

## **PARENTS' SATISFACTION TOWARDS THE QUALITY OF THE MANAGEMENT OF CHILDCARE CENTRES**

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**ABSTRACT** – The service of the childcare centre is very important for guaranteeing quality and parent satisfaction. The management needs to improve services and quality. This research study aims to assess parents' satisfaction towards childcare services management. The qualitative approach was used through observation and interviews. Five respondents were interviewed from 5 childcare centres in Kota Bharu, Malaysia. There is an interrelated between service quality and parent satisfaction associated with safety, parental involvement, childcare providers' qualification, curriculum content, physical facilities and strategic location were discussed. The study results showed that parents are satisfied with adequate safety, active parental involvement, a qualified and certified childcare provider, and good curriculum content that must be implemented and followed. The implication of the study shows quality childcare contributes to children later learning success. Thus, the main objective is to evaluate parents' satisfaction and childcare centre management towards safety standards and quality assurance.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The current state of the world economy today requires both parents to work to make ends meet. Thus, childcare services are desperately needed to fill in for both working parents. Numerous studies have examined how parents perceive childcare services and the variables that affect parents' choice of childcare. In addition, parents in Malaysia nowadays are increasingly seeking a high-quality childcare centre. Nationally and individually, it is important for parents to acknowledge extremely high services at a childcare centre. Recent research on brain development demonstrates the quality of childcare, which improves a child's development. Therefore, the quality of childcare fosters healthy brain development during the first five years of development (Mashitah et al., 2021).

Service quality is a crucial dimension of public services. Based on Safiek & Noor (2019), quality service results from customer assessment and processes comparing service expectations with what they have received. The quality of the service can be understood as an organisational need to achieve satisfaction and is related to customer perceptions and expectations. Whereas Abashah et al. (2021) stressed that customer satisfaction is very important for companies to improve their quality of services and management, which impacts business performance. Parents are clients of childcare services which are to be served directly. The understanding of early child development and care has increased nowadays.

Satisfaction theory describes a psychological state that reflects the assessment of the relationship between the customer and the service provider (Belas & Gabčová, 2016). The study of Nor et al. (2009) showed that parental satisfaction had no direct effect on loyalty to childcare centres. In contrast, Keiningham et al. (2006) found that parental satisfaction with kindergarten positively correlated with loyalty intentions.

Whereas Zahyah (2015) specified that ensuring the display of the best practices when handling children in childcare centres requires management that constantly adds knowledge and skills about child development from time to time. To ensure centre management provides the best services, childcare providers must handle children with knowledge and skills. Therefore, childcare centre management must consider the provider's behaviour and practice during activities and routines.

Past research shows that elements of parental satisfaction differ between countries. In addition, some studies included samples limited to specific school systems and locations (Thompson, 2003).

Supported by Brown, Cheng, Yau, & Ziegler (1992), many schools have tried to measure parents' satisfaction with school by measuring the quality of education given to children and finding the best way to improve the schools. Relative to that, parental satisfaction based on various parents' experiences with the school and meeting parents' expectations is important to create satisfaction (Olson, 1999). Whereas Salisbury, Branson, Altreche, Funk, and Broetzmann (1997) stated increasing parents' satisfaction is considered one way of improving the quality of schools.

As children are to be nurtured and protected, the parent's responsibility for caring for and educating their children. The institution of the family must be well maintained through sufficient education, which emphasises the importance of society and parents' role in protecting these young people from abuse. Therefore, parents should be aware of the responsibility to provide education and protection for children. Thus, parents trust childcare centre management to nurture and safeguard their kids—supported by Ramly, Zain, & Eshak (2020). Every parent must raise their children and provide for their needs.

As early as the 1970s, UNICEF showed that providing quality childcare services will increase productivity through reduced absenteeism, parental peace of mind, decreased hardship and improved family ties, which will contribute to the increase of Gross National Income (GNI) of 2 billion by 2020. Development, implementation and national preschool curriculum standard follow-up (NPCS) for four to six (4-6) and PERMATA for children under four (0-3) years reflect the breadth of development on Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE), and care has achieved and grown in the past decade.

According to Malaysia Blueprint (2013-2025), every parent is equipped with toolkits to support their child's learning and parents' involvement. Their child's progress at school can be accessed online, and in the future, it is hoped that parents can be close and work together with childcare providers to improve their child's performance, plus initiatives that promote adult literacy, ICT and parenting skills. This shows the importance of parents' knowledge in choosing the right childcare for their children.

As stated by Nik Farhanah Nik Azhari, Nurulhusna Qamaruzaman, Anniz Fazli Ibrahim Bajunid, and Azman Hassan (2015), parents need to understand the importance of having a clean and safe environment, physical environment inclusive of the curriculum, standard operation procedure (SOP) for indoor and outdoor arrangement, the number of staff ratio to children, toys and other playing equipment are available. Based on Layzer & Goodson (2006), parents' stress incurred from lower-quality arrangements will worsen work performance and relationships at home when childcare management fails to meet parent's and children's needs.

Based on service performance that they have found before. The ability to influence the customer's perception of quality service can be shown when they come back to choose the best service provider in the future is an indicator of quality service. Following this, service childcare providers must improve their approach, which remains relevant to the current needs, prioritising greater market share, loyalty, and market return on investment (Coelho & Henseler, 2012).

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The quality and safety of childcare centres in Malaysia need to be further enhanced, as the incidents of negligence plus abuse that resulted in a child's death (Mashitah et al. et al. 2018). **Although there are legal provisions on childcare in Malaysia, the quality of the services is still questionable as the problem of maltreatment in childcare is still alarming.**

The existing legal provisions on childcare in Malaysia against childcare centres are still questionable because the problem of child abuse is still a concern. Viral on social media, the news of the death of a three-month-old baby girl at a childcare centre in September 2014 (Cheng, 2014). It is reported that the childcare centre only hired four caregivers for thirty-nine children when it was supposed to have nine caregivers (The Star, 2014). In childcare, ACT 1984 regulation 2012 stated the caregiver ratio for children below one year: 1 caregiver cared for three babies, 1 to 2 years: 1 caregiver cared for five toddlers and 2 -4 years: 1 caregiver cared for ten children. In addition, numerous incidents of child abuse in homes and daycare facilities have been recorded. According to a statistical report by

the Social Welfare Department (JKM, 2021), in Selangor, from March 2020 to March 2021, 1,910 cases of child abuse and neglect were recorded.

In relation to that, children's injuries are also related to carelessness and negligence. Environmental factors also can cause injury to small children, such as wet floors, furniture that is not child-friendly and sharp objects. These injuries are predictable and preventable. Proper supervision can prevent these injuries (Nabiha et al., 2015).

**As far as Malaysian childcare is concerned, there is an effort to promote health and safety in childcare, especially looking at the Malaysian National Childcare Quality Standard, which outlines that nutrition, health and safety are among the standards that childcare operators should adhere to. The question is whether the minimum requirements set by the regulations in Malaysia are sufficient or whether the requirements describe the needs below the basic level of acceptable care (Mashitah et al., 2021).**

## **Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to evaluate parents' satisfaction towards the quality management of childcare centres, looking at the importance of safety, the benefit of parents' involvement, childcare providers' skills and qualifications, curriculum content, physical facilities, and strategic location.

## **Research Gaps**

Expanding the understanding of how childcare management looks and works across the importance of parental involvement, robust curriculum, and competent caregivers would add to developing more high-quality childcare services. Finally, support needs to be provided to help parents be satisfied and responsive and increase the effectiveness of childcare services management.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Mashoke et al., (2021), parents focus on the quality of the services provided by childcare centres. Supported by Untaru et al., (2017) stressed that important customer service and quality have direct customer implications. This service helps working parents and children, including the community. In childcare, quality services are a key aspect that is very important and needed by working parents, which depends on accessible and reliable quality.

### **Safety**

A literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory and, by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated. Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview of sources you have explored while researching a particular topic and to demonstrate to your readers how your research fits within a larger field of study.

Malaysia was plunged into a recession in 2020, with economic growth of -5.65 per cent in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, posing a great challenge for all businesses to survive. With high economic growth, child abuse cases have been reported recently. This has been evidenced by a study published in Economics Bulletin (2021), Volume 41 and Issue 3, showing that higher economic growth can result in more child abuse cases in Malaysia. The Social Welfare Department (JKM) recorded one thousand fifty-five child abuse cases nationwide from January to June of 2022 (JKMM 2022). These factors worry parents to send their children to childcare when various issues arise in the press involving negligence or violence of caregivers in childcare centres. In 2018, a case was noted in New Strait Times (2018) where a baby's body was found in a refrigerator at a babysitter's house. In addition, numerous other instances of child abuse in homes and daycare facilities have been documented.

Children are part of society and very important for future development. They should be formed into humans, well cared for, and useful to society and the country. Therefore, they need to be free from

abuse. They must have a healthy and conducive environment to grow up happily. Therefore, it is important to protect them from abuse (Bebas News: 2021).

## **Parents Involvement**

Encouraging parental participation in a childcare centre will support children and parents' understanding beyond an early age and make their families an important part of their education in the future. According to Ron Spreeuwenberg (2019), when parents are actively involved with their children's early education, they are more likely to remain involved when their child enters primary school. At the same time, Adams and Rohacek (2010) stated that unstable and low-quality arrangements at childcare centres are connected to the children's behavioural problems, cognitive and language deficiencies and poor social competence. The relationship and child's attachment to the childcare provider also led to developmental outcomes.

Apart from that, parents and childcare provider relationships are needed to equally understand the roles and responsibilities to enhance the total development of each child in the centre. To encourage a close relationship between parents and childcare providers, parents are voluntarily willing to be involved in activities that lead to their child's performance.

According to Layzer & Goodson (2006), about parent satisfaction, the family needs professional support in caring for and educating their children regardless of social standing. Research has claimed that a larger equation of families is an important element for kids and families.

Consequently, childcare services providers should strive to keep an open relationship with parents and professionally provide regular feedback. Supported by Blau (2003), the relationship between parental satisfaction and the retention of childcare providers is accepted as true without rigorous empirical research to keep the relationship.

As specified by Abdul Adib & Agnis Sombuling (2017), parents' educational backgrounds, differences, and socioeconomic positions of parents are not related to parenting satisfaction. Parental expectations that affect parental satisfaction and significantly higher parental expectations will lead to positive parenting satisfaction.

According to Jang et al. (2014), staff relationships with children and peers and partnerships with families are important for both parties. Children's experiences and learning with protective care and safety, nutrition and well-being led to positive children development, which is the key to identifying the areas of a quality childcare centre. As stated by Ling et al. (2019), the relationship between tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy identifies the dimensions of influencing parental satisfaction in the direction of private kindergartens in Kuching City. As Hong et al. (2019) stated, to promote equality, equity, and social justice in early childhood education. Chinese parents can make more efforts towards different types of kindergartens.

## **Childcare Provider Qualification**

The childcare provider's competence in communicating, interacting, and sharing in a sustainable manner with children. Childcare providers can set a good example in social and emotional skills, a safe environment and protect children from harm. Supported by Allen, Spear, & John (1969) stated that childcare provider expertise in nurturing, teaching and learning leads to understanding the effectiveness of parents' satisfaction and trust. Jang, Moore and Lin (2014) stressed that staff relationships with children and peers and partnerships with families are very important to both parties. Tighter with children's experiences and learning, safety, nutrition and protective care, plus managing is the key to identifying the areas of a quality childcare centre. While Abashah et al. (2021) stated that enrolment rates in childcare service centres have increased due to behavioural qualifications, as well as childcare provider practices,

Furthermore, the effectiveness of classroom management is one of the important criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of childcare provider teaching. In addition, effective classroom management improves student learning. The importance of classroom management and some effective techniques for

21st-century childcare providers: Childcare providers should control their professional behaviour and stabilise actions that are also important to manage classes and students (Nargiza Babadjanova, 2020).

## **Curriculum**

As stressed by Bendini & Devercelli (2022), training for childcare providers to understand the pedagogy of the curriculum is needed. To use assessment appropriately, educators need to understand the curriculum very well. Managers must also understand how to balance the system-wide challenges and local issues to help foster a positive partnership with parents, schools, and families, which can provide financial support and external accountability. Support to Untaru et al. (2017), childgivers must have good performance and service quality to win parents' satisfaction. With this, it is easy to win the approval and satisfaction of parents, thus helping to increase competitiveness.

The quality of an early childhood curriculum produces potentially lasting effects on child development. Friendly, responsive relationships help children feel safe. Positive relationships in a safe and secure environment will help children grow physically and learn to collaborate and socialise with others. Positive relationships between childcare providers and children will improve the classroom environment, which results in more motivation (Varga, M. (2017).

Quality assurance of teaching and learning is important to improve early childhood care and education quality—the childcare centre. Childcare providers must understand their childcare centre's curriculum and standard operating procedures and follow the guidelines set by the local agencies. Supported by Bendeni & Devercelli (2022), it is important that feedback on school functioning, childcare providers' performances, and children's learning at different levels of the education system are monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

## **Physical Facilities**

One of the structural factors of the physical environment is ensuring childcare centres provide sufficient facilities and space for children to learn and play in a conducive physical environment to foster more cheerful, creative children and independence. Trust in childcare services is an essential criterion for child registration for parents. As Moussié (2021) specified, the quality of childcare services includes factors such as basic infrastructure, qualifications and staff remuneration. The ratio of staff to children, stated by Drange and Havnes (2019), a recent study on childcare in Norway reported that enrolling 1–2-year-olds in childcare positively affected their first-grade performance in language and mathematics.

## **Strategic location**

We explore whether the location plays an important role in decision-making. When demanding quality childcare, many factors are involved, such as family background and characteristics that families value. Supported by Sofia Kelesidou et al. (2017), parents' belief and satisfaction is consistently associated with the educational level of parents and their communication skill. Whereas different educational levels of parents, the childcare location and the type of environment affected parents' satisfaction.

High-quality childcare was accessible to all, regardless of parents' ability to pay. High-quality childcare can help children grow, regardless of their family circumstances. It helps parents know that their children are being well taken care of while at work. But not everyone has access to high-quality childcare. Unequal access to high-quality and affordable childcare can trigger and intensify income diversity and social inequality. All children, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, gender, and political beliefs of their parents must be given the same quality care so that they are not deprived of the windows of opportunity in which to nurture emotional, physical, and intellectual growth (Heng Keng Chaim, 2016).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

An ethnographic approach is used in this study based on respondents from the same cultural location and staying close to each other. Based on qualitative research on observation and interviews, the study discovers and describes the complexities of parents' satisfaction to explore ways of increasing management services in Malaysia to satisfy parents. This study was adopted to find respondents' opinions through a demographic information interview.

### **Population and Sampling**

The study's target population was Malaysian parents who retained two children and above in the childcare centre. The study utilised a non-probability purposive sampling technique to select five respondents (4 mothers and one father). The reason for using purposive sampling is to match the sample to the aims of the research, thus improving the study's rigour and the trustworthiness of data and results.

### **Data Collection Method**

The qualitative approach was used through observation and interviews. Five respondents were interviewed from 5 childcare centres in Kota Bharu, Malaysia. Firstly, the researcher contacts five childcare centre managers and explains the purpose of the study. The appointment was made, and the researcher personally visited all the childcare centres and explained the study in detail. Co-operation from the childcare centre management was requested to carry out the study.

The data on the demographic background was given by childcare management. After getting all the information, a telephone call was made to all the parents on the list. Only one parent from one centre was selected for the interview. A total of 4 mothers and one father agreed to be interviewed.

### **Observation**

An appointment was set up to do the observation and interview each respondent according to the agreed-upon. A call was made to the respondents, and the researcher met the respondent face to face. The procedure was explained, and all conversations will be in the video for the study. All respondents agreed to participate during the evening when they pick up their children.

### **Interview**

On the first phone call, participants were told they would be interviewed for 10 minutes to 15 minutes. A questionnaire of the interview was listed and given to parents to read and understand the questions before the interview was recorded. The interview is done relaxed so that the parents feel comfortable answering questions. Respondents agreed to be interviewed in the evening when they collected their children.

It takes five days to complete the interview. The information in this study is gathered through primary data. After the interviews, the data-gathering technique was used to obtain accurate information. Based on the interviews, it is the depth of fieldwork and the continuous process of engaging with respondents in their natural environments. In particular, the study explores how parental satisfaction with child retention in childcare centres and childcare management benefits from it.

## **RESULTS**

Manual thematic coding was carried out on the interview transcription to analyse data. The important points are extracted, and coding is done to start analysing. Important points are then put into groups before groups are named. The names of the groups were then used as new salient points to put into groupings. This compresses the data into as little as possible to extract themes.

Six themes were derived from this research: safety, *parent involvement*, *qualified caregivers*, *curriculum*, and *strategic location* (please refer to Table 1).

**Table 1.** Respondent Demographic Background

Gender	Age	Number of Children	Child's enrolment at	Qualification
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Respondent 1 Female	39	2	3 years	Degree
Respondent 2 Female	37	4	2 years	PhD
Respondent 3 Female	37	4	4 years	Degree
Respondent 4 Female	37	2	Two years	Degree
Respondent 5 Male	37	4	3 years	Degree

Table 1 shows the respondent's demographic background. All respondents stayed between 1 to 5 kilometres from their home to childcare and had more than two children staying there. The age of respondents is between 37 years old to 39 years old, and their qualifications are from a degree to a Doctorate (Ph.D.). Their children have been at the childcare for more than two years.

**Table 2.** Explanation of the Themes

Themes	Explanation of themes
Safety	Respondents feel safe sending their children when the childcare centre is registered with JKM.
Parental involvement	Respondents agree parental involvement is important, and the management should have the latest technology in handling children, progress and information on early childhood care and education in Malaysia apart from regular basic provided. Management can share the latest information new information regarding ECCE as well.
Caregivers' qualification	Respondents mentioned that childcare providers need certification and are skilled in handling small children, especially babies.
Curriculum contents	Respondents mentioned the need to follow the syllabus and suggested an additional curriculum on culture in Malaysia.
Physical facilities	Respondents mentioned that the physical facilities must be clean and safe for the children. Toys and equipment are provided according to children's age and ability to support children's learning guided by childcare provider teaching.
Strategic location	The respondent mentioned that the location needs to be close to the parent's workplace.

Looking at Table 2, respondents were asked what quality characteristics are. Below is their answer: -

### **Safety**

The first question is about children's safety in the childcare centre. Are the parents satisfied with care? Has child abuse ever happened here?

Respondent 1: "... no child has been abused here, yes, things happen like that, and this issue also worries us to retain our children in such a place... that's why childcare has to be registered with JKM. It means that the centre is under surveillance, at all times through CCTV and as for now, I am satisfied with safety at this centre....."

Respondent 2: "... no childcare provider abuses children here as far as I know... and the childcare provider needs to have the skill, experience and knowledge to care for the children and manage routine properly plus comply with all government childcare regulations. Yes, I am satisfied with safety here ..."

Respondent 3: "... no abuse here, that the reason childcare centre must be registered with authorities & the need to apply all regulation stated. At the same time, caregivers need to show good attitude towards children and parents...."

Respondent 4: "... no abuse here at this centre and childcare centre need to be registered and comply to government regulation. Yes, I am satisfied with the care for my children ..."

Respondent 5: "... no child abuse here; my children are safe here, and I trust this centre. That is why childcare centres must be registered with JKM and comply with all regulations, and caregivers need to follow child centre operation procedures...."

The first theme in this study is safety. Parents are very concerned that child abuse is increasing in cities and rural areas. Parents are apprehensive about leaving their children under unskilled people's care and at the unregistered childcare centre. Respondents mentioned the need to be registered with the Welfare Department of Malaysia (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia). All childcare centres need to be registered with JKM. As a registered centre, they will always be monitored by JKM, and the safety of children can be guaranteed compared to being sent to a nanny's house or an unregistered childcare centre.

### **Parents' Involvement Programme**

How important is parental involvement in the childcare centre? Can your involvement help your children in learning?

Respondent 1: "...of course, it is important, I need to know what my children are learning, and I want the childcare centre informed on the spot on how my children are doing. Information on our children be informed through the Whatapps group so I won't miss any important issue, and yes, I think my involvement helps childcare providers to understand my children better...."

Respondent 2: "...yes, I need to be involved in any programme. As I am busy with work, childcare management needs to update the children's progress; for example, we have a What Apps group, so childcare providers will send pictures or videos of what my children are learning and their activities. At the same time, the Centre's management must discuss with parents if the children have any behavioural and learning problems. Childcare Centre management needs to provide the latest technology handling children, progress and information on early childhood care and education apart from regular basic provided. Management can share new information regarding Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) as well...."

Respondent 3: "...yes, parents' involvement is important, but since I'm busy with my work and can't attend any programmes, childcare management needs to improve on this matter because parent involvement is important, but this centre did not update parents regularly...."

Respondent 4: "... I agree that involvement in any children's programme is very important. I suggest the childcare centre have an online system where the parents can check on their children's progress on a real-time basis and have regular meetings with parents on children's performance. This is good because parents will always be updated on their children's progress...."

Respondent 5: "Yes, it is important. We need to know of our children's progress and to be involved with the programme, either monthly or yearly programme...and yes, my involvement will help my children learn...."

The second theme is that all respondents agree parental involvement is important. Respondent 3 commented that the childcare centre didn't update parents regularly regarding parental involvement programmes. Respondent 2 mentioned that the management should have the latest technology handling



children, progress and information on early childhood care and education in Malaysia apart from regular basic provided. Management can share new information regarding ECCE as well.

### **Caregiver' Qualification**

How competent are childcare providers with small children? Are they skilled and qualified?

Respondent 1: "Childcare provider needs to be equipped with related certification & undergoing courses that help them care for children better...".

Respondent 2: "The childcare providers need the ability and skill to handle children in the best manner...".

Respondent 3: "Childcare provider must have the ability to care and have good knowledge on how to teach children according to their age...".

Respondent 4: "The childcare providers have good knowledge and are well educated with ECE, and development progress is important so the children will be in good hands...".

Respondent 5: "Yes, it is important. When the childcare provider is knowledgeable and has certification related to childcare, parents feel confident that they will be taught correctly and have the right knowledge...".

Theme 3 was about childcare provider competency; all respondents agreed that a childcare provider must be knowledgeable and skilled in caring and teaching according to the curriculum provided. The childcare provider must have proper qualifications so parents will be confident and secure to maintain their children.

### **Curriculum content**

What curriculum is used here? Is this curriculum suitable for children?

Respondent 1: "...this centre is using the PERMATA NEGARA curriculum. I think it is very helpful in the continuous development of children...".

Respondent 2: "PERMATA NEGARA curriculum pedagogy is good and children's activities according to age...".

Respondent 3: "...the centre curriculum is good, but it seems the achieved objective of the curriculum is not shared with parents". Curriculum content is crucial for our children's development and improvement...".

Respondent 4: "The childcare centre has a set of curriculum content, and I can see the improvement in my child within a few months of enrolling. My child can read". I like to suggest the curriculum which provides multiple languages being taught here...".

Respondent 5: "PERMATA NEGARA curriculum. Curriculum content is informed to parents, and the feedback of children's achievement is given to the parents regularly".

The fourth theme is curriculum content. Respondents 1,2 & 5 used the PERMATA NEGARA curriculum. Respondent 3 didn't mention which curriculum and learning outcome was not shared with parents. Whereas respondent 4 suggested an addition to the curriculum, which provided multiple languages.

### **Physical facilities**

Are indoor and outdoor equipment suitable for the child's age? Is the equipment safe and clean?

Respondent 1: "The physical equipment needs to be in good condition, safe for children and beneficial to their development".

Respondent 2: "At the time of enrolment, the first thing to look at is the centre's cleanliness. The centre is neat and beautiful. It is also equipped with a playground and other equipment for the children to access".

Respondent 3: "Even though the equipment is a bit old, it is clean, and children can use it at a set of times. I hope there will be a new set of equipment, so I feel safer for my children when playing".

Respondent 4: "The physical equipment, indoor and outdoor, are clean and safe for children to play.

Respondent 5: "There is a playground for the children, and outdoor equipment is important, as well as outdoor equipment such as toys."

The fifth theme is physical facilities. Respondent 1, 2 & 4 said that the equipment are clean and safe. Respondent 3 answered that the equipment was a bit old but clean and suggested that the old equipment be replaced. Respondent 5 stated that indoors must have appropriate learning equipment suitable for children and didn't mention cleanliness.

### **Strategic Location**

Is the location important in placing your child in that particular childcare centre?

Respondent 1: "It's a bonus if the childcare centre is close to my house, but it's okay if it is a bit far as long as the safety and the curriculum benefit my children..."

Respondent 2: "I agree the location of a childcare centre and school is very important and must be close to my house. Since I have two children who go to school and two at the childcare centre..."

Respondent 3: "... going to work if it's a long distance, it will be difficult to reach my office on time. So, finding a childcare centre for my children close to my home is my priority..."

Respondent 4: "I agree that childcare centres need to be close to home. I don't mind childcare centre is distance is far because a well-known childcare centre is better as the childcare providers are better equipped with skill, knowledge and have a better set of curriculum content".

Respondent 5: "childcare centre is important to be close to my house because there are times that we arrive home late in the evening. Thus, it is already late when we pick up our children from the centre".

The sixth theme is strategic location; Respondents 2, 3 & 5 agree that the childcare centre must be close to their homes. Respondent 1 chose a childcare centre with safety and a good curriculum even though the childcare centre is far. Respondent 4 agrees that the childcare centre needs to be near her house, but at the same time, a well-known childcare centre is better, though it is far.

### **DISCUSSION**

This research explores and evaluates parents' satisfaction towards quality childcare centre management in Kota Bharu, Kelantan region of Malaysia. The result revealed that safety, parental involvement, childcare provider's qualification, curriculum contents, physical facilities and strategic location are interrelated.

Expanding our understanding of how responsive parental satisfaction looks and works across different families would add to developing a more highly specified quality childcare. This study used

qualitative research through observation and interviews where respondents come from the same culture and location but varied backgrounds, ages and academic qualifications.

Parents are very concerned that child abuse is increasing in cities and rural areas. Parents are apprehensive about leaving their children under unskilled adults' care and unregistered childcare. In 2019, the number of child abuse cases reported stood at 6,061, and in 2021, as many as 2,040 cases were reported in the first four months. According to the Department of Social Welfare, more than 2,000 child abuse cases are reported each year. Various negative effects may occur if this issue continues in this country (Bebasnews,2021).

More parents are knowledgeable now and easily assess child development and education through ICT. All respondents agree that the childcare centre needs to be registered with the Social Welfare Department of Malaysia (JKMM) for these centres are monitored by JKMN, and the safety of children is guaranteed compared to being sent to the nanny's house or an unregistered centre. Parents can compare to the others, as one of the respondent's stresses that the well-known centres are better and the childcare providers are well-equipped with skill and knowledge and have a better set of curriculum content.

Parental involvement is important in a childcare centre. Parent involvement in any program or activities with children and childcare providers will benefit both parties. At the same time, parents will expose their children to learning, attitude, behaviour and curriculum content. Childcare centre management must regularly update programmes and activities for parents regarding parental involvement. The study found that parents suggest the management should have the latest technology handling children, progress and information on early childhood care and education are shared among parents. With the latest technology, good quality of centre management and parents' satisfaction will increase children's enrolment. Supported by NAEYC (2014), technology and interactive media as tools in early childhood programs serving children, such as computers, tablets, smartphones, apps, and other digital tools, are part of our everyday lives. When used appropriately, technology can help children explore their world, express and understand what they know, and interact with other children. Technology tools can also assist families as they support their children's at-home learning.

Childcare providers must be knowledgeable and certified in qualifications, skills and competency to teach and care for children. These parents will be confident and secure to maintain their children at the childcare centre. As supported by Chiam (2015), quality childcare service is impossible without quality childcare providers. The industry must attract the best brains and professional qualifications of childcare providers.

Moreover, physical facilities and outdoor and indoor equipment must be clean and safe for children to play. Equipment and toys appropriate for children's age are available. Parents' other most commonly stated reason for selecting the centre was the location of the in-house centre. All five participants agree that a childcare centre close to their home is the main reason for choosing the centre.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

What makes parents satisfied with childcare service management? According to the research study, parents satisfied with adequate safety, active parental involvement, qualified and certified caregivers and good curriculum content must be implemented and followed. Parents' concerns about leaving their children in the hands of childgivers should be considered. Background checks of operators, managers, supervisors, and childcare providers should be done correctly. Therefore, effective approaches and written laws should be improved, and basic principles on standards of childcare protection should be developed at childcare centres in Malaysia.

Supported by Childcare Centre Act 1984 and Child Care Centre Regulation 2012 (JKM,1984), the quality of services must emphasise existing laws and regulations, including safety, health and child development, to guarantee management to provide quality services to children in the centres. Childcare management and childcare providers must meet the minimum requirements of certified qualification to ensure children are safe and happy at the care centre. The element of the ratio and area is stipulated in the Childcare Act, and the number of children cared for must follow the existing Act and regulations.

The need to be further analysed on health, safety and physical environment, of course, to produce a more robust and improved version of the law and regulations for childcare centres in Malaysia.

The issue is finding quality childcare that guarantees the comfort of the child that attends to children regardless of culture. Parents must ensure that the learning environment, positive communication, safety and trust are not neglected. Parents will be satisfied with the centre management's good and quality childcare services with systematic guidelines on the factors that positively influence childcare services management. Warfield & Hauser-Cram (1996) suggested that much is known about barriers to finding childcare for families. Still, less is known about families' childcare needs, arrangements, and satisfaction of these parents, especially those with children with disabilities.

The importance of childcare management for the well-being of young children has many policy implications in the country. Policies, practices and decision-makers need to pay special attention to childcare centre management and find ways to facilitate changes in childcare services, considering other factors besides parents' trust towards childcare centres. Another important factor to look into is checking childcare providers' health and mental status annually, continuous learning and teaching techniques, and motivation. This is to maximise the quality effectiveness of childcare providers and to ensure that children at vulnerable ages are given better protection. Models from developed countries can be considered an example of robust quality childcare management. Quality childcare services contribute towards children's later learning success. Thus, the main objective is to acknowledge the relationship between parents and childcare management towards safety standards and quality assurance to protect future generations from attending poor services in childcare centres.

The findings may be a wake-up call for parents to organise associations and groups to seek an audience for their concerns about the quality of services offered in childcare. Guidelines on childcare must be heard and incorporated in the enforcement and development of service standards as stated in policies and regulations. This study's future directions will be suggested based on trends in developed countries to help improve parents' satisfaction with childcare services in Malaysia. It can also attract more researchers and interest in understanding parents' desire for others' skills. This finding helps parents, and childcare management facilitate discussions about roles, trusts, responsibilities, and work environments that benefit both and help improve the childcare industry.

Create parent-peer support groups that can help these parents navigate the system more effectively and learn and share the experiences of other families. By following this group, parents get increased skills, an increased sense of power and a sense of belonging. Parents will feel less alone and gain hope, ideas and information, supported by Mary Law, Susanne King, Debra Stewart & Gillian King (2001). Connecting will provide support and skills among parents and enable them to deal with the day-to-day issues of raising disabled children. This support can help parents meet their children's needs more efficiently and with greater confidence and hope.

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