The Influence of Early Childhood Teachers' Educational Philosophies on their Classroom Practices in Preschools

Ranjit Kaur P. Gernail Singh[1], Nicole Low En Yi, Gurdip Kaur Saminder Singh, Shahrean Irani Binti Abdul Rashid

Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR International University, Kelana Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
Corresponding Authors Email: ranjit.kaur@unitar.my[1]

Abstract
As teachers, studying the history of education and pedagogy helps to understand the principles of education, various approaches and child development. With the gained knowledge and experiences over time, teachers develop their own set of beliefs, views and perspectives, which consequently and significantly reflect and influence their daily teaching practices. In other words, a holistic and quality education is achievable and supported by the philosophies on how teachers approach instruction and student engagement. It is important to align the philosophies with the current and best teaching practices. However, whether theoretical beliefs influence and impact day-to-day teaching, needs a deeper understanding and clarity. Thus, this paper will determine if preschool teachers' educational philosophies have an impact on their teaching practices in terms of teaching styles, approaches and environment setup. The qualitative data was collected through interviews with 15 preschool teachers who were selected based on their experience and qualifications in early childhood education. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that theatrically teachers hold strong knowledge of child-centered teaching philosophies. However, in practice, the teachers applied teacher-centered strategies together with child-centered practices. This is due to curriculum demand, lack of resources and overload of non-teaching obligations in their workplace. Comparatively previous research showed a contradiction to the findings where curriculum understanding and ECE knowledge impacted the implementation of the curriculum. The findings implicate school organisations and governing bodies to provide educators with institutional and professional support. Finally, the study recommends further research regarding this issue to enhance the quality of early childhood education.
Keywords: Educational Philosophies, Early Childhood Education, Teaching Practices.

Introduction

Early childhood education in Malaysia consists of two major components: Taska and Tadika. Taska (nursery) is for children aged four and below, and Tadika (preschools) is for children aged four to six. The tadika centres also fosters school readiness for primary education (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The Taska centres are established under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), while the Tadika preschools are generally governed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Rahmatullah et al. (2021) have further elaborated on the different types of TASKA centres, these include Community childcare centres, Workplace childcare centres, Institution-based childcare, and Home-based childcare centres. While TADIKA preschools are divided into two main categories: those that are established and financially supported by the government, and those that are established and operated by private sectors or NGOs. World Bank review on Preschool Education in Malaysia noted that though Malaysia has made remarkable developments in Early childhood education the goal to ensure all ECE teachers have a minimum of diploma has not been achieved. (World Bank, 2023).

With the target of having all new preschool teachers be at least Diploma-qualified in 2025, educators have to obtain their ECE qualifications from Teacher Education Institutes (IPGs) or higher education institutions, or by obtaining the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) within the next 2 years (World Bank, 2023). Rahmatullah et al (2021), have revealed several studies showing that preschool teachers continue to implement traditional teacher-centered teaching approaches, reinforcing students' knowledge using coercive techniques, drills, and memorizing methods in their learning. This is due to the teachers' belief that such methods will meet the academic demands of schools and parents for their children to ace 'cognitively'. Rahmatullah et al (2021), elaborate on the problem of preschool teachers not receiving sufficient continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, which has hindered their ability to keep up with current educational trends, indirectly causing their reluctance to change their teaching practices. It is then inarguably important that it is equally essential for educators to be initially and continuously equipped with ECE knowledge, skills and techniques. Consequently, by incorporating knowledge into teaching experiences, educators form practical wisdom that guides them to formulate their very own set of beliefs and educational philosophy, which will then guide their professional judgment in educational matters (Orchard and Winch, 2015). Thus, it is worth investigating the educational philosophies of preschool educators in consideration of their level of qualification in ECE, as well as how their beliefs reflect in their teaching and learning practices. It is therefore pertinent to examine the educational philosophies and practices of teachers in private and international preschools as well as those in government-funded preschools.

Research objective

Building on the preceding discussion, this research was designed to identify preschool teachers' philosophies and their classroom practices. Specifically, the research aims to analyse whether teachers' philosophies, influenced by their qualifications and teaching experiences, are reflected in their classroom teaching practices.

Research Questions
In specific, two research questions were formulated to guide this qualitative research:
1. What is preschool teachers' view on educational philosophies based on their understanding of theories, application of pedagogies and purpose of early childhood education?
2. How does the preschool teachers' educational philosophy reflect in their teaching practices?

Literature Review
Educational Philosophies
Alemdar and Aytaç (2022), explained that the literal definition of philosophy means "the love of wisdom" or "seeking wisdom". In their study, Alemdar and Aytaç (2022) have pointed out four major education philosophies in the history of educational sciences, they are perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and constructivism. The study further elaborated that perennialism and essentialism are considered traditional educational philosophies that require existing structures to be preserved and maintained across generations; while progressivism and constructivism inaugurate contemporary educational philosophies, emphasising the learner's interests and needs in the teaching-learning process. Suciyati (2023) elaborated that for educators who are perennialists, the purpose of education is to produce learners who internalise eternal values of truth to achieve a noble life. Echoing the emphasis on values and truth, essentialism views education as a means to inherit time-tested and long-lasting universal truth that will preserve old culture for the good of humanity (Hafid, 2015, as cited in Suciyati, 2023). It is a teacher-centered practice or passive learning where the teachers impart the knowledge and the students receive the knowledge. Stemming from a reform movement by American political society in the 19th century, progressivism focuses on the freedom of learners to develop naturally through hands-on experiences, with the educator acting as a facilitator (Yunaini et al., 2022). Given this learner-centered philosophical approach, constructivism is also another paradigm that is highly influential in the early childhood education field that emphasises the active participation of the learner during the learning process. The constructivist perception views learning as a constant construction of knowledge in the learner's mind that is built upon direct experiences. The extensive research on the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget explains that learners go through a series of stages as they mentally construct knowledge based on concrete experiences (Burhanuddin et al., 2021). Another influential philosophy of early years education is behaviourism, hugely contributed by the clinical research done by the behaviourists like B.F. Skinner, Ivan Pavlov, and John B. Watson (Burhanuddin et al., 2021). Behaviourism view learning as the change of behaviours based on stimulus response, and highly emphasise on reinforcement patterns and rewarding systems, instead of the internalisation process that is happening inside the learner (Burhanuddin et al., 2021). These philosophies split up into two major groups according to their approaches to teaching and learning – teacher-centered or child-centered. The perennialism, essentialism, and behaviourism philosophy emphasize the role of the educator in providing input to the child, including the process of imparting knowledge, and truth, and producing desirable behaviours through feedback and reinforcements. In contrast progressivism, constructivism, and pragmatism emphasize the learner having an active part in the learning process. These educational philosophies view the learner as actively guiding his/her own learning through exploration, discoveries, and experiences.In this school of thought, it is also encouraged that educators take on a facilitator role, supporting young children's learning through guidance, prompts, provocation, and intentional setup of the

learning environment. Free choice for the learner is also advocated in these philosophies, establishing child-centered pedagogies, echoing the liberal conception of early childhood education.

Early Childhood Education(ECE)
Yunus (2001), has pointed that education in Malaysia should equip the young generation, with analytical, creative, and critical thinking skills and that learning should be done through active, research and exploration, instead of memorisation and meaningless, drilling, encouraging students to formulate and express their ideas and thoughts. Such practice in learning will also bring forth problem-solving skills, which is another important aspect of education based on the NPE. Education in Malaysia is expected to equip children with problem-solving skills not only in academic terms but also for daily life practicality, which will prepare the young generation to be competent citizens. It is also suggested based on the NPE that educators should practice meaningful learning through contemporary teaching approaches like the constructivist approach, cooperative, learning, and contextual learning (Yunus, 2001). Finally, it is envisioned that education in Malaysia will produce noble citizens who can contribute to the betterment of society. It appears that the Malaysian NPE emphasizes the learner per se, nonetheless, it often depends on the individual educators whether these characteristics and qualities of education are upheld in practice. The educational philosophy will formulate the pedagogy of a school, as well as establish an educator's teaching practice, which will directly impact the child's learning and reflect the quality of education. According to the OECD Conceptual Learning Framework for Future Education, skills for 2030 refers to the capability of each child to carry out processes by responsibly using one's knowledge to achieve an objective (OECD, 2019). The OECD Learning Compass 2030 suggested that the three main types of skills that each child should equip include (OECD, 2018, as cited in OECD, 2019) are Cognitive and Meta-cognitive skills, Social and Emotional Skills and Practical and Physical Skills.

Early Childhood Education approaches and Teacher's beliefs and practices
Rinaldi (2021), elaborated that the teacher's role in the Reggio Emilia approach is to facilitate children's learning through listening, observing, and investigating a rich and intentionally set environment alongside the children. The child in the very center of the Reggio Emilia approach is viewed as competent, creative, and active, and is encouraged to express their learning in a hundred different languages (Aljabreen, 2020) – these include movement, words, scribbles, drawing, constructing, sculpting, sewing, role-playing, music, and more (Edwards, 2002). Shaari and Nazri (2023), explained the importance of outdoor play, emphasising that exposure to nature can bring forth formal and informal learning to children, stimulating their various areas of development as children are engaged in high-level involvement play. Phang et al. (2021), explained that educators' beliefs, attitudes, and practices are influencing factors for improving the early childhood educational process, as they shape children's motivation to learn and their learning outcomes. In their research about teachers' beliefs and practices in child-centered preschools, it was concluded that the educators' values and perspectives on teaching and learning most influence the implementation of developmentally appropriate lessons and child-centered learning approaches (Phang et al., 2021). Some of the important child development theories include Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and Bowlby's Attachment Theory. By understanding how young learners develop and

learn, teachers can relate their teaching experiences with child development knowledge, which will help them to understand children's behaviours and learning processes (Saracho, 2021).

To formulate one's educational philosophy, it is important to reflect on the current teaching practices of the educator to review whether the teacher's beliefs and perspectives on teaching and learning are reflected in practice. If there are gaps between the teachers' belief in education and actual practice, obstacles and challenges in implementing these ideal educational practices may be investigated to ensure quality education. Such reflective practice has also been proven to benefit early childhood educators in terms of well-being, as this study by Cigala et al (2019), shows, teachers are experiencing a greater sense of belonging to their colleagues as they reflect and share their day-to-day practices, and also a greater sense of self-efficacy as they critically reflect and improve their teaching-learning practices. Through the process of formulating one educational philosophy, teachers are allowed to refresh their minds with their personal beliefs in early childhood education, as well as review their current practices to align these two aspects.

This study was designed based on the conceptual framework shown in Figure 2.1. in brief, the framework describes how this research will be conducted using the two research questions.
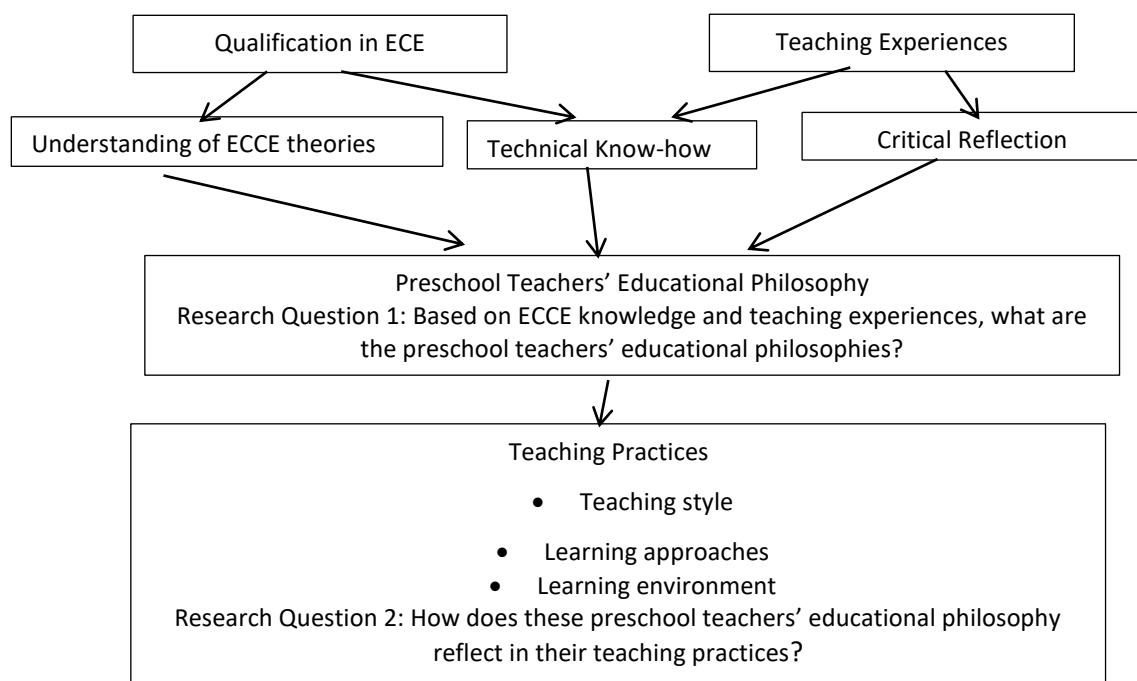
Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology
Research Design
This qualitative research engaged a case study design. This research design was appropriate as the main objective was to gather information from preschool teachers working in private and public preschools regarding their beliefs and practices on teaching. The responses were then systematically analysed by identifying emerging themes from the responses. A

descriptive exploratory research design allows researchers to achieve a wide sample which will expand the comprehension, and the analysis of a phenomena studied (Crescenza et al., 2021). The research participants were selected through a random sampling method, with the prerequisite that they are currently working in a preschool setting in Malaysia. Based on the collected data, the sample exhibits a diverse range of educational backgrounds and teaching experiences.

Research Instrumentation and Sampling
A total of 15 teachers were selected for the interview through the accessible population as it was not feasible to interview the entire population of preschool teachers throughout Malaysia. For this study, the researchers selected preschool teachers from the state they resided in, which is Selangor. Through random sampling, 15 teachers from different preschools were interviewed based on the agreed schedules and different platforms. Eight of them were interviewed through Microsoft Teams and seven interviews were conducted physically. The fifteen teachers were carefully screened and selected because they have experience teaching in preschool. Table 3.1 illustrates the information of the teachers.

Table 3.1
Demographic Profile of Teachers

Teacher	Workplace	Working experience	Qualification
T1	Private Preschools	More than 10 years	Diploma in ECE
T2	Private Preschools	Between 5-10 years	Diploma in ECE
T3	Private Preschools	Between 5-10 years	Diploma in ECE
T4	Private Preschools	Less than 5 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T5	Private Preschools	Less than 5 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T6	Private Preschools	Less than 5 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T7	International Preschools	More than 10 years	Master's Degree In ECE
T8	International Preschools	More than 10 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T9	International Preschools	Less than 5 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T10	International Preschools	Less than 5 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T11	International Preschools	Between 5-10 years	Bachelor's Degree In ECE
T12	Educational settings	Between 5-10 years	Diploma in ECE
T13	Educational settings	Less than 5 years	Teaching Certification
T14	Public Preschools	Between 5-10 years	Diploma in ECE
T15	Public Preschools	Between 5-10 years	Teaching Certification

In summary, the demography of teachers is broken down as below (Table 3.2). The largest population of teachers work in private or international preschools. Most teachers hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. As for working experience, 20% of the teachers have more than 10 years of experience and 40% have less than 5 years of experience.

Table 3.2

Summary of Demographic Profile of Teachers

Criteria	Categories	Count	Percentage
Work place	Private/International Preschools	11	73,3
	Public Preschools	2	13.3
	Educational settings	2	13.3
Qualification	Master's Degree In ECE	1	6.7
	Bachelor's Degree In ECE	7	46.7
	Diploma in ECE	5	33.3
	Teaching Certification	2	13.3
Working experience	More than 10 years	3	20
	Less than 10 years	6	40
	Less than 5 years	6	40

Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The aim was to identify the teachers' responses and provide a qualitative description to summarize and inform the educational philosophy tendencies of preschool teachers. After data collection, the researchers interpreted the data by applying key aspects. The aspects were then analyzed against the transcripts to validate the findings. Once completed, the data was examined to identify patterns and draw conclusions, ultimately extracting themes for further discussion.

Findings

The findings from the qualitative data are presented and discussed under themes that respond to each research question.

Research Question 1

What is preschool teachers' view on educational philosophies based on their understanding of theories, application of pedagogies and purpose of early childhood education?

Table 4.1

Preschool Teachers' Understanding on ECE Theories

Aspect	Verbatim Transcript	Teachers
Understanding of Child Development Theories	"I use the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development to support learning for my weak students."	T1
	"Children learn by imitating the adults as Bandura's theory."	*T2*
	"Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps to understand the outsider external influences on children."	T3
	"Understanding the emotional needs of a child through Erikson's stages of development helps develop trust issues."	T4
	"I don't see the relevance of some theories in my work as they are outdated and don't fit today's classroom dynamics."	T5
	"The child development stages guide me to keep track of children's milestones."	T6
	"Theories may be important but, in the end, flexibility is the key to practice."	T7
	"Gardner's multiple intelligences theory sees the uniqueness of every child though it is hardly used in my classroom."	T8
	"There is no clear guidance on how to use theories effectively in practice."	T9
	"Understanding Piaget's stages of cognitive development helps a child's developmental progress."	T10
	"In practical application, theories don't help as it is emphasised in training programs."	T11
	"Through my class group activities or projects, I witness Vygotsky's idea of social learning."	T12
	"Sorry, I can't recall much on theories I learned during training."	T13
	"I am not sure if I am applying any theory in the classroom as I am not so familiar with them."	T14
	"With the knowledge of theories, I can justify my teaching methods to parents."	T15

Table 4.2

Preschool Teachers' Understanding on ECE Pedagogies

Aspect	Verbatim Transcript	Teachers
Early Childhood Education Pedagogies	*"I combine structured play and guided instruction to develop creativity."*	T1
	"Inquiry-based approach, in Reggio Emilia supports critical thinking and a love for learning."	T2
	"For effective teaching and cater to the style of learning, I blend pedagogies"	T3
	"Project-based learning encourages turn-taking and accepting opinions from others. "	T4
	"I believe in hands-on activities and exploration as it develops exploring experiencing and having fun."	T5
	"For language development, storytelling is effective for learning vocabulary, comprehension, and verbal skills	T6
	"Inquiry-based learning promotes exploration and problem-solving skills.	T7
	"I believe children learn when they have fun in play-based learning."	T8
	"I like Montessori's practical skills material and the structured environment."	T9
	"Montessori approach develops focusing skills in children."	T10
	"Children should have fun while learning a skill,"	T11
	"I am amazed by how Montessori materials can keep a child-focused longer"	T12
	"Lesson plans must be developmentally appropriate"	T13
	"Montessori method fosters independence and self-discipline."	T14
	"Children learn best through play, as it fosters creativity, problem-solving skills"	T15

Table 4.3

Teachers view on the Purpose of Early childhood education

Aspect	Shared thoughts	Teachers
The Purpose of Early Childhood Education	To support and enhance young children's holistic development, including physical, cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social development	T2,T3,T4, T7,T8.
	To educate young children to excel academically	T1. T4, T6
	To provide opportunities for exploration	T5. T7, T15.
	To nurture and develop young children's skills and build a solid foundation for children	T3, T7, T9, T10
	To provide them conducive and safe environment	T1-T15
	To develop young children's critical thinking and problem-solving skills with hands-on activities	T5, T10, T11
	To develop young children's interest in learning and provide quality education for young children	T6. T8, T14,T15
	Collaborate with parents to support child's learning	T1-15
	Impart knowledge to parents as they look up to teachers for answers	T1, T7,T8,T9

Research Question 2

How does the preschool teachers' educational philosophy reflect in their teaching practices?

Table 4.4

Teachers Responses on their Teaching Styles and Learning Approaches

Aspect	Shared thoughts	Teachers
Child-centered Teaching Practices	Value play in children's learning.	T8, T11, T15
	Promote collaboration and peer learning in my classroom.	T1, T2, T7,T11
	Encourage child-initiated activities.	T14
	Spend lots of time planning the children's learning environment.	T9, T10
	Encourage project-based learning in my classroom.	T11, T5
	Teaching styles can cater to the different needs of children.	T1, T3
	Encourage the integration of stories in children's learning.	T6
	Value students' expressions of thoughts and ideas.	T4
	Children construct knowledge through first-hand experiences.	T5
Teacher-centred Teaching Practices	Group teaching sessions that are pre-planned with clear objectives	T2, T5, T7, T8
	Stresses on order and rules in the classroom.	T9, T12, T13
	Academic achievement is the main focus of preschool education to ensure primary school readiness in children.	T13
	Structured classrooms following strict curriculum limit time for experiments and exploration	T1, T3, T4, T6, T12, T13
	More rigid passive teaching following workbook with specific educational outcomes	T1, T12, T13
	Use of videos, and flashcards in many lessons	T1, T2, T3, T4, T12, T13
	Use extrinsic rewards in classrooms to instil desired behaviours	T1, T3, T5, T11
	Scaffolding until children are more competent on their own	T3, T4, T6, T12, T13

Table 4.5

Teachers Responses on Learning Environment

Aspect	Shared thoughts	Teachers
Structured Environment	Organised classroom with learning areas depending on space	T7, T9
	Schedules and rules and routine to establish uniformity	T2, T3
	Fewer distractions to retain focus	T3, T14
	Easier to manage the class	T5
	Limited space children to move and explore freely	T12, T13
Flexible Environment	The layout of the furniture is arranged for passive and active learning.	T6
	The furniture is rearranged during group projects to make room for collaboration with team members	T1, T4
	Children have the freedom to explore the learning areas like a reading corner, drama corner	T8, T10, T11
Standardized Materials	The same materials are shared among children and teachers	T1, T2, T5
	No new materials are used throughout the year	T3,
	Request for material is always not accommodated	T4, T6,
	Books are the main source of material	T12,13
Diverse and Stimulating Resources	A variety of resources provided by the organisation	T7, T8
	Many materials stimulate different types of exploration and support sensory, cognitive, and emotional development	T9, T10, T11 T14, T5
	Often use natural base materials	T12, T13

Discussion

The teachers shared about being inspired by contemporary early childhood philosophers like Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Malaguzzi, whose pedagogy and theories are focused on the development of the child, and active participation of children in learning processes, through play, exploration, and interactions with their surroundings.

The first research objective explores preschool teachers' educational philosophies based on the understanding of theories, the application of pedagogies and the purpose of early childhood education. When exploring preschool teachers' individualities, responses were collected about their motivation, personal inspiration, and perceptions of their role in children's learning processes. The teachers have simultaneously expressed that young children's growth, development, and milestones motivated them the most, along with parents' positive feedback. This finding very well reflects preschool teachers' passion for early childhood education, which defined their core purpose of the identity of being teachers similar to the findings reported by Heidemann,et al (2020). Most teachers are clear with their roles in young children's learning processes, revealing that they are obligated to support and enhance young children's holistic development through nurturing, scaffolding, and opportunities for exploration. The teachers unanimously recognize the importance of play in early children's learning, emphasising enjoyment, active learning, and opportunities for exploration. Similarly, studies by Taylor, & Boyer, (2020) show that play-based learning

enriches children's educational journey. The teachers also concurrently recognise the importance of a well-prepared environment that will support children's play, exploration, learning, and development. Similarly, Bone, (2021) states that play is fundamental for the development of across all domains of a child's development. It is also elaborated that a learning environment that is well-resourced and spacious, and a space that values diversity will support children in developing their interests for learning, enhance autonomy and encourage social interactions. When asked about teachers' perspectives on how children learn best, the teachers acknowledge that children learn most effectively through active participation in the learning process, for instance, exploration and collaboration, through first-hand experiences with their surroundings. It is also suggested that interactions with peers and adults through modeling and scaffolding methods are the best ways for children to learn. Similarly, Neumann, (2020) states that *"cognitive, affective, and technical scaffolding supported and engaged young children during shared reading."* Questions on past lessons successfully revealed the current teaching practices of the teachers. Through qualitative analysis, the findings revealed that adult-initiated activities are mainly conducted in preschools, with a mix of child-led and adult-led activities.

Upon categorising the 15 responses, the analysis shows that there is a higher percentage of adult-led activities than child-led activities. Child-led activities recorded in the responses mostly include role-play activities as well as some integration of stories, while adult-led activities mainly consist of group-structured lessons. Based on the Onion Model by Korthagen (2004), educators share their perceptions and views about early childhood education and their philosophical stance, which lays the foundation of their curriculum tendencies. Few teachers expressed opposing views, advocating for teacher-centered learning approaches. Despite their agreement towards play-based learning and the importance of setting up the learning environment, they expressed on the adults' role in guiding children's learning. The idea of adults being responsible for scaffolding, nurturing, and educating young children has been repeatedly mentioned by multiple respondents, implying the significance of the adults' role in children's learning processes.

Such an educational philosophical stance aligns with the perennialism and essentialism philosophical paradigms that emphasise instilling values and truth in learners as determined by the educator (Suciyati, 2023). Teachers have also indicated their preferences for using extrinsic rewards in classrooms to instill desired behaviours in students, which aligns with B.F. Skinner's behaviourism philosophical school of thought (Burhanuddin et al., 2021). Based on the analysed data, several teachers recorded the use of workbooks in classrooms to teach a subject matter. In other words, despite being aware of children's most effective way of learning, some teachers still rely on traditional teaching methods that do not encourage the active participation of children during the learning process. The findings show that teachers focus on guiding young children's learning, laying a solid foundation for education through scaffolding them to support their holistic development. In other words, from this perspective, it is the adult who initiates and leads the learning of young children.

The findings show that teachers continue to employ passive learning strategies like using videos, flashcards, photos, and workbooks. The teachers remain implementing conventional teaching approaches in their classrooms due to several factors, including low teachers' qualifications, the lack of professional development on child-centered teaching methods

(Singh & Singh 2023), classroom management issues, and parental demands on children's academic achievements. Majority of the teachers have at least a diploma qualification in ECE. This implies that despite having proper ECE qualifications, teachers continue to implement traditional teaching approaches, which contradicts the statement by (Abdullah et al., 2017). The teaching and learning approaches employed in preschools remain contradicted by theories and pedagogies that advocate play-based learning in preschools. One teacher pointed out the need for guidelines on implementing child-centred teaching and learning theories for teachers to effectively support young children's learning.

Due to insufficient resources, teachers are restricted in terms of creating a conducive learning environment that supports child-centered learning. Some teachers' responses imply that they opt out of child-centered teaching methods due to academic requirements of primary school readiness for children as required by their organisations.

It is crucial not to disregard the current state of teaching and learning especially given the observed awareness among teachers regarding the efficacy of child-centred learning approaches in fostering holistic development of young children. Such observation of the contradiction between preschool teachers' educational philosophy and their current teaching practices indicates that these teachers may be facing challenges due to the lack of institutional support necessary for the implementation of their pedagogical aspirations. Hence, such findings of this study have provided insightful implications for school organisations and the government. The author of 'Can I Go and Play Now?' which encourages learning through play and exploration can provide insightful theories and practical ideas for implementing child-centered teaching and learning practices (Bottrill, 2022). Although most of these pedagogies are based in overseas school settings, there is no harm in adopting commendable practices in local school contexts for the benefit of young children.

Limitations of the Study
For this small-scale study, only a small group of samples was obtained for data collection procedures. Hence, a limited sample size may compromise the validity of the data collected. Thus, findings from this descriptive exploratory study cannot be generalised to broader populations. While reviewing the data collection methods, open-ended questions may not lead to extensive responses regarding teachers' educational philosophies. Integrating interviews with a larger sample group can yield more authentic and comprehensive responses, enhancing the effectiveness of this descriptive study's objectives. It is also worth clarifying the disparities between the statements about teacher-centered and child-centered characteristics to ensure that teachers can accurately identify these traits while reflecting on their teaching practices. The increased clarity will facilitate a more precise data collection process. In addition, the open-ended question to collect qualitative data on teachers' practices has resulted in less comprehensive findings. It is suggested that integrating a variety of data collection methods to investigate educators' current teaching practices may provide a more extensive set of findings.

Recommendations for Further Research
The current practices of teachers do not reflect their pedagogical aspirations. It is recommended to explore factors affecting preschool educators' teaching practices to gain insights into the underlying causes contributing to the gap between teachers' educational

philosophies and their actual teaching practices. This investigation can provide valuable information for addressing and bridging this gap effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research objectives of this qualitative research have been achieved by exploring preschool teachers' educational philosophies and investigating the influence of these philosophies on their teaching practices. However, despite the child-centered educational philosophy tendencies of most teachers, some of their teaching practices remain mainly teacher-centered, contradicting the findings regarding their educational philosophies. Consequently, assumptions regarding the contradiction have been made based on the literature review and the findings gathered from this study. The findings of this study imply shortcomings of school organisations and governing bodies in supporting educators professionally, hence further research is recommended in efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education.

Acknowledgement

References

Abdullah, M., Md Nor, M., Damaety, F., & Chee, J. (2017). Teaching Approaches in the Classroom among Preschool Teachers. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 7(3).

Alemdar, M., & Aytaç, A. (2022). The impact of teachers educational philosophy tendencies on their curriculum autonomy. Journal of Pedagogical Research, 6(1). https://doi.org/10.33902/jpr.2022.166

Aljabreen, H. (2020). Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia: a Comparative Analysis of Alternative Models of Early Childhood Education. International Journal of Early Childhood, 52(3), 337–353. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-020-00277-1

Badiei, M., & Sulaiman, T. (2014). The Difference between Montessori Curriculum and Malaysia National Preschool Curriculum on Developmental Skills of Preschool Children in Kuala Lumpur . British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science, 4(10), 1372–1385.

Bone, M. (2021). The Role of Play in Early Child Development: An In-depth View.

Bottrill, G. (2022). Can I Go and Play Now? Sage Publications UK.

Brewer, J. A. (2014). Introduction to early childhood education : preschool through primary grades. Pearson Education.

Burhanuddin, N. A. N., Ahmad, N. A., Said, R. R., & Asimiran, S. (2021). Learning Theories: Views from Behaviourism Theory and Constructivism Theory. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 10(1). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v10-i1/8590

Cigala, A., Venturelli, E., & Bassetti, M. (2019). Reflective Practice: A Method to Improve Teachers' Well-Being. A Longitudinal Training in Early Childhood Education and Care Centers. Frontiers in Psychology, 10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02574

Crescenza, G., Fiorucci, M., Rossiello, M. C., & Stillo, L. (2021). Education and the Pandemic: Distance Learning and the School-Family Relationship. Research in Education and

Learning Innovation Archives, 0(26), 73–85. https://eari.uv.es/index.php/realia/article/view/18078/18016

Edwards, C. P. (2002). Three Approaches from Europe: Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia. Early Childhood Research & Practice, 4(1). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED464766

Fani, T., & Ghaemi, F. (2011). Implications of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in Teacher Education: ZPTD and Self-scaffolding. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 29, 1549–1554. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.396

Fernández Santín, M., & Feliu Torruella, M. (2017). Reggio Emilia: An Essential Tool to Develop Critical Thinking in Early Childhood. Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research, 6(1), 50–56. https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2017.1.207

Hayes, N., Halpenny, A. M., & O'Toole, L. (2022). Introducing Bronfenbrenner. In Introducing Bronfenbrenner (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003247760

Hedges, H., & Cullen, J. (2005). Subject Knowledge in Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy: Beliefs and Practices. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 6(1), 66–79. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2005.6.1.10

Heidemann, S., Menninga, B., & Chang, C. (2020). Intentional teaching in early childhood: Ignite your passion for learning and improve outcomes for young children. Free Spirit Publishing.

Korthagen, F. A. J. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. Teaching and Teacher Education, 20(1), 77–97.

Laubach, M. (2011). Pestalozzi and His Significance in Democratic Education. Journal of Philosophy & History of Education, 61(1), 185–194.

Leatemia, L. D., van Merrienboer, J. J. G., & Susilo, A. P. (2022). Development of a questionnaire to measure teachers' student-centred perspectives based on the Onion Model. BMC Medical Education, 22(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03547-9

Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2008). Education in Malaysia: A journey to excellence. Malaysia: Educational Planning and Research Division.

MOE. (2017). National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum. Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Mphahlele, R. S. S. (2019). Exploring the role of Malaguzzi's "Hundred Languages of Children" in early childhood education. South African Journal of Childhood Education, 9(1). https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.757

Neumann, M. M. (2020). Teacher scaffolding of preschoolers' shared reading with a storybook app and a printed book. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 34(3), 367-384.

OECD. (2019). OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: Conceptual learning framework.

Orchard, J., & Winch, C. (2015). What training do teachers need?: Why theory is necessary to good teaching. Impact, 2015(22), 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/2048-416x.2015.12002.x

Phang, A. W. L., Loh, C. H.-S., Dhamotharan, M., & Mustafa, M. C. (2021). Preschool teachers' beliefs and classroom practices of child-centred learning at private preschools in central region, Malaysia. Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal, 10(2), 69–83. https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.2.5.2021

Rahmatullah, B., Muhamad Rawai, N., Mohamad Samuri, S., & Md Yassin, S. (2021). Overview of early childhood care and education in Malaysia. Hungarian Educational Research Journal, 11(4). https://doi.org/10.1556/063.2021.00074

Rinaldi, C. (2021). In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching and Learning. In Google Books. Routledge. https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=umtHEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT9

&dq=reggio+emilia&ots=7AmHtBjIaA&sig=ulw3UiDmcheIh2v9LCFyF9EF1j8#v=onepage &q=reggio%20emilia&f=false

Saracho, O. N. (2021). Theories of child development and their impact on early childhood education and care. Early Childhood Education Journal, 51(1), 15–30. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01271-5

Shaari, M. F., & Nazri, B. (2023). Learning with Nature in Malaysia: Methods of Incorporating Nature in Kindergarten Outdoor Physical Environments. Online Journal for TVET Practitioners, 8(3), 1–13. https://publisher.uthm.edu.my/ojs/index.php/oj-tp/article/view/13711/6109

Seferoglu, G. (2004). A study of alternative English teacher certification practices in Turkey. Journal of Education for Teaching, 30(2), 151-159.

Singh, R. K. P. G., & Singh, G. K. S. (2023). Hybrid Mode of Learning For Early Childhood Education: Teachers' Perspective. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 12(3).

Suciyati, L. (2023). The Concept Of Perennialism Education And The Flow Of Essentialism. Amandemen: Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Studies, 1(2), 62-71.

Taylor, M. E., & Boyer, W. (2020). Play-based learning: Evidence-based research to improve children's learning experiences in the kindergarten classroom. Early Childhood Education Journal, 48(2), 127-133.

World Bank. (2023). Shaping First Steps A Comprehensive Review of Preschool Education in Malaysia.

Yosoff, T. D. B. T. (2023, September 16). Bilangan Tabika, Taska Kemas ditambah di seluruh negara. Utusan Malaysia. https://www.utusan.com.my/nasional/2023/09/bilangan-tabika-taska-kemas-ditambah-di-seluruh-negara/

Yunaini, N., Rukiyati, R., Prabowo, M., Hassan, N. M., & Hermansyah, A. K. (2022). The Concept of the Independent Learning Curriculum (Merdeka Belajar) in Elementary Schools in View Progressivism Educational Philosophy. JIP (Jurnal Ilmiah PGMI), 8(2), 95–105. https://doi.org/10.19109/jip.v8i2.14962

Yunus, A. S. M. (2001). Education Reforms in Malaysia. ERIC. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED464406