

AN IMPROVEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION

ONG KAI XIN

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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the degree of Master of Business Administration

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who provided unlimited support so that I could have motivation to continue my learning journey.

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In preparing this thesis, I had the opportunity to meet a number of people. I would like to express my gratitude to Miss Tan, the principal of the case company, Kinderkids Education Centre. Without her kindness and help, this thesis would not have been a success.

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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in early childhood education has been proven to be beneficial for students, the society and the country. It can establish a healthy parent-teacher relationship and improve students' success and also teachers' work. However, research showed a reduction in parent involvement in children's education. This action research aims to understand the issue of parent involvement in Kinderkids Education Centre and implement a solution to solve it. "My Time with You" and "My Time with You 2.0" programme were implemented as interventions in the kindergarten's curriculum to improve the parent involvement in early childhood education. Interviews were carried out with principal and parents and analysed using thematic analysis. The barriers hindering parent to get involved in their children's education and solutions to increase parent involvement were identified from the interview. Moreover, survey questionnaires were used to determine the improvement of parent involvement after the intervention. 4 elements in parent involvement showed significant improvement in the end of cycle 2, namely parenting, communicating, learning at home and decision making. In conclusion, the major contribution of this action research is the improvement in parent involvement in early childhood education. We expect the students will have better performance in terms of academics, soft skills and behaviour improvement. We strongly believe that outstanding future generations nurtured today will highly impact our country's wealth and the society at large one day in the future.

ABSTRAK

Penglibatan ibu bapa dalam pendidikan awal kanak-kanak telah terbukti bermanfaat bagi pelajar, masyarakat dan negara. Ia dapat menjalin hubungan yang sihat antara ibu bapa dan guru serta meningkatkan kejayaan pelajar dan juga pekerjaan guru. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk memahami isu penglibatan ibu bapa di Pusat Pendidikan Kinderkids dan menyelesaikan isu tersebut. Program "My Time with You" dan "My Time with You 2.0" telah dilaksanakan dalam kurikulum tadika sebagai intervensi untuk meningkatkan penglibatan ibu bapa dalam pendidikan awal kanak-kanak. Temu bual telah dilakukan dengan pengetua dan ibu bapa serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Halangan yang menghalang ibu bapa untuk terlibat dalam pendidikan anak-anak mereka dan cara penyelesaian telah dikenal pasti dari temu bual. Selain itu, soal selidik tinjauan telah digunakan untuk mengenalpasti keberkesanan intervensi pada penglibatan ibu bapa dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak. 4 elemen dalam penglibatan ibu bapa menunjukkan peningkatan yang ketara pada akhir kitaran dua, iaitu keibubapaan, berkomunikasi, pembelajaran di rumah dan membuat keputusan. Kesimpulannya, sumbangan utama penyelidikan ini adalah peningkatan penglibatan ibu bapa dalam pendidikan awal kanak-kanak. Kami mengharapkan para pelajar mempunyai prestasi yang lebih baik dari segi akademik, kemahiran insaniah dan peningkatan tingkah laku. Kami sangat percaya bahawa generasi masa depan yang cemerlang yang dipelihara hari ini akan sangat mempengaruhi kekayaan negara kita dan masyarakat pada masa akan datang.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHIBS	-	Azman Hashim International Business School
CCTV	-	Closed-circuit television
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus Disease 2019
ECCE	-	Early Childhood Care and Education
PESTEL	-	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors
RO	-	Research Objective
SOP	-	Standard Operating Procedure
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SWOT	-	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

LIST OF SYMBOLS

p-value - Significant value

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE
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M	Transcript of Interview with Kindergarten Principal
N	Transcript of Interview with Parents
O	Information Sharing Content

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction about the Case Company

Kinderkids Education Centre is a kindergarten located in Taman Century, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia. It was established by Madam Chia in the 1990s. It is a franchise under Q-dees, a trusted brand with a long-history and the goal to deliver world-class educational programmes to realise the global knowledge economy. They aim to empower young minds globally to be the best that they can be. Q-dees stands for Quality, development, educational excellence, environment and service. Q-dees consistently improves to make learning more intelligent, inspiring, fun and creative for children (Q-dees Worldwide Edusystems Sdn Bhd, n.d.).

Madam Chia's passion and patience that has allowed the kindergarten continued operation for more than two decades, helping many students learn to their full potential. In the early 2000s, Miss Tan, the daughter of Madam Chia, took over operations of Kinderkids Education Centre and is the current principal of the kindergarten.

1.1.1 Organisation and Facilities of Kinderkids Education Centre

Miss Tan is the principal of Kinderkids Education Centre. She is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the institution. For instance, coordination of staff schedules, the development of curriculum and school policy enforcement such as discipline and safety. Besides that, the principal is also very concerned about the students' well-being. A positive school culture is maintained between students, teachers, and parents. Systematic modules are planned to allow parents involvement in both home-based and school-based activities. It enhances school culture by building strong connections with each other.

Madam Chia, the founder of the kindergarten, currently serves as an advisor in Kinderkids Education Centre. She monitors the daily operations and assists in establishing the curriculum for future improvements. In addition, she also provides advice and support to kindergarten teachers who are on the frontline directly working with the students.

There are three full-time teachers in Kinderkids Education Centre. All of them are caring and motivated to assist the future generation to learn and grow. Kindergarten teachers are responsible for a child's initial education experience. Their teaching focuses on introducing basic concepts and subjects, such as basic math, colours, and shapes. Kindergarten teachers also teach students letter recognition, reading, awareness of the phonological structure of words and other basic academic skills. They also help students build interpersonal skills and literacy skills.

Kinderkids Education Centre provides a conducive environment allowing students to enjoy the best learning experience. There are study rooms, a computer room, a music studio, an art corner and even an outdoor playground. Most of the learning rooms are equipped with air-conditioner units and a complete ventilation system.

School security as well as student safety are always the top priority. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras were installed in all rooms as well as the front of the kindergarten to ensure a safe environment for students' conducive learning.

1.1.2 Student Demographics and Curriculum

The structure of the kindergarten is divided into two parts: nursery class and pre-school. Nursery classes are provided for children of 4 years of age and below and pre-school are for 5 to 6-year-old children. Each class on average consists of 10 to 25 students. Most of the students enrolled in Kinderkids Education Centre are Chinese; with 15 % of students being Indian and 5% are Malay students. English is used as their primary language to teach in the kindergarten.

A complete guideline on the curriculum is provided by Q-dees to equip the students with life skills and values that will help them grow into confident and independent individuals. The curriculum designed also follows our standard national preschool curriculum issued by Malaysia Ministry of Education. It consists of language education, memory and logical training, math and science, as well as character building.

There are several activities organised by the kindergarten management team to make the learning process fun and meaningful. For example, field trips to a local fire station, where they can learn about the basic structure of the fire truck, the job duty of a fireman, the station's working environment, and the importance of a fire drill and exit signs. Another example would be a field trip to the grocery store to build literacy and math skills in a real-life setting. There are also constant activities in the kindergarten to make the learning process interesting.

An annual concert, teacher’s day, children’s day, and sports day celebrations are organised yearly by the kindergarten management team and parents are highly encouraged to join the events. There are also home-based activities to get parents involved, such as a grade-based reading programme and art activities. However, the response from parents have not been satisfactory.

1.1.3 External Environmental Analysis

A PESTEL analysis has been done to examine the external environment of a private kindergarten. This is to have a better idea on the external factors and could be used to draft a business plan strategically if required.

Table 1.1 The PESTEL analysis of a private kindergarten business

Political	A set of minimal standards has to be fulfilled to ensure the safety, care and education of children.
	National Preschool Curriculum are set to follow. (School Malaysia, n.d.)
Economic	Labour cost are in increasing trends. (Asean Briefing, 2020)
	Increased cost of basic resources such as books and paper.
Social	Decline in birth rate in Malaysia. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020)
	Rising in the number of dual-income family. (Zaimah et al., 2013)
Technological	High usage of electronic devices. (Sarla, 2019)
	Regular updates on the learning materials in school.
	Exist the need of both face-to-face learning and online learning
Legislative	Need to adhere to the Standard Operating Procedure
	A qualification requirement to be kindergarten teachers
Environmental	Air, water and noise pollution

There are six elements in PESTEL analysis. From the table above, we can clearly see that we have a set of rules and regulations to follow in order to ensure the safety and proper education of students. Inflation and increased labour costs may cause the expense of operating a business to be increased. We have to figure out ways to attract higher enrolment numbers of students to cover the increased expenses.

We have observed a decline in birth rate in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). The impact of this social factor may not be significant to a private kindergarten business but we have to be aware of the issue which may have influence in a long run. Secondly, there are more dual-career families where both parents are working adults (Zaimah et al., 2013). The parents may not have enough time to spend with their children during early childhood. We believe that it also affects the learning and development of students. This is a worrying issue because studies have shown that parents play an important role in shaping the future generation from early childhood (Ceka & Murati, 2016).

High usage of electronic devices such as computer and mobile phones may exacerbate the issue of low parent involvement in early childhood education. On the other hand, kindergarten owners has to review the learning materials regularly in order to stay relevant to what the students have to learn. A blended-learning of both physical and virtual classes also exists to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, we believe that physical classes are still the mainstream in early childhood education.

Recent announcements on the minimum requirement to be a preschool teacher creates an extra burden to the kindergarten. They have to obtain at least a tertiary academic qualification in order to work as a teacher in kindergartens (The Malaysian Insight, 2019). This is an initiative to improve the quality of pre-school education in Malaysia. However, kindergarten owners may face difficulties in the hiring process.

Existing teachers also need to go for further study to get at least a diploma to work as a teacher.

To provide a clean and healthy environment to the students, kindergarten owners have to ensure there is minimal pollution on water, air and noise in the surrounding area. Students should enjoy the learning process without any interference from the environment.

1.1.4 Internal Environmental Analysis

Internal environmental analysis is important for us to understand the strengths and weaknesses within the organisation. It can be assessed by three elements, management, marketing, and operation.

Table 1.2 The Internal Environment Analysis of Kinderkids Education Centre

Management	Experienced and friendly teachers
	Small and well-structured organisation
Marketing	Strategic location
	Good reputation
Operation	Safe and conducive environment
	Limited space capacity to handle a huge number of students
	Quality of the curriculum is assured.

From the table above, we can know that this kindergarten is doing well in terms of management and operation. Due to the word of mouth from parents, the reputation of Kinderkids Education Centre is good. However, the limited space may restrict the number of student enrolments.

1.1.5 SWOT Analysis

Based on the external and internal environmental analysis discussed above, we have formulated a SWOT analysis to assess the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Table 1.3 SWOT Analysis of Kinderkids Education Centre

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Long history of the kindergarten with good reputation- Teachers with experience- Conducive environment for learning- Well-organised curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Lack of parent support towards school events in kindergarten- Weak participation of parents in children's homework
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Higher parent involvement improves children's learning and development- Strategic location could attract more student enrolment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Parents are busy with their own work- High usage of electronic devices- Inflation and increased labour cost

From the SWOT analysis, we can see that the lack of parent involvement in in student's education is the main issue in Kinderkids Education Centre. We can also notice that teachers, parents and children are interdependent each other in this case. With an improvement in parent involvement in early childhood education, we expect children would have improvements in their learning and development. In addition, the kindergarten would gain more student enrolment and better reputation. However, there are several threats in the analysis we have to overcome to get things straight.

1.2 Problem Statement

The management team of Kinderkids Education Centre realised that the parents nowadays are less proactive in involving in children's education. Based on the observation by the principal and teachers, parents showed weak participation in both home-based and school-based activities. Hence, the problem statement for this research is: The Lack of Parent Involvement in Children's Education in Kinderkids Education Centre.

1.2.1 Problem Diagnosis

Kinderkids Education Centre has operated for more than 20 years. The principal is very concerned about the students' well-being and development. She would like to see every graduate being equipped with adequate knowledge and excellent soft skills to better continue their learning journey. The teachers in the school are also very passionate to help students to learn and the environment provided in Kinderkids Education Centre is conducive for joyful learning.

The management team of Kinderkids Education Centre believes that if parents can actively engage with their child's education, the results in the child's academic and non-academic performance will be better. However, they realised that parents nowadays are less proactive in participating in activities organised by the school. For example, sports day. Miss Tan wishes to see every parent being able to join the activities to build strong relationships between students, parents and teachers. The attendance rate of parents on sport days has reduced every year. Less and less parents are willing to spend time to join the activities and this has been disappointing to school efforts.

Besides school-based activities, home-based activities can also allow parent to involve in their children's education. Homework given by teachers can be assisted by parents to complete it. However, Miss Tan realised that most of the parents did not provide help to their kids in these home-based activities. Some parents might think that the responsibilities of teaching should be on teachers, not them. Their thoughts are that they pay an amount of money to the kindergarten and expect everything to be conducted in school.

This is a worrying issue to the kindergarten management team because they understand how crucial it is to have parents' participation in their child's education and upbringing. The school, teachers and parents all are responsible in enabling children to grow comprehensively so that they are better equipped with the knowledge and soft skills to become an outstanding nation in the future. Teachers observed that some children have very good character and they realised that the caring parents are the reason behind such good behaviour. Children would also love to have their parents participate in their learning process.

Through the research, we would like to see the level of parent involvement in children's education to increase. Therefore, we have been thinking on how to improve the poor parent involvement in children's education to optimise their learning and development.

1.3 Research Questions

With the issue mentioned in the previous section, there are several research problems in the action research:

- a) What barriers contribute to the lack of parent involvement in early childhood education of children in Kinderkids Education Centre?

The barriers we are going to examine will be both internal (e.g., parent's own attitude towards children's education) and external factors (e.g., school environment) to understand the causes of lack of involvement in children's education from parents.

- b) How to promote parents to be involved in their children's education?

We would like to know the best ways are to get the parent involved in their children's education. From that, we may implement the right solution to solve the problematic situation in Kinderkids Education Centre.

- c) How to improve parent involvement in early childhood education?

What is the best solution to improve the lack of parent involvement in early childhood education?

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions mentioned above, we have established several research objectives:

- a) To determine the barriers contributing to the lack of parent involvement in early childhood education of children in Kinderkids Education Centre.
- b) To discover ways to get parents involved in their children's education.
- c) To improve the lack of parent involvement in children's education.

1.5 Researcher's Role

We would like to act as both researcher and implementer in this research. A thorough study will be conducted to understand the underlying causes behind the problem, which is the lack of parent involvement in early childhood education. We would want to discover and implement solution to improve the parent involvement in children's education. An analysis will be conducted to observe the difference before and after the implementation of intervention.

1.6 Research Ethics

This research was accepted by both AHIBS, UTM and Kinderkids Education Centre. The research poses minimal risk towards the participants. No sensitive topic was discussed in the research. Furthermore, the data of participants in this research is kept private and confidential at all time. The information received throughout the research are solely used for education purposes.

1.7 Significance of the Research

This action research aims to solve the organisation's issue. We could improve the level of parent involvement towards children's education in Kinderkids Education Centre. We believe that it could bring benefits to the stakeholders in the research. The significance of the research can be divided into two: significance to theory and to practice.

1.7.1 Significance to Theory

Studies have proven that parent involvement in early childhood education provides several advantages to the wellbeing of students. For instance, students often have better grades if their parents are involved in their education (Olmstead, 2013). It could also reduce problematic behaviour of children in school (El Nokali et al., 2010). Interpersonal skills and literacy skills of students are also shown to improve with increased parent involvement (Hashmi et al., 2013).

In a bigger picture, this research is very important to the Sustainable Development Goals in Malaysia. Malaysia had recognised the multidimensionality of development since the 1970s. Apart from poverty eradication plans that emphasised job creation and skills development, Malaysia rapidly expanded education and health facilities to improve our country. Empowering people through education and skills upgrading will provide them with access to better jobs and higher incomes, while also helping to achieve better quality of life and well-being. We strongly believe that outstanding future generations nurtured today will highly impact our country's wealth and the society one day in the future (Economic Planning Unit, 2017)

1.7.2 Significance to Practice

Kindergarten management team will be actively promoting the parent involvement with their children's education. We believe that the parents would love to see the improvement in their children's learning and development. We also expect the parents would have higher satisfactory level with the kindergarten.

Increased parent involvement in early childhood education could also provide benefits to Kinderkids Education Centre. Students with strong academic performance, excellent character and better interpersonal skills would be the testimonies of our case company. It could probably lead to increase in reputation and higher number of student enrolment.

The benefits of parent involvement in children's education have been well established, but getting parents involved is very challenging. The management team of Kinderkids Education Centre would like to seek our assistance to improve the current situation.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Parent Involvement

Pomerantz et al. (2007) define it as “parents’ commitment of resources to the academic arena of children’s lives”. Bouffard and Weiss (2008) describes it as an “direct effort provided by the parent, in order to surge educational outcomes of their children”. Parent involvement can be categorised into home and school-based activities in which parents are engaged to support their children's well-being development and education (Epstein, 1995; Seginer, 2006).

Parent involvement in school can be described as “practices on the part of parents that require them making actual contact with schools” (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Examples of school-based activities that parents can participate in are parent-teacher meetings involving informal and formal communication, attending concerts involving their children, visiting the school, as well as volunteering in school activities (Lee and

Bowen, 2006). School-based parent involvement is one of the most visible forms of parent involvement in children's education (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Home-based parent involvement can be described as interactions that happen between parents and children outside of school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997). It generally focuses on a child's learning-related attitudes and behaviours. Parent involvement in homework is the most common example of home-based activities in children's education. Other examples of home-based activities are discussions on schoolwork and events, and engagement in outdoor activities, such as visiting a museum, historical places and even libraries (Lee and Bowen, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2007).

1.8.2 Early Childhood Care and Education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes are divided into pre-schools for children aged 4+ years old and above and nursery classes for younger children (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Childcare services for children of 4 years of age and below are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and pre-school for 5-to-6-year-old children are under the Ministry of Education (Heng, 2008).

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