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Physical Learning Environment: Impact on Children School Readiness in Malaysian Preschools

Mariam Felani Shaari, Sabarinah Sh Ahmad*

**Centre of Architecture Studies, Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia*

Abstract

Preschool physical environments significantly affect children's development. Malaysian government efforts to improve the quality of preschool education shows lack of emphasis on the physical environment. Despite improvements, school readiness is reportedly moderate. Currently, minimal evidences suggest a direct link between the physical environment and school readiness in Malaysia; therefore, this study aims to investigate and propose a clear relationship between these two aspects through literature review. Findings are hoped to help stakeholders to better understand and attract more interest as well as research into this matter to help Malaysia establish better preschools in the future.

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Keywords: Malaysian preschool education; physical learning environment; children school readiness ; children development

1. Introduction

Preschool period is crucial for the development of one's personality, emotional, social and cognitive abilities (Katz, 1999). Developed countries have long acknowledged this by emphasizing preschool education as a stepping stone to ensure world-class societies. Malaysia's Vision 2020 highlighted the importance of nurturing children's

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +6-012-346-5788 ; fax: +6-035-544-4353.

E-mail address: sabar643@salam.uitm.edu.my

academic excellence to become a fully developed country. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) also integrated preschools as part of its formal academic system and is rapidly increasing enrollment rates by increasing preschool numbers throughout Malaysia. For preschools to maximize the development of children, learning programs must be supported by both aspects of the learning environment - social and physical (Loebach, 2005). Unlike developed countries, the awareness among Malaysians regarding this is still lacking (Abbas, Othman & Rahman, 2012). School readiness is also an important aspect of children education as it highlights the level of development the child has achieved. It acts as a yardstick to assess general children physical and mental development (Majzub & Rashid, 2012). Therefore, school readiness should be a major agenda in the education of children in preschools to maximize their development into better human capital for the country.

2. Aims and objectives

The paper aims to establish the link between the quality of preschool physical environments and children school readiness. Future directions will be suggested based on trends of developed countries to help improve Malaysian preschool education and attract more research and interest in the physical built environment.

The objectives are:

- To define physical learning environment of preschool and school readiness
- To assess the current state of preschool environments among Malaysian preschools
- To assess the current level of school readiness of Malaysian public preschoolers
- To investigate the relationship between physical learning environment of preschool and primary school readiness
- To propose future direction of improvements of Malaysian public preschool learning environment

3. Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative literature from various disciplines related to the title were reviewed. Three electronic databases were searched: Science Direct, Scopus and Web of Knowledge, indexes Malaysian and international journals on a variety of preschool children related topics from 1923 to present. The following keywords were searched; Malaysian preschool education, physical learning environment, children school readiness and children development, using titles and descriptors.

4. Literature review

4.1. Definition and types of Malaysian preschools

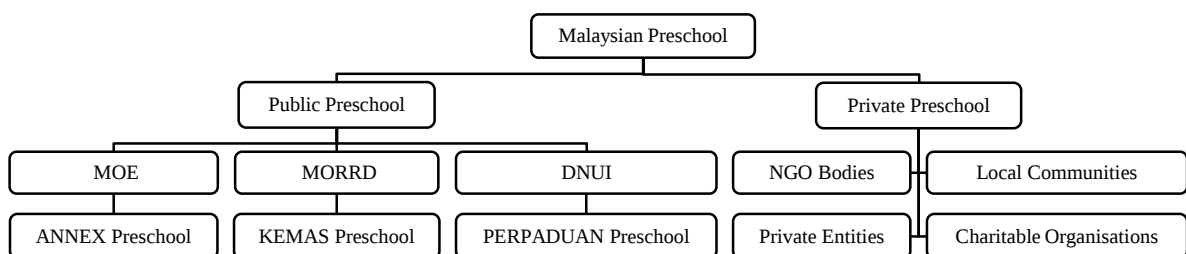


Fig. 1. Malaysian preschool system

(Source: Boon, 2010)

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