

Parents' Perceptions of Childcare Centers and the Relationship with Involvement in Parenting Activities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to obtain guardians' views on childcare centers and their involvement in parenting activities organized in the Putrajaya area. Additionally, the objectives of this study are (1) to examine parents' perceptions of sending their children to childcare centers; (2) to identify the level of parental involvement in parenting activities organized by the childcare centers; and (3) to identify the relationship between the motivation for choosing childcare centers and parental involvement in the parenting activities organized by these centers. A questionnaire (Google Form) was used to collect information on parents' perceptions of childcare centers and the relationship between involvement in the activities organized. A total of 231 parents and guardians of children from the Putrajaya area were randomly selected to answer the distributed questionnaire. The study data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) application and reported descriptively. Descriptive analysis involved frequency, percentage, and mean, while inferential analysis used correlation tests. The study findings indicate that parents' perceptions of childcare centers had a mean of 4.78 ($SD = .140$), while the level of involvement in parenting activities had a mean of 4.33. Statistical analysis through correlation tests showed no significant relationship between parents' perceptions of childcare centers and parental involvement in activities organized by these centers. The implications of this study can serve as guidance for future researchers in improving childcare centers and emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in children's development.

Keywords: Perception, Childcare Center, Parental Involvement, Parenting Activities

Introduction

Nowadays, dual-income couples are common and have contributed to the development of childcare centers. Monitoring has become challenging due to the rapid increase in the number

of childcare centers, particularly in urban areas. It is especially challenging for working parents, particularly those with higher education, to choose the best place to leave their children. There are many factors to consider before selecting a childcare center that can meet their needs. This is due to their concerns about the type of childcare center they choose.

As of September 2021 Bernama (2021), only 5,436 childcare centers nationwide are registered with the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), while others have yet to do so. Additionally, issues related to childcare services are increasingly concerning, particularly cases of abuse, neglect, and accidents caused by hazardous environments or caregiver negligence (Safiek, Fadhiha & Syuhada, 2017). This problem is drawing attention from various parties, including parents who use childcare centers. However, fewer studies on this subject have been conducted by domestic researchers compared to international researchers. It is important to examine how education influences parents' choices regarding their children's childcare. Several studies have investigated childcare centers.

This study is conducted to examine parents' perceptions of childcare centers and the relationship between parental involvements in the activities organized by these centers. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to examine parents' perceptions of the quality of childcare centers; (2) to identify the level of parental involvement in parenting activities organized by the childcare centers; and (3) to identify the relationship between the quality of childcare centers and parental involvement in the parenting activities organized by these centers. This study is also conducted to address questions such as “What are parents' perceptions of sending their children to childcare centers?” “What is the level of parental involvement in parenting activities organized by childcare centers?” and “What is the relationship between parents' perceptions of childcare centers and their involvement in the organized parenting activities?”

Many organizations have conducted studies on childcare in Malaysia. This is the result of ongoing monitoring and improvements in various areas. Norzamira Che Noh (2020) examined 423 kindergartens and childcare centers in Shah Alam, and 271 of them did not have approval from the Shah Alam City Council (MBSA). This is based on MBSA records. According to Nor Afazan Mohamad Yusof (2018), childcare fees are expected to increase by 10–30 percent in the following year due to the implementation of minimum wage and maintenance costs. In a 2019 article published by Mariam Nizar in *Malaysiakini*, the fees charged by daily childcare operators were reported to be relatively high and unaffordable for some parents, especially those in the B40 income group. To achieve zero poverty by 2030, the B40 group is crucial (United Nations, 2016; World Bank, 2017).

Correction Suggested: This study is conducted to emphasize the importance of choosing the best childcare center for their children. This is due to the increasing and serious cases of negligence by childcare centers in Malaysia, which are especially concerning for parents. Through this study, readers are exposed to the critical aspects of establishing a childcare center and the importance of maintaining a good relationship between the center and the parents. Quality childcare centers can build social skills that significantly aid in the overall development of their children. Additionally, parental involvement can also impact the center, especially in enhancing cooperation with parents to ensure that the needs of their children are met.

Therefore, this study is crucial to guide young children towards high-quality behavior and development. The study will provide a detailed explanation of how parents view outstanding childcare centers from various perspectives and how parental involvement impacts their children's growth. The responsibility for caring for and educating their children, which is a trust, lies with the parents (Najihah, Azizah & Zarina, 2020).

Literature Review

Perceptions of Childcare Centers

Haslinda (2013), states that "perception" can be defined as an individual's impression or perspective of an object after experiencing, observing, understanding, and interpreting it. The focus of this study is on parents' perceptions of childcare centers in Malaysia. According to the Child Care Center Act 1984, a childcare center cannot accommodate more than four children. These children receive paid care services (Child Care Center Act, 1984). The main purpose of establishing nurseries or childcare centers in Malaysia is to provide a good nursery environment that supports the growth of children from zero to four years old by offering learning experiences that match their development (Rahmattullah, Rawai, Samuri & Yassin, 2021).

A study conducted by Maszlyana, Nordin, Romarzila Omar, and Noralina Kamaruddin in 2020 examined what parents think about Malaysian Child Care Centers (TASKA). The study used a quantitative survey involving 48 parents who sent their children to childcare centers in Taman Melati, Kajang. The results showed that the researchers categorized childcare centers into five essential qualities: fees, care and education, rules and regulations, safety, cleanliness and health, and food provision. A study by Yee and Yunus (2021), investigated how the social and physical environment of childcare centers affects children's growth. This study included an analysis of academic writings and findings from seventy journal articles. The focus was on the impact of cleanliness and social factors on children's development, especially in childcare centers. Data indicated that a child's living environment, particularly at a young age, significantly affects their development. Therefore, to ensure parental satisfaction, social elements are crucial in childcare institutions.

Parental Involvement

Considered as parental involvement, various behaviors exhibited by parents impact their children's school achievement and their cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development (Asnawi & Farhah, 2020). Conversely, Mairin, Nizam Nazarudin, Zakiah, Azmain, and Rozana (2020) determined that there is a relationship between parental involvement and Albert Bandura's social learning theory. This theory is a general theory about human behavior. Bandura (in Ragbir Kaur Joginder Sing, 2010) views human behavior as a direct interaction between cognitive influences, behavior, and environment. Bandura's social learning theory states that individuals are shaped by their environment. According to Norjumira et al (2020), social control is a set of ongoing rules for good behavior provided to children at home and in childcare centers. Parental involvement is crucial for promoting this social control.

Thus, parents' involvement in their children's education will enhance their sense of ownership, respect, and appreciation for what teachers do for them. Parents not only need to participate in organized activities but also need to teach their children how to care for and

educate themselves. Additionally, this makes the educators' and caregivers' jobs easier. Aqilatuzzahrah Azharuddin and Kamariah Abu Bakar (2023) aimed to study various aspects of parental involvement in supporting preschool learning at home. This quantitative study used a survey instrument from the Parent Support Program (KPM 2013). A total of 347 respondents participated in the survey. The results indicated that the level of parental involvement in social interaction and communication with children organized by teachers was very satisfactory. According to Seng (2021), parents who communicate well and are involved in parenting programs are more likely to have children who excel in school. This shows that attentive parents who frequently communicate with teachers influence their children's personal development. Norjumira's 2020 study involved 47 parents with children at KEMAS childcare centers in Perak. The study aimed to determine the level of parental involvement in educating their children there. The study used a quantitative methodology with a questionnaire instrument. The results showed that parents actively participated in activities organized by the center, such as Graduation Day, annual sports events, and monthly meetings of the Parents and Teachers Association (PIBP/PIBG) at TASKA.

Previous studies have found that several factors often associated with parental involvement in supporting their children's learning include parenting style, socio-economic status or mother's occupation, highest level of mother's education (Evelyn and Ruslin, 2020), beliefs about the mother's life context, and parents' perceptions of the school (Macliffon and Faridah, 2020).

The Relationship between Childcare Centers and Parental Involvement

A study by Paezah and Faridah (2016), shows that participating in activities with children supports their development in various aspects, including physical, emotional, and personal growth. Previous research analysis indicates that Joyce Epstein's model of parental involvement is one of the models that explain parental engagement. This model demonstrates that parents are involved in their children's learning in real life, whether at home or at school. It shows that parents assist by providing learning resources for their children. A study conducted in Kudat, Sabah, by Florina and Rahayu (2020), found that both factors are related: parents are significantly involved in their children's learning and support child excellence programs. Generally, it can be concluded that parental participation in childcare center initiatives leads to successful children in kindergarten.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers decided to conduct the study using a quantitative survey. Quantitative research falls into the categories of intervention and non-intervention. Experiments are used in intervention studies, while non-intervention studies use correlation and surveys. The researchers chose the survey method as one of the non-experimental research methods. The purpose of the survey is to determine the relationship between parents' perceptions of childcare centers and their involvement in parenting activities.

Population and Sample of the Study

A total of 423 parents from 6 childcare centers were randomly selected in groups from the Putrajaya area, using a list obtained from the Department of Social Welfare. Out of this total,

only 235 respondents completed the questionnaire over the span of one month. After review, 231 sets of data were successfully analyzed for this study.

Research Instrument

In addition, for this study, the researcher used a questionnaire to collect the necessary data. As the research instrument, the researcher employed Google Forms via WhatsApp to gather data. The questionnaire is divided into Sections A, B, and C, which were distributed online to respondents. Section A contains background information about the respondents. Section B consists of twenty questions divided into four factors: socioeconomic, reputation, social, and geographical. Section C discusses the level of parental involvement through external events, consultations, and online activities. Five questions were developed for each aspect. Each item in Section B is rated using a five-point scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5), while Section C uses a scale of Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), and Always (5).

To analyze all items in the questionnaire, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for Windows version 25.0 will be used. The data collected will be analyzed using frequency statistics (f), percentages (%), and means for each research question. The study data will be presented in the form of tables and charts with general interpretations. Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis will be used to compare the highest and lowest percentages and mean scores and standard deviations for each research question.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The researcher needed to create the instrument and obtain approval from experts to collect the study data. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the tool. A total of 17 respondents, consisting of parents and guardians, were randomly selected via WhatsApp and responded through Google Forms. All results from the pilot study were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0 to test the consistency of the questionnaire instrument. The research tool measures four factors: socioeconomic, reputation, social, and geographical, with Section B achieving a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.745. Conversely, Section C received a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.738 for the research instrument measuring the level of parental involvement in online activities, consultations, and external activities. This indicates that all items have high reliability, as the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceed the value of 0.70. Both instruments underwent content and conceptual assessment to ensure their validity. Sekaran (1992) states that the alpha value level determines the reliability of the questionnaire items. An alpha value greater than 0.60 is considered acceptable, while an alpha value greater than 0.80 is considered good.

Construct	Section	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Parents' Perceptions of Childcare Centers	B	20	0.745
Socioeconomic		5	0.601
Reputation		5	0.613
Geographical		5	0.620
Social		5	0.611
Parental Involvement in Parenting Activities	C	15	0.738
External Activities		5	0.636
Consultation		5	0.786
Online Activities		5	0.744

Table

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Values for Study Constructs

Data Analysis Procedure

Descriptive analysis is the preferred method, which uses mean scores and standard deviations. This approach allows the researcher to obtain more comprehensive, in-depth, and accurate information as expected from the study's objectives. Pelant (2013) interprets that to obtain more precise, comprehensive, and meaningful data, the study analysis needs to be aligned with the study's objectives. The table below represents the measurement and interpretation of mean scores by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) used to calculate mean scores. Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) developed a four-level measurement scale for mean scores. The total agreement or assessment of respondents can be obtained using mean score interpretation. The program used calculates means, percentages, and frequencies. Table 1 shows the distribution of mean ranges for each level.

Table 1

Strength of Means (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)

Score	Strength
1.00 - 2.00	Low
2.01 - 3.00	Low to Moderate
3.01 - 4.00	Moderate to High
4.01 - 5.00	High

Sumber: Psychometric Theory, 3rd edn, 1994(Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)

In assessing relationships, the Pearson correlation test was used by the researcher. The Pearson correlation test serves as a guide for the strength of the relationship between the quality of childcare centers and parental involvement in parenting activities organized by the centers. According to Piaw (2014), the strength of the correlation coefficient (r) values is used by the researcher based on Table 2.

Table 2

Interpretation of Correlation Strength

Correlation Size (r)	Interpretation of Strength
0.91 - 1.00	Very Strong
0.71 - 0.90	Strong
0.51 - 0.70	Moderate
0.31 - 0.50	Weak
0.1 - 0.30	Very Weak
.00	No Correlation

Study Findings

The study sample consisted of 231 individuals, including 68 males (29.4%) and 163 females (70.6%). A total of 12 randomly selected childcare centers in the Putrajaya area were involved. Table 3 provides a detailed profile of the study sample's background.

Table 3

Respondent Profile

Demographic Background	Group	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	68	29.4
	Female	163	70.6
Status	Mother	128	55.4
	Father	54	23.4
	Guardian	41	17.7
	Others	8	3.5
Distance to Childcare Centre	Less than 1 KM	47	20.3
	1- 4 KM	80	34.6
	5-8 KM	46	19.9
	9-12 KM	33	14.3
	More than 12 KM	25	10.8
Number of children in Childcare	1 child	82	35.5
	2 children	84	36.4
	3 children	49	21.2
	4 children or more	16	6.9

Parents' Perceptions of Childcare Centers

The researcher has conducted a descriptive analysis of this study by examining four aspects of childcare centers based on parents' perceptions: socioeconomic, reputation, geographical, and social. Each aspect is explained and interpreted according to the table created by the researcher. Each table contains frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and mean interpretation.

Table 4

Parents' Perceptions of Childcare Centers by Aspect

Aspect	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Mean Interpretation
Socioeconomic	4.80	.220	-.932	High
Reputation	4.72	.254	-.517	High
Geographic	4.90	.171	-1.88	High
Social	4.69	.269	-.455	High
Overall	4.78	.140	-.409	High

Table 4 shows that all five items assessed by respondents had a high overall mean of 4.90 (SD = .171) for the geographical aspect. The lowest mean compared to other aspects was 4.69 (SD = .269) for the social aspect. The mean for the reputation aspect was 4.72 (SD = .254), and the mean for the socioeconomic aspect was 4.80 (SD = .220), both reflecting a high level. Overall, the mean of 4.78 indicates a high level of parents' perceptions of childcare centers.

Parents' Involvement in Parenting Activities Organized by Childcare Centers

Table 5 presents the mean scores for evaluating the level of parental involvement in childcare center-organized parenting activities, divided into three dimensions: outdoor activities, consultations, and online activities. Each aspect is analyzed and described based on the data in Table 5, which includes the mean scores and their interpretations.

Table 5

Parents' Involvement in Parenting Activities Organized by Childcare Centers

Aspect	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Mean Interpretation
Outdoor Activities	3.36	.850	.143	Moderate high
Consultation	4.82	.277	-2.835	High
Online	4.81	.271	-2.171	High
Overall	4.33	.313	.151	High

The analysis revealed three different levels of parental involvement: low, moderate, and high. The moderate level of involvement is represented by outdoor activities with the lowest mean score of 2.64 (SD = .850). In contrast, the high level of involvement is shown in consultation activities with the highest mean score of 4.82 (SD = .277), and online activities with a mean score of 4.81 (SD = .271), both of which are categorized as high. Overall, parental involvement in parenting activities is rated at a high level with a mean score of 4.33 (SD = .313).

Relationship between Parents' Perceptions of Childcare Centers and Parents' Involvement in Organized Activities

Null Hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant relationship between the choice of childcare centers and parents' involvement in activities organized by these centers.

Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to assess the extent of the relationship between the quality of childcare centers and parents' involvement in parenting activities organized by these centers in the Putrajaya area. The study found no significant relationship between the choice of childcare centers and parents' involvement in organized activities. The results were tested, and the strength of the relationship was evaluated according to the scale of relationship strength as outlined by Chua Yan Piaw (2014). The results are detailed in **Table 6**.

Table 6

Pearson Correlation Results Between Parents' Perceptions of Childcare Centers and Parents' Involvement in Organized Parenting Activities

Construct	Pearson Coefficient Correlation	Significance Level	Interpretation of Relationship Strength
Parents' Perceptions with Involvement in Parenting Activities	0.003	0.00	No correlation

**Significance correlation at level 0.05 (2-tailed)*

***Significance correlation at level 0.01 (2-tailed)*

Table 6 shows the correlation coefficient values obtained from the analysis conducted. The study found that the Pearson correlation coefficient between parental perception of child care centers and parental involvement in parenting activities organized by the centers is $r(0.003) = .00, p < .05$. Therefore, parental perception of child care centers does not affect parental involvement in the parenting activities organized by the centers.

Discussion

Parental Perception of Child Care Centers

The study results indicate that the majority of parents sending their children to child care centers in the Putrajaya area agree with the factors of socioeconomics, reputation, geography, and social aspects discussed in this study. The overall components of the study are highly rated. The socio-economic findings are well received. This contrasts with previous studies showing that the fees charged by child care providers are a major socio-economic factor for some parents, especially those from the B40 group, when deciding whether to place their children in care (Nizar, 2019). This is because parents living around Putrajaya agree that socio-economic conditions are not the primary factor when choosing a child care center; rather, the quality of care is more critical.

Furthermore, the findings regarding social aspects align with the study by Mohamad et al. (2023), which found that social factors are important for ensuring that children can adapt to their environment. The study shows that, in terms of geography, factors such as the location of the center, accessibility, and strategic positioning are priorities for parents. This is consistent with Aiman's (2019), finding that proximity to child care centers can alleviate

concerns when being away from young children. Additionally, the majority of respondents highly rated the reputation aspect, which concerns the cleanliness of the child care environment. This is because a quality learning environment contributes to emotional, social, physical, and developmental growth in children (Yee and Yunus, 2021).

Overall, the findings regarding parental perception of child care centers align with all aspects: socio-economic, reputation, geography, and social. This study is consistent with Maszlyana et al. (2020), where parents in Taman Melati, Kajang, Selangor, who have children in child care centers, view these centers in Malaysia as being of high quality. This is because each established center must meet specific criteria to ensure parental satisfaction in placing their children there.

Parental Involvement in Parenting Activities

Based on fifteen items in total, the level of parental involvement in parenting responsibilities is depicted. The involvement of parents in parenting activities has been categorized into three types: outdoor activities, consultations, and online interactions, each divided into five items. The study shows that overall, parents are highly involved in their parenting responsibilities. Aqilatuzzahrah Azharuddin and Kamariah Abu Bakar (2023), support this finding, indicating that parental involvement is excellent in social interactions and communication with educators and children at home. This is crucial for ensuring continuous learning in children's developmental processes. However, Norjumira et al. (2020), contradict this finding by stating that parental involvement in parenting programs remains moderate and needs to be improved for the benefit of child development. This is attributed to parents being busy with work and other responsibilities. To ensure consistent parental involvement, this study suggests that center activities and programs should be adjusted to parents' schedules. Paezah (2019) asserts that parental involvement is good and high, as parents are aware of the importance of communication with the child care center to enhance the institution. Future research could focus on identifying the level of parental involvement in private kindergartens comprehensively. Additionally, exploring studies using other factors affecting involvement, such as parents' educational levels or parenting styles, should also be considered.

Pearson Correlation Between Parental Perception of Child Care Centers and Parental Involvement in Center-Organized Parenting Activities

Based on the inferential results from the correlation test, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between parental perception of child care centers and their involvement in organized parenting activities. This means that the correlation test reveals that parental perception of child care center selection does not impact their involvement in organized parenting programs. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) of the study is not rejected, as parents are still involved in organized activities even if the child care center does not meet the four stated aspects. Ngu (2017), found that parental involvement significantly impacts the success of institutions and programs. This is due to the fact that the study focused on a single region, making the collected data less comprehensive. Further studies could be conducted across Malaysia to measure the relationship between public perception of the quality of child care centers and parental involvement in supporting organized activities. Considering demographic components, the study's results could be used to increase the number of respondents.

A 2019 study by Paezah found a positive relationship between parental involvement and their children's education. This is because most parents do not have sufficient time to participate in their children's learning activities, and parental involvement in these activities serves as a motivation for academic success. According to Fauziah et al. (2014), perception is crucial to ensure high participation in activities. Therefore, parents and guardians of child care centers become more interested in engaging activities and essential program improvements.

Conclusion

Overall, most parents involved in the study believe that certain factors influence their choice of child care centers. Based on the four elements emphasized by the researchers, respondents provided favorable evaluations regarding their perceptions of child care centers in Malaysia. The results indicate that parental involvement in parenting programs is high across all participation categories, including outdoor activities, consultations, and online interactions. Due to time constraints from work, many parents engage in all activities, but only at specific times. At the same time, there is no significant correlation between the selection of child care centers and parental involvement in the center's operations. This finding suggests that perceptions regarding the choice of child care centers do not impact parental involvement in parenting activities. When it comes to parental perceptions, each perception has distinct characteristics and significance related to parental capacity.

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