questions asked are unstructured questions where participants are free to give answers and express their views personally on the issues studied. Analysis of the documents is viewed from



the children's activity report and the Rancangan Pelaksanaan Aktiviti Kanak-Kanak or Implementation Plan for Children's Activities (RPA).

All participants' responses are then transcribed by shifting the oral form to the writing. Then, all transcribed documents need to be read and categorized according to the appropriate themes to support the findings.

#### **4. Analysis of studies**

To answer two questions of the study, the researchers formulated based on the themes in line with the study questions with the following:

#### **4.1 Study Questions 1: What are the Views of TASKA teachers on the KAP Certification**

##### **4.1.1 Enhanced knowledge of early childhood education**

Researchers found that all participants agreed and acknowledged that the KAP course was very effective and could enhance their knowledge and understanding of early childhood upbringing and upbringing. They were able to gain much knowledge through KAP, and it was very beneficial to them. These findings are supported by participants' views as follows:

"For me, this KAP certificate needs to be arr... Anyone who wants to be... whether the TASKA operator, TASKA supervisor, task manager or TASKA teacher arr... should have KAP certificates because we want to know how to take care, educate, to support the children in the TASKA." -P1

"Ok, it is good for me to take this KAP. We can learn about the development of children, how to control their emotions... I know how to handle everyone. Every age is different development"-P2

"Err... suitable and good for current demand, because parents have more confidence in those educators who have KAP"-P3

"Emm... Even if JKM comes, he will see whether the staff has a KAP certificate or not. So, if we have the certificate, we will feel proud."- P4

Based on the views of all participants, KAP was found to be very helpful in enhancing their knowledge in early childhood parenting and upbringing. This is in line with the main objectives and goals of training to achieve any changes in knowledge, skills, experience, behavior, or temperament, which can highlight an employee's capabilities (Gerhart, Minkoff, & Olsen, 1994).

##### **4.1.2 Having an understanding of children's development**

The study found that all P1, P2, P3, and P4 participants admitted that after having a KAP certificate, they were more aware of the child's development and what they should have done to serve the children they were dealing with. This is evidenced by the participant's statement as follows:

"Yes... For example, it is not easy actually to take care of a baby 2 months to 1 year old, because he does not understand anything. So, when we have studied in KAP, we know how to interact with the baby, we know reasons he does face like this or that... then, we can understand." - P1

"Understand more... Because knowing one person is different at every age, the emotions too can make us comfortable to handle them. For example, if a crying child does not want to do any activity, we can try to attract him or ask him to sing a song. Previously, if the child cries, we just ignore it, we do not know what to do, let him be there, do not know how to handle him, or what activities to conduct. After having KAP, I feel more manageable as I know what to do if there is a case like that"- P2

"Yes... Know that our responsibility is not for them to play only but to monitor their progress, whether the activity is appropriate with the age or not"- P3

"It is like the teacher has to have the discipline to welcome the child. We must smile every morning. We must show them first and when the children see they could imitate. One emm... PERMATA activity is assisting in further developing fine motor. Before having KAP, we thought of solely taking care of the children. But, after having KAP, we learn that apparently, the child has six stages of development"- P4

The development of children is core to early childhood education. TASKA teachers need a strong knowledge of children's growth and development to plan and design a safe, healthy environment and stimulate the development of relevant childhood experiences. (Malaysian qualifications agency, 2014). Participants' knowledge of children's development enabled them to understand how children learn, effective learning methods, and effective learning start-ups to be used in learning activities. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) divided the development of children into four stages, namely sensorimotor (born-2 years), Pre-operative (2-7 Years), Concrete Operations (7-12 years), and Formal Operations (12 years and older) (Miller, 2011).

Understanding a child's development enables a teacher to understand the tasks better and roles they need to take and take the right actions or decisions. In addition, understanding children's development can help them have friendly relationships with children and understand the needs and behaviour of children under their care. This is in line with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory which states that success in meeting children's needs allows them to develop perfectly.

#### **4.1.3 Improve communication skills with parents**

According to participants, KAP was found to be very effective in helping them improve the quality of their work. KAP can help improve participants' communication abilities and skills with children's parents, as shared by P1 and P2 in the following excerpt:

" When you have been working at TASKA there are many works to do. Err... The job is not necessarily nurturing a child, and there is another job to take care of TASKA, err... Want to manage the children's progress, update the daily logbooks, at least we know how we want to interact with the parents..."- P1

"It means we understand more about doing the task with children. The work Is more organized systematically... work at TASKA err... There is a lot to handle besides the child, parent is

important too... emmm... Like telling them about their children, what they are good at, and what they have learned in TASKA. We have to know how to answer all that".- P2

#### **4.1.4 Improves work efficiency**

Meanwhile, based on the views of P3 & P4, KAP is very helpful in improving their understanding when performing everyday tasks. These findings are supported by their statements below:

"Yes... We know a lot after KAP. For example, we can do activities according to the level of development of children in TASKA. We know better what we need to do, have activity planning, set up children's records, do activities according to the set themes, how to treat children, communicate with children, and so on" – P3

"Yes... we better understand and know how to handle a child's emotions. If he cries er... We can tell him it is his sad feelings er... That is how it is. Besides, we can sing songs with children, change the singing of the song... RPA., plan activities, how to handle babies and learn to massage baby too"- P4

The findings prove that training can help employees improve their performance (Lynton & Pareek, 1990). Training affects employees' behaviour and skills, which can improve their achievements and constructive changes in the future (Satterfield & Hughes, 2007) and improve services in line with improved employee performance (Kraiger, 2002; Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Productivity will usually increase as employees receive appropriate and continuous training.

#### **4.1.5 Understand the differences in children's development by age**

The participant admitted that after attending the KAP, he understood more about the differences in children's development. Knowledge of the growth and development of a child is very important to a teacher in determining the planning and teaching techniques of the child according to the child's development. Here is a statement quoted from the copyedited answer:

"Ok... If before there was a KAP, we'd just take care of it, if there is a KAP, um... We can know if that baby and 1-year-old child are progressing not well, we know how to educate him"– P1

"The development varies by age. Some babies are progressing well and those who are slow"- P2

"These children have their own developments according to their age, examples like the 2 years old child. They are usually good at talking"- P3

"The activities we do, do not necessarily mean a child can achieve that objective, then if today let us say he cannot do it, tomorrow we repeat the same activity. We help him... We use his finger, and we'll help him put it in the rope"-P4

### **4.2 Study Questions 2: How Far Can TASKA Teachers Practice the Knowledge Learned from KAP In Their Daily Tasks?**

#### 4.2.1 More planned and aimed activities

With the availability of knowledge, TASKA teachers can practice the right practices and know the goals for carrying out their daily tasks. By following KAP, they get clearer information and know the correct methods for performing their daily tasks. Here are the participants who support this claim:

" Before there was KAP, when we did any activity, we did not know what the activity was, what was his purpose but, when there was KAP we knew the development was divided into 6. Today what activity we have done, what development we have achieved, and how have the children performed. We can tell parents about these... So, those are the knowledge that we learned from that KAP"- P1

'For example, like RPA, we used to do as what we could do. Now after learning KAP, we learn to know the right way of making it, fit into the child's age" - P2

"I learn on the early language and literacy. After learning KAP, I try to talk to children a lot. For example, in my storytelling activity, I applied voice intonation to attract children to listen to the stories. - P3

"When our activities have SOPs, we have pictures before and after. In the logbooks, we learn to understand the child's behaviour and write their behaviour progress while they are in TASKA" - P4

Identifying learning goals or objectives is important before creating a learning plan. Teachers need to set and know what goals and objectives to communicate to students through planned learning or activities. Teachers not only need to plan for teaching but also need to ensure the benefits that students can get through the learning delivered (Jones, 2018). A good learning plan should have goals and objectives that have been set or are to be achieved. Teachers who prepare to learn plans are more confident (Jensen, 2001). Master knows what to do, how, and when. Learning becomes easier and more structured as all information and preparation have been done and decided in advance.

#### 4.2.2 Skilled in preparing an Rancangan Perancangan Aktiviti or Activity Implementation Plan (RPA)

RPA is one of TASKA teachers' most important teaching tools to plan activities suitable for children. With the RPA, TASKA teachers can plan activities suitable for the child's skills, development, and age. After following, KAP has been proficient in using RPA in planning and carrying out activities with children in nurseries. The following are the statements given by participants to support these findings:

"There is... If we were doing activities with children before we had the KAP, we would take pictures without knowledge. However, when we have KAP, we know how to do the RPA, we know the steps to do any activity with the children and what to achieve and how to conduct activities to achieve our objectives. So, it means we know our activities are going well in the

end because we already have a RPA as what we learned in KAP. So, when there is a RPA, we tend to record each activity we did with the children." - P1

"There's... RPA for example, because it has a lot to do with how we do things with children. The RPA is based on the children's development, the activities we want to do, and the kind of ways we do with them, the way we attract them to involve in the activities. Before learning KAP, we just do any activity without specific purposes"- P2

"... Before this, I err... Play, like doing that activity er... not systematic and arrangeable...After I took the KAP course and I followed how the procedures of RPA, we just follow the steps"- P3

"Before taking KAP, the way we talked was unarranged... Sometimes the teacher is rude too... But after having KAP, we know how to behave as we learned that children see us as their role models. They assume us as their example... We need to show a good example to the children. How we speak, how we behave, and how we react so that the child will get a positive way of thinking and acting. For example, the instructions... We kind of telling them that they were acting roughly... In order to modify, we have to do it first, and then they will be able to follow our way later on. -P4

#### **4.2.3 To raise awareness of children's safety and health issues in nurseries**

The findings showed that all participants showed a high awareness of safety issues and recognized the importance of safeguarding the safety and health of children in nurseries. They not only know and care about safety and health issues but also know what monitoring and preventive actions they need to take. The participants answered the questions asked:

"In the KAP, there is indeed a safety module. The fire brigade came to teach about putting off the fire and the need for the emergency staircase in each TASKA. Besides, we learn that the teacher must ensure the fence is locked and the TASKA is secured by CCTV too... Lots more. For example, we learn about the ratio of caregivers to children too. These are among the things we must obey at TASKA"-P1

"Teacher has to record. In the early morning, the teacher will have to check the child physically. If the child is on fever, the teacher will have to take the temperature and separate the child from other children. Fences should always be locked and do not give put little things messy because children like to pick up things and put them into the mouth – P2"

"Before we do activities with children, we must make sure that the child is healthy"-P3

"Unwell children will be quarantined in special rooms to avoid any inconvenienced conditions that occurred at TASKA. The teacher will keep the grill closed constantly, sharp equipment placed in a covered place and keep the door bathroom door closed"- P4

Safety and health issues are very important issues to be aware of in nurseries. It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that children are always protected from any accidents or

infectious diseases during their time in nurseries. Safety measures must be taken to ensure no accidents and deaths occur in nurseries. Nurseries need to provide a clean and safe environment whereby the care environment plays an important role in child health and safety (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2013). This issue of responsibility is in line with the roles and responsibilities of caregivers as set out in the Child Care Centre Regulations 2012, 15 (1) (d), whereby 102 operators and caregivers are responsible for implementing safety and health care measures to prevent the occurrence of accidents, injuries, or deaths of children in nurseries.

As is commonly known, every child has the right to protect a safe and protected environment from injury or abuse. This is stated in one of the main objectives of the National Children's Policy (NSC), which is to ensure that every child has the right to live with care, care, love, health services, support, and social assistance (Department of Social Welfare, 2016). In addition, Maslow's Theory of Necessity also stressed the importance of the need for child safety to be met to enable children to feel safe and secure while in nurseries.

## **5. Discussions and Recommendations**

Overall, all participants agreed and expressed the opinion that KAP is very beneficial and can improve their knowledge about early childhood education. In addition, the participants also expressed their opinion that KAP improved their communication skills with parents and children. Communication skills can be enhanced by delivering information to parents on their children's development and activities carried out in nurseries throughout the children being left behind while the parents are out of work. By conducting various activities in nurseries with children, TASKA teachers have materials to convey or tell parents about their children.

It is clear here that KAP has improved knowledge and skills and shaped the teacher's attitude towards nursing duties (Zaida et al., 2017). All participants also agreed that KAP could improve their work skills and enable them to understand the child's development and realize that each child has different developments. None of the children has the same development; each is distinctive and unique. By understanding that children have different developments, TASKA teachers can coordinate children's activities according to the child's age, skills, interests, and abilities. This phenomenon can forge good relationships between teachers and children and lead to success in educating children.

This is in line with a study conducted by UPSI and the National Child Development Research Centre (NCDRC), finding that 84 percent of children in PERMATA Negara achieve good emotional development and form stable, cheerful, calm, and self-confident personalities. The findings found that PERMATA children are more special than non-JEWEL children, with more than 80 percent achieving pre-science skills, using sentences fully and correctly, self-managing, and being friendly and easy according to instructions (PERMATA Curriculum, 2008).

The knowledge gained will not give any meaning if it is not practiced. The study participants claimed that they were proficient in using the Activity Implementation Plan after attending

KAP. Therefore, they can plan activities that are suitable for the child. Hence, it enables TASKA teachers to have planned activities and aims to align with the task's planning and goals to be achieved. Providing assistance when students are in the ZPD zone is a very important and effective time. Teachers need to determine that the child is in the ZPD zone to help him learn something new. When TASKA teachers attend KAP like they are in the ZPD zone and need help from more discerning people to enable them to understand more about early childhood nursing and upbringing.

Apart from being substitute parents to children during their time in nurseries, TASKA teachers play a role as facilitators in helping children understand their activities in nurseries. Zaida et. al (2017) state that parents state several factors that are emphasized in selecting nurseries for their children. Among these factors are location, qualified, and experienced nannies/educators. In addition, parents are also aware of the importance of sending their children to registered nurseries, having good TASKA testimonials, according to the PERMATA curriculum that suits their age, charges reasonable and safe as a replacement place while parents go out to work

The findings also found that all participants showed a high awareness of safety issues and recognized the importance of safeguarding the safety and health of children in nurseries. Not only do they know and care about safety and health issues, but they are also aware of the monitoring and preventive actions they need to take to prevent accidents and infectious diseases in nurseries. This explains that the study participants understand their role and responsibility to safeguard the safety and well-being of children in nurseries as stated in the TASKA Regulations 2012 on the roles and responsibilities of TASKA teachers.

No matter how well the education policy or curriculum is formed, it should be borne in mind that teachers are the implementing agents to ensure that what is planned is successful. Teachers are human capitals whose role is to produce excellent students. High-quality human capital is necessary for today's global context (Yahaya, 2009). Due to the responsibility of teachers as planners and implementers, they should always be prepared and strive to equip themselves from all angles to enable the planned strategies to be implemented. (Henry, 2017). A career as a TASKA teacher requires a very high level of commitment, and they take on enormous tasks and roles. Greenberg and Baron (2000) noted that commitment refers to a high level of personal acceptance of the purpose and value of employment in which the individual will strive, work and have a strong desire to survive in the workplace.

Each job is often associated with professionalism. Professionalism in early childhood nurturing and upbringing means the knowledge and skills possessed by the teacher to demonstrate her competence and ability in performing the duties entrusted. Professionalism is also closely related to a person's experience, background, and training. Professionalism is also defined as behaviour, skill, or quality that can indicate that someone has the highest experience and standard expected of a profession. In other words, professionalism means that a person is highly competent, trained, knowledgeable, and has the necessary expertise to perform his duties. TASKA teachers need to realize that they are vocational members who determine the effectiveness of the services of a TASKA (Early Childhood Education Division (PERMATA,2013). The professional role of TASKA teachers is a function they perform where

they are members and responsible. The roles in question include responsibility for children, families, communities, and the nation (Jonsdottir, 2012).

Based on the study's conclusions, KAP provided valuable benefits to the study participants by giving them basic knowledge and exposure to early childhood nursing and upbringing. This benefit is especially useful for participants who do not have an educational background in early childhood nursing and upbringing.

The question that needs to be extended for future studies is, what is KAP relevant to TASKA teachers with early childhood education backgrounds such as diploma holders or degree holders from public and private institutions or holders of the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM)? This is because more and more early childhood education graduates are produced in line with the government's recommendation that the level of education of TASKA teachers be increased at least at the Diploma level.

Suppose KAP is compulsory for candidates with Academic qualifications and Malaysian skills certificates in early childhood education. TASKA teachers who attend KAP classes part-time not only have to pawn their weekend holidays but also have to bear the cost of training and allocate time and energy to achieve the certificate. Employers are also forced to bear high operating costs to replace workers who attend KAP training. Are they willing to allocate 144 hours to attend KAP classes, attend 40 hours of practicum/practical training and sit for a written exam to obtain a KAP certificate?

Another recommendation for future studies is to study KAP's ability to provide career pathways for TASKA teachers. KAP is short-term training that does not provide advanced programs that allow TASKA teachers to pursue their studies to a higher level. Compared to SKM, it offers a clearer career pathway to TASKA teachers starting from the certificate of skills; they can then continue their studies to a higher level, such as The Malaysian Skills Diploma and MQA Accredited Malaysian Skills Advanced Diploma as per its equivalent academic qualifications. SKM also produces more skilled and skilled students through its learning system, which focuses on 70% practical and only 30% theoretical. SKM also offers interesting learning methods by recognizing the previous experiences of TASKA teachers and enabling them to gain qualifications in a short time and low cost.

TASKA teachers are also urged to improve their knowledge and skills from time to time continuously. Caregivers need to undergo continuous training and do not stop as far as having a KAP certificate only. This is important because their role is to nurture children and provide education and knowledge base to children. Acquiring a qualified TASKA teacher in the job market is not easy. Although many Early Childhood Education graduates are born into higher education institutions, employers still face difficulties obtaining a qualified and experienced workforce. They are forced to employ workers who do not have a parenting background and early childhood education in their nurseries. Employing TASKA teachers with a background in nursing education and early childhood education, skilled and competent is essential to ensure the success of the early childhood education system is achieved, and the process of educating a smart and excellent generation of Malaysians can be implemented.



## 6. Conclusion

Early childhood education in Malaysia has undergone several phases of development and progress from before independence until today. All changes made are aimed at improving the existing early childhood education system. In line with the advancement of the early childhood education industry, the quality of the teaching profession/early childhood educator must also be improved. Knowledgeable, trained, and skilled TASKA teachers are indispensable to educating every PERMATA Negara, the next generation of Heirs of Malaysian nations, and future leaders who will be the pillars of the nation's success. Early childhood education is an investment in human capital development. Both the government and the private sector are expected to increase investment in ECCE's quality education as numerous studies have proven that investments in ECCE are future investments that can provide lucrative returns to investors. Hence, all responsible parties should provide the best early education to every child in the country by mobilizing their energy, expertise, and resources, providing programs, services, education and training, protection, and facilities that can stimulate the development of children.

Education is a key driver of economic development, and there is no denying that it has a direct impact on the quality of life of everyone. As clearly stated in the concept of Every Permata Negara", every child should be given the best start in life. The task of educating children at a golden age should be handed over to a wise hand so that every PERMATA of the country can be polished into a high-quality, noble personality and useful to the nation. It is also hoped that more scientific studies on early childhood education will be produced, especially on issues related to TASKA teachers or early childhood educators under the age of 4 years. Hopefully, the government, government agencies, or the private sector can benefit from the various studies that researchers have done to be carried out or pay attention and do more in-depth research so that the study can be of the necessary benefit. May Malaysia's education and early childhood industries continue to thrive on par with developed countries.

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