

# Parents' Knowledge Level of The Montessori Learning Approach in Kuantan Private Kindergarten

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## Abstract

Montessori learning approach is a learning approach that emphasizes children's freedom, creativity and practical experience. Purpose of this study was to identify parents' knowledge level on Montessori learning approach practiced by private kindergartens in Kuantan, according to the parents' perception. This study uses a quantitative design and a questionnaire instrument where this study involves 80 respondents of parents who have children who follow Montessori learning approach in kindergartens around Kuantan. The research data collected will be analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to obtain a descriptive analysis about the level of parents' knowledge of the Montessori approach. The results of the analysis show that parents have a moderate level of knowledge on Montessori learning approach. Parents think that Montessori learning approach can improve the cognitive, social, emotional and moral skills of their children, including children with special needs. This study has shown that the level of knowledge of parents in Montessori learning approach is very important and has a positive impact on the personal development of their children. However, parents face challenges in implementing Montessori learning methods at home due to lack of resources, time and knowledge. This study is expected so that the kindergarten can continue to provide guidance and support to parents in applying Montessori learning at home.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Montessori Approach, Level of Parental Knowledge

## Introduction

Montessori approach is gaining popularity in early childhood education in Malaysia where this approach emphasizes holistic development through child-centred learning, use of specific educational materials and active involvement of children in practical activities. It attracts the interest of parents and educators who are looking for an alternative approach to

learning to the usual approach practiced in Malaysia. Montessori approach emphasizes emotional, social, cognitive, and motor development of children through practical activities and the use of specially designed Montessori materials (Zaini, 2023). Although not a mainstream approach in the country's education system, interest in Montessori is growing in Malaysia where there are educational organizations that offer Montessori teacher certification and courses as well as organizations that exchange information about it.

Montessori approach in private kindergartens in Malaysia emphasizes creativity, independent skills and freedom in learning, providing an alternative in early childhood education in this country (Abdullah et al., 2021). Choosing a kindergarten is an important decision for parents because it affects their children's development. There is a difference in perception towards Montessori approach among parents in Malaysia. This study was conducted to assess the level of parents' knowledge and understanding of Montessori learning approach including the role of Montessori teacher, use of Montessori learning materials as well as the learning environment provided for their children to be evaluated (Abdullah et al., 2021).

The first step to assess the level of parents' knowledge about Montessori approach is through parents' knowledge on the meaning of Montessori and the main principles of the approach. Many parents may have heard about Montessori through friends or social media channels. They may know that Montessori emphasizes learning through children's experiences and activities, with a focus on personal development. This may be the initial stage of their knowledge (Idris et al., 2022). The second step is to assess the level of parents' knowledge about the selection of activities that have been planned in Montessori learning approach where this approach emphasizes the children's freedom in choosing the activities they are interested (Nur Afifah, 2020). Each activity in Montessori approach has been designed to improve the child's emotional, social, cognitive, and motor development (Zaini, 2023).

The third step is to assess the parents' level of knowledge about the uniqueness of Montessori learning environment. Montessori approach adopts a learning environment that is carefully structured to support children's development. It includes appropriate learning equipment, manipulative materials, and activities designed specifically to improve children's development (Zarybnisky, 2010). Montessori approach allows children to learn in a free and pressure-free environment. Therefore, children who learn in a Montessori environment may have access to different learning materials and a more interactive learning experience than children who learn through conventional education (Nur Afifah, 2020)

In addition, the teaching approach also plays an important role in Montessori approach. The teacher in this approach acts as an observer and guide where the teacher needs to observe the children's development and provide appropriate guidance (Laksmi et al., 2021). This approach gives students the freedom to learn autonomously and take initiative in the learning process. Therefore, the way of teaching in Montessori approach may differ from the more directed conventional teaching approach (Adhikari, 2022). Parents' understanding on Montessori approach is an ongoing process starting with the basics and growing with experiences and learning. Some parents may choose Montessori approach as an educational option to support their child's development, while others may stick to traditional education. Therefore, it is important for parents to do thorough research to make the best educational decisions.

## Literature Review

Montessori approach began in 1870 with Maria Montessori who was initially involved in the education of mentally disabled children in Rome. He then applied this approach to typical children and believed it could give better results to both groups of children (Laksmi et al., 2021). This approach emphasizes learning based on children's individual abilities and interests. It promotes an independent learning environment, where children have access to learning materials that are appropriate for their development. Montessori approach was introduced in Malaysia in the early 1950s and is now used by several kindergartens and preschools in the country. Although the national education system does not use Montessori approach as the main education, however, Montessori approach is becoming more and more popular with parents and educators who appreciate the principles and uniqueness of this approach.

Kindergarten is the initial level of formal education in Malaysia for children aged 4 to 6 years before entering primary education (Zaini, 2023). According to Laksmi et al (2021), most parents have limited knowledge about Montessori Approach before they send their children to a Montessori school. Many parents may first hear about this approach through sharing with peers or through online research. However, this initial knowledge is often based on general perceptions and may not always be accurate. A study by Peng & Ismail (2020) found that the level of parents' knowledge increased after they involved their children in a Montessori environment. This shows that direct experience with this approach can help parents better understand the principles and approaches used in Montessori learning.

Based on Montessori's study of children, he developed a new theory of psychological development where he believed that children can develop if they are given freedom and a suitable environment during learning. He is convinced that children have a natural tendency that allows children to improve their self-skills and achieve their potential including focusing, independence and self-discipline (Laksmi et al., 2021). The application of Montessori in children's daily lives including their ability to do tasks such as dressing themselves, making the bed, and washing the dishes after eating can also be evaluated (Adhikari, 2022). Differences between children who learn Montessori approach and other learning approaches in terms of academic performance, independent skills, creativity, and other developments can be observed and studied. Parents can assess the development of their children and the differences between those who learn Montessori learning approach and others.

Self-discipline is also one of the important aspects emphasized in the Montessori learning approach where it is a process for children to learn to control themselves. Based on observations made by Doctor Maria Montessori, children are more likely to repeat the exercise with satisfaction and self-confidence increases after concentration is achieved. After successfully mastering the skills to survive in a job, self-discipline is the next step in improving the child's self-development. Self-discipline can develop children's creativity in using the skills they have as well as being responsible for all the actions they do (Madisyn, 2023). When children adapt their own needs to their environment, children can build various abilities and create things by using the abilities that have been built (Janius et al., 2023).

According to the study, giving external rewards to an activity will have a negative effect on the development of children's self-discipline where children's involvement will decrease when these external rewards are absent. On the other hand, the study states that children will have their own motivation when the learning activity is a reward for them. A typical child actually learns to overcome his own weaknesses, has the will to be in a calm state and prefers disciplined tasks to tasks that have no direction (Adhikari, 2022). However, there are also

studies that suggest that there are differences in parents' knowledge levels based on their socioeconomic background. Parents with higher economic resources may be more inclined to seek information and understand the Montessori approach better than parents with less source of information (Kamil & Asriyani, 2023).

Parents' knowledge on Montessori Approach is an important factor in making educational decisions for their children. Although many parents may have limited prior knowledge, hands-on experience with this approach can increase their understanding. Therefore, it is important to provide parents with a clear and easily accessible source of information about Montessori. In addition, it is necessary to take into account differences in socioeconomic background in an effort to increase parents' knowledge of this approach and provide fairer opportunities for all children to obtain quality education (Bannister, 2022).

The role of Montessori teachers is not only to impart knowledge but also to identify and develop the individual potential of each child. For this reason, the term teacher is not used in Montessori learning to emphasize the role of children in independent learning (Peng & Ismail, 2020). Montessori teachers have an important responsibility in giving children the freedom to follow their own developmental path. One of the aspects that need to be emphasized is not setting a time for children to complete their tasks where children have their own level of ability in completing a given task.

Children's interest needs to be built, however, when the task they are interested in is prevented, the interest will decrease in the child (Ahmad et al., 2012). If adults want to help, it is enough to just give praise and help, not disturb or prevent the activities being done by children (Nur Afifah, 2020). The results of this study are expected to help Montessori teachers and educators understand the needs of parents and their children in applying this approach in everyday life. In addition, this study can help in increasing awareness, training, support, and the quality of implementation of Montessori approach in private kindergartens in Kuantan. Parents can also assess the level of development of their children and also assess the difference between children who learn the Montessori learning approach and children who learn other approaches.

## **Methodology**

Research design is a method or way of conducting research and acts as a guide for the researcher to collect and analyse the results of the research where the research design is divided into two, namely the qualitative method and the quantitative method (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is a method where data is collected in the form of sentences through interviews and observations while quantitative research is a method where data is collected and analysed in the form of numbers (Hiles, 2015). This study uses a quantitative method where the instrument used is a questionnaire because the design of this study is easier to measure and analyse the level of parents' knowledge on Montessori approach. Questionnaires are one of the instruments that are often used in various fields, especially in the social sciences. The use of this instrument allows researchers to assess the population by collecting data from a small portion of it known as a sample.

## **Study Instrument**

The initial sample size should be set larger to provide backup in the face of unexpected problems. There are 5 Montessori kindergartens in Kuantan that can be identified where the average number of children in each kindergarten is 20 people. Based on this data, the population size for this study is 100 people where the assumption that one mother or father

from each child will participate in this study is made. Therefore, the number of mothers or fathers required in this study is as many as 80 people where this number is determined according to table 1 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). This study was conducted using a questionnaire that was adapted and processed from previous studies that have been tested for validity and tested for reliability.

Table 1

*Sample size determination table*

<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

This questionnaire is divided into two parts, namely the demographics of the respondents (A) and the level of parents' knowledge and understanding of the Montessori learning approach (B). The demographics of the respondents collected are information related to gender, age, race, education level and place of residence while part B consists of 12 statements about the Montessori approach. The level of parents' knowledge on Montessori approach was studied using a Likert scale where a scale of 1 to 5 was used for each statement. Table 2 shows the Likert scale used for this study.

Table 2

*Likert scale*

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Level of agreement</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
1	Strongly disagree	SD
2	Disagree	D
3	Not sure	NS
4	Agree	A
5	Strongly agree	SA

### Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data collection approach used is to use a questionnaire that will be distributed to the respondents that have been set. This questionnaire was distributed to respondents through the WhatsApp application in the form of Google Form. The results of this

questionnaire can be obtained after two weeks. The data collected will be analysed using a statistical approach where these data will be presented in table form (Ag Kiflee@Dzul kifli et al., 2020).

The results of this data collection are analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software where this software is used to analyse various types of statistical tests whether descriptive statistical tests. The data collected in this study was analysed to obtain frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation values and to analyse the level of parents' knowledge on Montessori approach. The mean value was studied by using table 3 where the level of parental knowledge tendency towards Montessori was interpreted based on the mean value range. The standard deviation value is interpreted using table 4 where the dispersion of parents' level of knowledge on Montessori approach is interpreted.

Table 3

*Scoring level of mean value*

Min Value	Scoring level
1.00 – 2.40	Low
2.41 – 3.80	Medium
3.81 – 5.00	High

### Discussion

A total of 80 parents have been respondents in this study through data that has been collected using a questionnaire where the results of this study have been summarized in table 5. Based on table 5, the study results found a total of 65 mothers (81.2%) and 15 fathers (18.8%) have been respondents in this study. The majority of respondents are aged between 25 and 30 years, which is a total of 36 people (45%) followed by 22 respondents (27.5%) aged between 31 and 40 years, 16 respondents (20%) aged between 41 and 50 years and 6 respondents (7.5%) who are over 50 years old. 77 respondents (96.3%) were made up of Malay respondents and the rest were made up of Chinese respondents which were 3 people (3.7%).

There are 9 respondents (11.3%) who have an education level at the certificate level and 23 respondents (28.7%) have an education level at the Diploma level. The majority of the respondents have a degree level of education which is 27 people (33.8%). A total of 14 people (17.4%) and 7 people (8.8%) respondents have a Master's and PhD level of education. Most respondents which are 55 people (69%) live in urban areas while the rest live in rural areas which is 25 respondents (31.2%).

Table 4

*Demographic Data*

Respondent Demographics		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Men	15	18.8
	Female	65	81.2
Age	25 - 30 years	36	45.0
	31 – 40 years old	22	27.5
	41 – 50 years old	16	20.0
	51 years and above	6	7.5
Races	Malay	77	96.3
	Chinese	3	3.7
	India	0	0.0
Level of education	Certificate	9	11.3
	Diploma	23	28.7
	Degree	27	33.8
	Masters	14	17.4
	PhD	7	8.8
Location	Rural	25	31.3
	In the city	55	68.8

Table 5 shows the level of parents' agreement with the Montessori learning approach. A total of 58 people (72.5%) respondents chose to agree and strongly agree with the statement that Montessori approach helps children learn to cooperate with each other. A total of 22 people (27.5%) chose to strongly disagree and were unsure about the statement. This shows that Montessori approach can help children learn to cooperate with each other.

In the second item, a total of 54 (67.5%) respondents chose to answer strongly agree and agree with the statement that Montessori approach gives children a competitive advantage in life, while a total of 26 (32.5%) respondents chose to answer the statement disagree and disagree sure For the statement that Montessori approach focuses more on social skills than academic skills, a total of 50 people (62.5%) chose to state that they strongly agree and agree, while a total of 30 people (37.5%) answered strongly disagree, disagree and are unsure about the matter the said.

On the tenth item, most respondents chose to agree and strongly agree, that is 58 people (72.5%) to the question asked such as Montessori learning environment meets the needs of children with special needs. While a total of 22 people (27.5%) chose to answer not sure. This shows that Montessori learning environment can meet the needs of children with special needs.

The mean value that has been analysed shows that the overall mean value is at a moderate level. This value indicates that parents think that Montessori approach uses national education standard tests in determining children's academic skills. Almost all the statements studied are at a high and very high level based on table 3. This value shows that almost all respondents have the same opinion about Montessori approach.



Table 5

*Level of Parents' Agreement to Montessori Learning Approach*

No. Statement	Number of respondents (%)				
	STS	TS	TP	Q	SS
1. Montessori approach helps children learn to cooperate with each other.	2 (2.5)	0 (0)	20 (25)	46 (57.5)	12 (15)
2. Montessori approach gives children a competitive edge in life.	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	24 (30)	44 (55)	10 (12.5)
3. Montessori approach focuses more on social skills than academic skills	2 (2.5)	6 (7.5)	22 (27.5)	44 (55)	6 (7.5)
4. Children who learn Montessori approach are assessed through standardized tests as in the national curriculum.	4 (5)	6 (7.5)	24 (30)	40 (50)	6 (7.5)
5. Montessori approach is able to develop a sense of community in children.	0 (0)	0 (0)	28 (35)	44 (55)	8 (10)
6. Montessori approach encourages creative thinking.	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	24 (30)	42 (52.5)	12 (15)
7. Children are more motivated to learn through Montessori approach.	0 (0)	0 (0)	24 (30)	42 (52.5)	14 (17.5)
8. Montessori learning activities challenge children to develop their intellectual abilities.	0 (0)	0 (0)	24 (30)	38 (47.5)	18 (22.5)
9. Montessori learning environment caters to the needs of highly intelligent children.	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	24 (30)	40 (50)	14 (17.5)
10. Montessori learning environment meets the needs of children with special needs.	0 (0)	0 (0)	22 (27.5)	44 (55)	14 (17.5)
11. Montessori approach is more concerned with children's understanding of concepts than correct answers.	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	24 (30)	38 (47.5)	16 (20)
12. Montessori approach helps children reach their individual potential.	0 (0)	0 (0)	24 (30)	40 (50)	16 (20)
Min Value and Allowance Overall Standard	Min	Interpretation	SP	Interpretation	
	3.79	Simple	0.74	Simple	

**Discussion**

The analysis results on the research findings that have been carried out have provided a comprehensive answer to the objective of the study which is to assess the level of parents' knowledge of Montessori learning approach in Montessori kindergarten Kuantan Pahang is at a moderate level. Montessori learning approach is an educational method founded by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 20th century. This method emphasizes self-learning, independence and respect for children's development. It also involves the use of certain tools that are built to encourage children's vision, thinking and imagination (Pickard, 2019).

The level of parents' knowledge of Montessori learning may vary depending on their background, experience, and sources of information. Some parents may have deep and positive knowledge about this method. Factors that affect the level of parents' knowledge of



Montessori learning approach are diverse such as educational background, experience, information sources and attitudes. According to a study conducted by Hiles (2018) states that parents who have a high educational background, experience sending their children to schools based on Montessori teaching or many sources of information, such as books, the Internet or friends tend to have a high level of knowledge about Montessori learning approach.

Children with special needs need an education that suits their abilities and interests, so that they can develop optimally and integrate with society. One of the educational methods that is said to be able to meet the needs of children with special needs is Montessori learning approach. By using Montessori approach, children with special needs can help themselves in areas related to physical, social and intellectual aspects. A study conducted by Hisam & Khairuddin (2022) states that parents who have children with special needs find that their children feel joy and happiness in Montessori learning environment because they can use original and natural materials to learn. which can attract their daily life and understanding.

A study conducted by Hisam & Khairuddin (2022) found that Montessori education applied to children with special needs is more flexible and flexible than other education patterns. Children with special needs can explore things to the fullest without depending on the timetable and rules of kindergarten. Madisyn (2023) further strengthen this study by stating the collaboration of education teachers, industry and parents in carrying out career transition programs for students with special needs. This study found that Montessori education helps students with special needs to improve their work, communication, social and cognitive skills.

However, there is a study that rejects this finding, which is a study conducted by Gunir (2021) which states the involvement of Dusun ethnic parents in the learning of special education students. This study found that Montessori education could not attract the interest and support of Dusun ethnic parents in their children's learning. This is due to factors such as poverty, time constraints, low awareness, and denial of their children's disabilities. This shows that most parents only have basic knowledge about Montessori learning approach. The majority of respondents have knowledge about Montessori environment that has direct learning materials but lack knowledge in terms of children's social skills (Fatinah Jaafar et al., 2020).

Placement location is one of the factors that can influence the level of parents' knowledge of Montessori learning approach. For example, parents who live in urban areas or near Montessori schools may have better access to information and resources about Montessori education. This can increase their knowledge of Montessori principles and practices, which in turn influences how they educate their children at home.

On the other hand, parents who live in rural areas or far from Montessori schools may be less exposed to this approach. They may lack understanding of Montessori principles and how to implement them at home. Parents in urban areas typically have better access to information and resources about Montessori education, which can increase their knowledge of Montessori principles and practices. This can influence the way they educate their children at home. In rural areas, most parents choose to give more time for children to play than to study. So, although Montessori approach can be implemented at home by parents in both urban and rural areas, the level of knowledge and application of this approach may differ based on the location of the settlement. However, more studies are needed to fully understand this relationship.

Although the questionnaire instrument cannot produce an accurate assessment, this study can give a comprehensive picture of the level of parents' knowledge about Montessori learning approach. This study needs to be conducted on a larger sample in order to be able to assess the level of parents' knowledge about Montessori learning approach more clearly and in detail in terms of Montessori principles, the activities carried out in educating children as well as the relationship between parental involvement and children's self-development (Sedek & Zaini, 2021).

Indirectly, this study can give awareness to parents about the existence of a better learning approach in improving children's skills in terms of the use of fine motor, gross motor as well as mental and social development of children. This study can also explain parents' confusion about Montessori approach in terms of learning process and materials in the classroom (Janius et al., 2023). This study also shows that today's parents value the concept of independent learning and even today's parents also value discipline, competition between peers and setting goals in doing something.

### **Conclusion**

Montessori learning approach is a specific way of learning that focuses on the learning and growth of the children throughout of their life. It encourages children on self-study and do hands-on activities. Montessori learning approach has shown its effectiveness in improving children's academic and social skills, also on their creativity and independent skills in daily activities. However, parents' role in Montessori learning approach is often been neglected and also misunderstood. The purpose of this study was to assess parents' knowledge level on the Montessori learning approach implemented by private kindergarten and how parents' assist gives impact on their children's learning abilities.

The motivation to study on parents' knowledge level of Montessori learning approach caused from the assumption that parents are the main educators of their children where their beliefs and behaviours at home influence their children's learning outcomes at school. Montessori education requires a consistent and coherent environment for children to grow and parents are expected to support and reinforce Montessori principles and practices at home. However, some parents may not be familiar Montessori philosophy and also may face challenges in reinforcing Montessori principles to their home settings. Therefore, it is important to assess the level of parents' knowledge about the Montessori learning approach and identify factors that influence it, such as parents' educational background and exposure level to Montessori education.

There were various benefits by studying parents' knowledge level on Montessori learning. This study helps Montessori educators and management division in understanding parents' needs and expectations which also gives overall pictures on designing and implementing effective parents' education programs that can helps parents in understanding and appreciation of Montessori education. Second, it helps Montessori parents to reflect on their own parenting beliefs and behaviours hence embrace Montessori-based parenting practices which can strengthen their children's development and learning skills while at home. This study indirectly gives awareness to parents about the importance of learning activities, learning atmosphere as well as parents' involvement in children's learning for the development of language, social skills and others. Third, this study helps Montessori researchers to explore more on the relationship between parents' knowledge level on Montessori learning approach and children's learning outcomes. Other than that, this study

helps Montessori researchers to examine the potential benefits of Montessori learning approach on families and also communities.

As a conclusion, the study on level of parental knowledge on Montessori learning approach in private kindergarten is a worthwhile endeavour that can have significant implications on Montessori learning approach to both parents and educators. By assessing and increasing parents' knowledge level on Montessori learning approach, Montessori educators, parents and researchers can work together to create a supportive environment for children to grow and learn in the Montessori way.

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