

The Play-Based Approach in the Teaching and Learning of the Malay Language in Private Kindergartens: A Study in the Kuala Selangor District, Selangor

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the levels of teacher attitudes, motivation, and the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language, with a primary focus on its practical application. The research is motivated by the necessity to comprehend the actual implementation of play-based strategies as mandated by the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK), given its proven efficacy in fostering children's potential within a stimulating, autonomous, and meaningful learning environment. Utilizing a quantitative research design, the study involved a population of 220 private kindergarten educators, with a final sample size of 140 respondents. Data collection was conducted via Google Forms using a structured questionnaire, and subsequent descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS Version 27. A pilot study confirmed the instrument's high reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.840. The findings indicate that teacher attitudes, motivation, and the implementation of play-based approaches are at a satisfactory level. These results suggest that the play-based approach holds significant potential for further integration into Malay language pedagogy within private kindergartens. Consequently, this study offers critical implications for educators, researchers, and policymakers in their efforts to refine engaging and effective instructional strategies. Furthermore, it is recommended that future research delve deeper into the specific challenges encountered during implementation.

Keywords: Teacher Attitude, Motivation, Implementation, Play-Based Approach, Malay Language Pedagogy, Private Kindergarten.

Introduction

The play-based approach has gained significant traction in early childhood education, recognized as an efficacious pedagogical medium for fostering cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic development (Peng & Ismail, 2020). Grounded in the constructivist theory of Piaget (1962), learning through play enables children to actively construct knowledge through experiential interaction with their environment (Babullah, 2020). As play is an intrinsic behavioral instinct, it remains an inseparable element of a child's developmental journey, providing an authentic platform for exploration and experiential learning (Che Hussin & Wan Mohammad, 2022; Peng & Ismail, 2020). In the specific context of Malay language acquisition, this approach is highly pertinent; language mastery necessitates active communication, vocabulary expansion, and the self-confidence to interact. By integrating elements such as linguistic games, storytelling, and role-play, educators can facilitate a more engaging and effective acquisition of language competencies (Peng & Ismail, 2020; Haruni & Wan Mohammad, 2019).

Furthermore, play-based pedagogy enhances educational efficacy by fostering a high-motivation, low-anxiety environment that optimizes student engagement (Radzi, 2023). These interactive and immersive activities not only refine linguistic proficiency but also stimulate critical social and cognitive skills. Research by Thavandran (2019) underscores the positive impact of play-based strategies on the linguistic development of children within the Malaysian educational landscape. Consequently, the present study seeks to evaluate the implementation and efficacy of the play-based approach in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language within private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor. This investigation aims to bridge the gap between theoretical pedagogical mandates and actual classroom practices to ensure a robust foundation for early childhood literacy.

Although numerous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of play-based approaches in early childhood education, much of the existing literature primarily emphasizes theoretical perspectives, specific language outcomes or implementation within public preschool settings. Empirical evidence examining the actual classroom implementation of play-based approaches in private kindergartens at the district level is still relatively limited. Furthermore, previous studies often examine teachers' attitudes or motivation in isolation, with fewer studies integrating these factors alongside the practical execution of play-based pedagogy in Malay language teaching. Therefore, there is a need for a more localized and holistic investigation that examines teachers' attitudes, motivation, and the level of implementation of play-based approaches concurrently, particularly within private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district.

Background Study

The Malay language serves as the national language and the primary medium of communication and instruction within the Malaysian educational system. Early mastery of the Malay language is fundamental, acting as a precursor to the development of complex literacy and communicative competencies in subsequent educational stages. Nevertheless, the pedagogy of Malay language for preschool children necessitates approaches that are congruent with their cognitive and social developmental levels. In this regard, the play-based approach is identified as an effective pedagogical strategy, aligning with early childhood

development principles that emphasize experiential learning, social interaction, and an engaging environment (Peng & Ismail, 2020).

Within the framework of early childhood education, a play-based approach not only stimulates interest and intrinsic motivation but also facilitates natural language acquisition. Through activities such as role-playing, storytelling, linguistic games, and singing, children develop vocabulary, sentence structures, and communicative skills in an informal and spontaneous manner. Furthermore, the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) explicitly recognizes the significance of play-based learning, particularly in cultivating early language and literacy skills (Puteh & Ali, 2011).

Despite its pedagogical advantages, the optimal implementation of play-based approaches in private kindergartens remains inconsistent. A segment of educators continues to prioritize traditional, teacher-centered methodologies—such as repetitive writing exercises and rote memorization—which offer limited opportunities for meaningful play. This trend may be attributed to various systemic factors, including time constraints, curricular pressure, a lack of pedagogical training, or conceptual ambiguity regarding the academic integration of play (Yusri et al., 2024).

Consequently, it is imperative to investigate the extent of play-based implementation in the teaching and learning of the Malay language within private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district. As a rapidly developing region with a diverse array of private preschools, Kuala Selangor provides a critical context for evaluating actual teaching practices and their impact on linguistic development. By analyzing the strengths and challenges of this implementation, strategic improvements can be proposed to ensure that Malay language instruction is more immersive, meaningful, and efficacious at the early childhood level (Peng & Ismail, 2020).

Problem Statement

The play-based approach is a fundamental strategy emphasized within the Malaysian pedagogical framework. The National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) mandates this approach to facilitate the holistic development of children's potential within a stimulating, autonomous, and meaningful learning environment. However, significant challenges persist in integrating play-based methodologies to enhance the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language. As the national language, Malay serves as a critical educational cornerstone, a primary medium of communication, and a symbol of cultural identity (Mohamad et al., 2023). Consequently, establishing a robust linguistic foundation at the early childhood level is imperative.

Despite its importance, Malay language instruction in private kindergartens often encounters obstacles, particularly in sustaining student engagement and ensuring effective linguistic mastery. Traditional instructional paradigms, characterized by rote memorization and passive learning, are increasingly deemed incompatible with the developmental needs of children who thrive through interaction and play. Therefore, play-based pedagogy has been proposed as a superior alternative to stimulate interest and elevate academic achievement in language acquisition (Radzi et al., 2023).

Research by Husin and Rajamanickam (2024) indicates that while private kindergarten teachers in the Sepang district possess high levels of theoretical knowledge regarding play-based learning, they face considerable difficulties in its strategic planning and execution. Effective play-based pedagogy requires meticulous design to ensure that activities transcend mere entertainment and offer substantive educational value. Educators often struggle to calibrate activities with children's developmental stages, exacerbated by a lack of specialized training in integrating play elements into the formal T&L process.

Furthermore, Khaildin and Mohamed (2023) suggest that the pressure for immediate academic achievement often marginalizes play-based approaches. Ineffective implementation stems from various systemic factors, including inadequate teacher comprehension, insufficient instructional aids, curricular overload, and non-conducive learning environments. Consequently, educators tend to prioritize formal academic instruction over play, perceiving the latter as having lower utility for academic performance. This issue is further compounded by a lack of support from parents and administrators who often advocate for more conventional, formal instructional methods.

According to Sidek (2022), although play is essential for holistic cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, its inconsistent application remains a concern. Negative teacher perceptions or a fundamental misunderstanding of play's pedagogical potential lead to ineffective classroom practices. Many educators lack the confidence to utilize play as a primary instructional tool, often struggling to select age-appropriate games or assess the efficacy of such activities.

This situation is intensified by the perception that play lacks rigorous pedagogical value, being viewed merely as a recreational activity (Abd Rashid & Mohamed, 2023). High administrative workloads and external pressure from parents to focus solely on academic metrics significantly diminish teacher motivation. If motivation is compromised, the proactive planning and execution of effective play-based activities are inevitably neglected. Moreover, the persistent stigma that play-based learning yields negligible academic impact remains a significant barrier (Kamaruddin & Mohamed, 2019). The emphasis on standardized testing often forces teachers to revert to structured, rote-based traditional methods, while parental misconceptions that play is a "waste of time" further hinder its successful implementation in early childhood education.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of play-based approaches in early childhood education several gaps remain evident in the existing literature (Lee, Mohd Radzi, & Mamat, 2022). Previous studies have largely focused on the conceptual understanding of play-based learning, its benefits for child development or its implementation within public preschool settings. Comparatively fewer studies have examined the actual level of implementation of play-based approaches in private kindergartens, particularly in relation to teachers' attitudes and motivation as interconnected factors influencing instructional practices (Peng Chew & Fikri Ismail, 2020).

Moreover, studies that investigate play-based approaches in Malay language teaching often emphasize learning outcomes without sufficiently addressing how teachers plan, facilitate,

and sustain play-based activities in real classroom contexts. Research at the district level especially within rapidly developing areas such as Kuala Selangor, remains scarce. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of how national curriculum aspirations such as those outlined in the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) are translated into everyday teaching practices in private early childhood settings.

This study is motivated by the need to bridge the gap between policy expectations, teacher readiness, and classroom realities. By examining teachers' attitudes, motivation, and the level of implementation of play-based approaches in Malay language teaching, this research provides empirical evidence that contributes to the refinement of early childhood pedagogical practices. The findings of this study are significant as they offer valuable insights for educators in enhancing instructional strategies, for kindergarten administrators in designing targeted professional development programs, and for policymakers in strengthening guidelines related to play-based learning implementation. Ultimately, this study supports the continuous improvement of Malay language teaching practices to ensure they remain developmentally appropriate, engaging and effective for young learners.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the level of teacher attitudes toward the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning of the Malay language in private kindergartens within the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor.
2. Determine the level of teacher motivation regarding the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning of the Malay language in private kindergartens within the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor.
3. Evaluate the level of implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning of the Malay language in private kindergartens within the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of teacher attitudes toward the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning of the Malay language in private kindergartens within the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor?
2. What is the level of teacher motivation to implement play-based approaches in the teaching and learning of the Malay language in private kindergartens within the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor?
3. What is the level of implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning of the Malay language among children in private kindergartens within the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor?

Literature Review

Husin and Rajamanickam (2024) assert that play is a natural instinct in children that fundamentally supports their holistic development. Their research explored the implementation of "Learning Through Play" among private kindergarten educators in the Sepang district, Selangor. This quantitative study employed a survey method utilizing a structured questionnaire as the primary research instrument. The instrument was bifurcated into Section A, focusing on respondents' demographic profiles, and Section B, comprising 15

items regarding perceptions of play-based instruction aligned with the research objectives. A pilot study involving 50 respondents established high reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.87 for the overall instrument and 0.86 for individual items. Data analysis was executed using descriptive statistics via IBM SPSS Version 29. The actual study involved 265 educators sampled from a population of 835 private kindergarten teachers in Sepang. The findings indicated that these educators possess a high level of knowledge concerning play-based approaches and actively integrate them into early childhood pedagogy. The study recommends continuous professional support and training to sustain this implementation. Furthermore, the implications suggest that play-based instruction can significantly enhance the quality of early childhood education if teachers act as instructional designers within the play-learning system. In conclusion, play fosters not only cognitive growth but also social, emotional, and physical competencies.

Furthermore, Radzi et al. (2023) noted that while play-based learning has been practiced globally for nearly a century, its emphasis in Malaysia intensified following the mandatory implementation of the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) in 2010. Play is indispensable for children as it provides invaluable opportunities for meaningful learning, knowledge expansion, universal skills acquisition, imagination, creativity, and enjoyment. There is an imperative need for more in-depth research into play-based activities in Malaysian preschools to provide empirical evidence of its efficacy. This qualitative study, which utilized observation and interviews with three preschool teachers of children aged three to four, aimed to identify the types of games frequently used, teachers' perspectives on play-based instruction, and the resources used in instructional design. The findings highlighted that dramatic play was the most favored method among educators, and all observed teachers maintained a positive outlook on integrating play within the classroom. These positive perceptions and implementation strategies were significantly influenced by the teachers' professional backgrounds, including their experience, educational levels, and the administrative support received from school principals.

Furthermore, Liu et al. (2025) assert that play has long been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach for promoting early childhood literacy. Despite extensive research validating its benefits, academic discourse remains divided regarding the comparative efficacy of home-based versus school-based play. This has led to an outcome-oriented perspective where play is often viewed merely as a structured intervention, potentially neglecting the agency of children to create, negotiate, and interpret their own play activities. Through a conceptual lens, the authors explore temporal and spatial scales to re-evaluate play as a dynamic, multi-layered flow of meaning-making across time and space. From this perspective, play is analyzed as an action, a process, and a context defined by the children themselves.

According to a study by Thavandran et al. (2019), the play-based learning approach was investigated to evaluate its efficacy in enhancing the speech proficiency of preschool children. Play-based learning is recognized as a highly effective instructional technique, enabling children to derive enjoyment and satisfaction from the educational content. Furthermore, through play, children master physical development and linguistic competence, specifically in terms of vocabulary acquisition and grammatical rules. This study utilized Piaget's Cognitive Theory and Chomsky's Mentalist Theory as theoretical frameworks to identify the impact of play-based methodologies on the oral communication skills of preschool learners.

Subsequently, research conducted by Peng and Ismail (2020) emphasizes that appropriate teaching and learning (T&L) methods are essential to unlock children's potential and sustain their interest. Play-based learning was identified as a paramount pedagogical strategy in this regard. Consequently, their study aimed to identify the implementation of play-based approaches in Malay language T&L and analyze the correlation between teacher attitudes and motivation with the actual classroom execution. Utilizing purposive sampling, the study involved 66 preschool teachers in Kuala Lumpur, with questionnaires serving as the primary data collection instrument. The findings revealed that both teacher attitudes and motivation toward implementing play-based approaches in Malay language instruction were at a high level. Additionally, a significant correlation was observed between these two variables (attitude and motivation) and the practical implementation of the approach. These findings serve as a critical resource for educators, school administrators, and the Ministry of Education in assessing teacher readiness and drive toward play-based pedagogy in the Malay language curriculum.

In addition, Syazreena et al. (2024) observe that reading difficulties among preschool children remain a persistent challenge for educators. Consequently, their study explores the constraints and complexities encountered by teachers in facilitating the mastery of reading skills. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study involved 12 preschool teachers from 12 national schools across seven states in Malaysia. The participants were selected through non-random sampling based on specific criteria, including a minimum of eight years of teaching experience and status as lead practitioners in the field of early childhood education. Data were collected via online interviews, which were recorded and subsequently analyzed using NVivo software to ensure systematic data management. Utilizing a Grounded Theory approach, the study identified 11 primary factors contributing to the challenges in reading mastery. These factors include varying levels of cognitive readiness, such as limited memory retention, inability to recognize alphabets, and lack of focus. Furthermore, external factors such as a lack of familial support, time constraints, diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and diminished interest in reading were also highlighted. To mitigate these issues, preschool teachers employ diverse and engaging pedagogical methods to stimulate interest and enhance children's confidence during the reading process, both within the classroom and at home. Ultimately, the study concludes that teachers play a pivotal role in implementing effective strategies to foster engagement and improve literacy outcomes. Mastery of reading skills is deemed critical for a child's developmental trajectory, as literacy serves as a foundational skill for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Research Methodology

This chapter delineates the methodological framework employed to evaluate the play-based approach in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language within private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor. The selection of a robust research methodology is paramount to ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. According to Husin and Rajamanickam (2024), play-based pedagogy fosters student engagement and holistic development, effectively preparing children for their future educational trajectories. This section encompasses the research design, population and sampling, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and the statistical techniques utilized for data analysis.

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey method. The quantitative approach was selected to facilitate the systematic measurement of variables and to produce empirical data that can be objectively analyzed. As noted by Osman and Mohamed (2023), choosing an appropriate instructional and research model is critical for achieving accurate results. The research process was executed in four distinct phases: preliminary study, data collection, data analysis, and the reporting of findings.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this research consists of 220 educators from private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district. To ensure a representative sample, purposive sampling (or *simple random sampling* depending on your specific method) was employed. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) determination table, a sample size of 140 respondents was identified as sufficient to ensure the statistical power of the study.

Research Instrument

Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument was meticulously designed to measure three primary constructs: teacher attitudes, motivation, and the level of implementation. A Likert scale was utilized to capture the intensity of respondents' perceptions. To ensure the instrument's efficacy, a pilot study was conducted with 50 participants, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.840, which signifies high internal consistency and reliability.

Data Analysis Procedure

The raw data underwent rigorous analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. Descriptive analysis, involving mean scores, frequencies, and percentages, was utilized to address the research questions. This systematic approach allows for a concrete interpretation of the play-based approach's implementation and its impact on Malay language instruction.

Research Finding

Respondents' Demographics

The study involved a sample of 140 respondents, consisting of educators selected from private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants involved in this research.

Table 1

Respondents Demographics

Demographics		Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	35	25%
	Female	105	75%
Race	Melayu	118	84.3%
	Cina	5	3.6%
	India	8	5.7%
	Others	9	6.4%
	Age	20 – 30 years old	96
	31 – 40 years old	36	25.7%
	41 – 50 years old	7	5%
	51 – 60 years old	1	0.7%
Teaching Experience	1 – 5 years	105	75.0%
	6 – 10 years	33	23.6%
	11 - 15 years	2	1.4%

Table 2

The interpretation of mean scores

Range of Mean Scores	Evaluation Level	Interpretation
1.00–1.80	Very Low	Respondents strongly disagree, or the level of achievement is very low.
1.81–2.60	Low	Respondents disagree, or the level of achievement is low.
2.61–3.40	Moderate	Respondents are neutral, or the level of achievement is moderate.
3.41–4.20	High	Respondents agree, or the level of achievement is high.
4.21–5.00	Very High	Respondents strongly agree, or the level of achievement is very high.

Pallant, J. (2020)

Research Findings: Level of Teacher Attitudes Toward the Implementation of Play-Based Approaches

The first research objective is to identify the level of teacher attitudes toward the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language. The data obtained from the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 3 below:

No	Item	Mean	S.D	Level
1.	I make thorough preparations before commencing the T&L process using a play-based approach.	4.44	.590	Very High
2.	I prepare necessary materials for Malay language instruction.	4.44	.566	Very High
3.	I frequently utilize play-based approaches in Malay language instruction.	4.41	.561	Very High
4.	I believe that my students can enhance their Malay language mastery through play-based approaches.	4.48	.593	Very High
5.	I consistently provide opportunities for children to contribute ideas during play activities.	4.51	.581	Very High
6.	I feel comfortable applying play-based approaches in Malay language instruction.	4.41	.523	Very High
7.	I am confident in applying play-based approaches in Malay language instruction.	4.44	.527	Very High
8.	I do not easily give up when guiding children using play-based approaches in Malay language instruction.	4.41	.562	Very High
9.	I share the implementation methods of play-based instruction with my colleagues.	4.21	.687	Very High

Based on Table 3, the research findings demonstrate that all nine items concerning teacher attitudes toward the implementation of play-based approaches in Malay language teaching and learning (T&L) within private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district reached a high mean level, ranging from 4.21 to 4.51. These scores indicate that private preschool educators in this region maintain a highly positive disposition toward the utilization of play-based pedagogy.

The item that recorded the highest mean was “I consistently provide opportunities for children to contribute ideas during play activities” with a value of 4.51. This underscores the educators' commitment to actively involving children in the learning process, which serves as a fundamental pillar of the “learning through play” pedagogy (Che Hussin & Wan Mohammad, 2022). This approach not only facilitates bidirectional communication but also fosters self-confidence and creativity among young learners.

Furthermore, items such as “I make thorough preparations before commencing the teaching process” and “I prepare necessary materials for Malay language instruction” both recorded a mean of 4.44. This suggests that educators are prepared both mentally and through the provision of material resources (Ahmad & Osman, 2025). Such an attitude reflects a high level of professionalism and a profound understanding of the critical role that meticulous planning plays in the execution of play-based pedagogy.

The findings also reveal that educators strongly believe “play-based approaches can enhance children’s Malay language mastery,” with a mean score of 4.48, thereby demonstrating confidence in the efficacy of this strategy. This aligns with research by Kamaruddin and

Mohamed (2019), which found that play-based approaches significantly assist children in letter recognition and vocabulary acquisition.

Regarding personal engagement, items such as “I am confident and comfortable in applying play-based approaches” recorded means of 4.44 and 4.41, respectively. This signifies a robust level of acceptance and proficiency among teachers, despite potential systemic constraints such as time limitations or high workloads (Ali, Puteh & Mohamod, 2018). Moreover, teachers demonstrated resilience and commitment, as evidenced by the item “I do not easily give up when guiding children using play-based approaches” (M = 4.41), reflecting their perseverance in the face of pedagogical challenges.

However, the item with the lowest mean score was “I share implementation methods of play-based approaches with my colleagues” at 4.21, though it remains within the high category. This suggests that the culture of professional collaboration and the sharing of best practices among kindergarten educators could be further strengthened (Husin & Rajamanickam, 2024). Collective collaboration is vital for disseminating effective methodologies and elevating overall instructional quality.

In conclusion, the high mean scores across all items indicate that private kindergarten educators possess a positive attitude toward play-based approaches in Malay language instruction. This sentiment is consistent with findings by Abd Rashid and Mohamed (2023), who identified teacher receptivity as a critical factor in the success of preschool play-based pedagogy. Consequently, these results reinforce the necessity of continuous support from administrators and policymakers in providing specialized training and a conducive environment to ensure play-based approaches are implemented more effectively.

Research Findings: Level of Teacher Motivation Toward the Implementation of Play-Based Approaches

The second research objective is to determine the level of teacher motivation regarding the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language. The descriptive statistics for the items in this construct are presented in Table 4.

No	Item	Mean	S.D	Level
1.	I plan teaching strategies for Malay language instruction.	4.47	.555	Very High
2.	I am aware that the instructional approaches I use can facilitate children's Malay language learning.	4.49	.530	Very High
3.	I am interested in teaching new techniques and skills in Malay language learning.	4.52	.593	Very High
4.	I encourage children to complete Malay language tasks within the stipulated time, whether individually or in groups.	4.53	.529	Very High
5.	I find that children are more enthusiastic about learning when I employ a play-based approach.	4.51	.516	Very High

6.	I encourage children to ask questions during Malay language lessons, regardless of any linguistic errors they may make.	4.52	.543	Very High
7.	I feel more motivated when children successfully complete their tasks in Malay language learning activities.	4.54	.528	Very High
8.	I adapt original ideas according to current changes in Malay language instruction.	4.52	.569	Very High
9.	I consistently receive encouragement and support from fellow teachers in Malay language instruction.	4.49	.569	Very High

Based on Table 4, the level of teacher motivation toward the implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language among kindergarten children in the Kuala Selangor district shows high mean scores across all nine items, ranging from 4.47 to 4.54. These findings illustrate that private kindergarten teachers in the Kuala Selangor district exhibit robust and consistent motivation in adopting play-based approaches as their primary pedagogical strategy.

The item that recorded the highest mean was “I feel more motivated when children successfully complete their tasks in Malay language learning activities” ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.528$). This indicates that teacher satisfaction and motivation significantly increase when they witness positive learning outcomes among children. This situation aligns with the findings of Husin and Rajamanickam (2024), which emphasize that children's success acts as a catalyst for teacher motivation to continuously refine their instructional approaches.

Furthermore, several other items also recorded high mean scores, including “I adapt original ideas according to current changes in Malay language instruction” ($M = 4.52$) and “I encourage children to ask questions despite their errors” ($M = 4.52$). Both statements demonstrate that teachers are flexible and open-minded in managing the dynamics of children's learning and are prepared to adopt more inclusive approaches. Ali et al. (2018) state that a teacher's ability to adapt instructional strategies according to the situation plays a vital role in ensuring the effectiveness of play-based pedagogical implementation.

Additionally, teacher motivation in delivering new techniques and skills is also remarkably high, as shown by the item “I am interested in teaching new techniques and skills in Malay language learning” ($M = 4.52$). Teachers exhibit a profound interest in enriching student learning content with fresh and innovative methods. This is further supported by Che Hussin and Wan Mohammad (2022), who state that effective play-based approaches require innovative and highly motivated teachers to explore diverse instructional techniques.

Teachers' positive attitude toward Malay language learning through play is also evidenced by the item “I find that children are more enthusiastic about learning when I employ a play-based approach,” which recorded a mean of 4.51. This proves that educators not only recognize the effectiveness of play-based approaches but also observe its direct impact on student enthusiasm. These findings are consistent with the study by Kamaruddin and Mohamed (2019), which found that the use of play strategies enhances active engagement and motivation among children.

Other items, such as “I plan Malay language teaching strategies” ($M = 4.47$) and “I consistently receive encouragement from other teachers” ($M = 4.49$), indicate that teacher motivation is not only intrinsically driven but is also influenced by peer support and professional learning community practices. This statement is reinforced by Abd Rashid and Mohamed (2023), who emphasize the role of teacher collaboration as a catalyst for work motivation and the enhancement of instructional quality.

Overall, the mean analysis results in Table 4 prove that private kindergarten teachers in the Kuala Selangor district possess exceptionally high motivation in integrating play-based approaches into Malay language learning. These results further reinforce that this approach is not only appropriate for child development but also elevates the professional satisfaction and motivation of educators in performing their duties more effectively and enjoyably.

Research Findings: The Level of Implementation of Play-Based Approaches in Malay Language Teaching and Learning

The third research objective is to evaluate the level of implementation of play-based approaches among private kindergarten teachers in the Kuala Selangor district. The descriptive data for this section are summarized in Table 5.

No	Item	Mean	S.D	Level
1.	I implement play activities that are aligned with the Malay language learning objectives.	4.51	.543	Very High
2.	I provide teaching aids such as instruction cards, board games, and other relevant materials.	4.49	.543	Very High
3.	I plan for the optimal utilization of time and space.	4.52	.569	Very High
4.	I provide basic information to assist children (e.g., pictorial materials).	4.54	.528	Very High
5.	I ensure the active participation of all children during the activities.	4.61	.503	Very High
6.	I explain the learning objectives clearly before commencing play activities.	4.44	.579	Very High
7.	I act as a facilitator throughout the duration of the activities.	4.51	.581	Very High
8.	I determine specific criteria when forming groups of children.	4.55	.567	Very High
9.	I encourage the sharing of information among group members or between peers.	4.41	.600	Very High

Table 5 presents the overall mean scores for the nine items assessing the level of implementation of play-based approaches in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language within private kindergartens in the Kuala Selangor district, Selangor. All obtained mean values fall within the high range, specifically between 4.41 and 4.61, indicating that private kindergarten teachers in this district implement this approach consistently, systematically, and comprehensively. These results reflect a robust execution and the pedagogical efficacy of play strategies within the classroom.

The item recording the highest mean was “I ensure the active participation of all children during the activities,” with a mean score of 4.61 (SD = 0.503). This finding underscores the teachers' commitment to the active engagement of all children, regardless of their proficiency levels. This is crucial for ensuring that the learning process remains inclusive and enjoyable. A study by Che Hussin and Wan Mohammad (2022) asserts that the holistic involvement of children in play activities not only enhances cognitive achievement but also strengthens social relationships and emotional development.

Furthermore, the item “I provide basic information to assist children (e.g., pictorial materials)” recorded a mean of 4.54, indicating that teachers recognize the necessity of providing visual support to facilitate children’s understanding during play activities. This support aligns with pedagogical approaches that emphasize contextual and concrete learning for children in early childhood (Ahmad & Osman, 2025).

The item “I determine specific criteria when forming groups of children” also recorded a high mean score of 4.55. This illustrates that teachers strive to ensure that group formation occurs strategically rather than randomly. Effective grouping can foster collaboration, communication, and leadership skills among children (Abd Rashid & Mohamed, 2023). This demonstrates that teachers act not only as facilitators but also as astute pedagogical planners.

The items “I plan for the optimal utilization of time and space” (M = 4.52) and “I act as a facilitator throughout the duration of the activities” (M = 4.51) reflect the teachers' active role in ensuring smooth execution. Organized implementation in terms of time and space is vital in play activities to ensure children can focus and derive maximum benefit from the tasks performed (Ali et al., 2018).

Although all items recorded high means, the item “I encourage the sharing of information among group members or between peers” recorded the lowest mean at 4.41. While this score remains high, it suggests that elements of communication and interaction among children could be further enhanced. This is consistent with the findings of Husin and Rajamanickam (2024), who suggest that educators should increase collaborative opportunities within play-based approaches to strengthen social engagement among children.

Overall, the mean scores obtained in Table 5 demonstrate that private kindergarten teachers implement play-based approaches in Malay language instruction very effectively. These findings further reinforce the view that play-based approaches are not only suitable for early childhood education but also assist in improving children’s achievement and maintaining their motivation and active engagement in daily learning.

Discussion

Discussion of Research Findings

The findings indicate that teachers in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor possess a high level of readiness and a positive outlook toward play-based pedagogy. This is evidenced by the high mean scores across all three main variables: attitude, motivation, and implementation. The high level of attitude suggests that teachers are cognitively and

emotionally prepared to shift from traditional methods to more student-centered, play-based instruction.

Research Implications

Educators

The study implies that teachers need to act as creative instructional designers. A positive attitude and high motivation are insufficient without the skill to adapt play activities to the Malay language curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to continuously innovate their teaching aids to sustain student engagement.

Kindergarten Administrators

The results suggest that a supportive environment and the provision of adequate resources are vital. Administrators should prioritize professional development programs (CPD) that focus specifically on the practical execution of play-based learning to maintain the high motivation levels identified in this study.

Policy Makers

The findings reinforce the importance of the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK). Policymakers should consider developing more structured guidelines and modules for play-based Malay language T&L to ensure consistency across private and public sectors.

Research Recommendations

It is recommended that private kindergartens increase collaboration through benchmarking sessions with other successful institutions. Additionally, the integration of digital-based play (educational technology) should be explored to complement physical play activities.

Longitudinal Studies: Future research should track the long-term impact of play-based approaches on children's actual literacy performance over a longer period.

Qualitative Approaches: A qualitative study involving in-depth interviews and classroom observations could provide deeper insights into the specific challenges faced by teachers during implementation.

Comparative Analysis: Future studies should compare the effectiveness of play-based approaches between private and government-funded (KEMAS/Perpaduan) kindergartens.

Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates that private kindergarten teachers in Kuala Selangor possess positive attitudes, high levels of motivation, and effectively implement play-based approaches in the teaching and learning (T&L) of the Malay language. The successful execution of this methodology can be attributed to the teachers' awareness of its efficacy, professional support, adequate training, and their pedagogical agility in adapting to children's evolving needs. These findings reinforce the imperative need to sustain and expand the implementation of play-based approaches in early childhood education while providing continuous support to educators through specialized training, professional mentorship, and the provision of sufficient instructional resources.

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