

Longer-Term Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Preschool Children: Perspectives from Malaysian Teachers and Parents

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic substantially disrupted early childhood education (ECE), with immediate effects on learning, social interaction, play, and family routines widely documented. Less is known about how these disruptions are perceived to have carried into children's later developmental and school-transition experiences. This qualitative case study explored the perspectives of Malaysian preschool teachers, administrators, and parents on the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on children who attended preschool during the COVID-19 period. A purposive sample of 11 participants was drawn from one private preschool: eight teachers or administrators and three parents representing varied household-income backgrounds. Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Three interrelated themes were identified: holistic developmental trajectories of preschool children post-COVID, shifts in parent-teacher dynamics, and the pandemic as a generational marker in children's lives. Participants described continuing concerns related to attention, communication, socioemotional adjustment, physical activity, and readiness for primary school. At the same time, they identified adaptive gains, including greater digital fluency, stronger hygiene practices, and closer home-school collaboration. Parents' capacity to support online learning also varied according to time, resources, and family circumstances, highlighting the importance of equitable support. The findings suggest that post-pandemic recovery in ECE should extend beyond academic remediation to include socioemotional development, play, physical wellbeing, and structured transition support. Because the study relies on retrospective stakeholder accounts from a single private preschool, the findings should be interpreted as perceived longer-term impacts rather than direct longitudinal evidence. Future research should follow affected cohorts over time and compare experiences across socioeconomic groups and preschool settings.

Keywords: COVID-19; preschool children; Malaysia; online learning; pandemic; early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for early childhood education (ECE) worldwide. Between 2020 and 2022, widespread school closures forced preschools to shift abruptly to online or hybrid modalities, disrupting learning routines, social interactions, and developmental opportunities for millions of young children. While much scholarship has documented immediate disruptions such as learning loss, attention challenges, and parental stress (UNICEF, 2021; OECD, 2022), there remains limited understanding of how these experiences shape children's long-term developmental pathways.

In Malaysia, preschools faced prolonged closures, leaving educators and families to improvise digital solutions despite disparities in access and readiness. As children affected by the pandemic now transition into primary schooling and beyond, questions of longitudinal impact emerge: How have pandemic disruptions influenced their academic readiness, social-emotional resilience, physical health, and identity formation? What lessons can be drawn for strengthening ECE in the post-pandemic era?

Despite mounting evidence globally, Malaysian research remains limited in its qualitative examination of how pandemic-related disruptions are perceived to have shaped children's development beyond the immediate closure period, particularly in private preschool contexts. This study addresses that gap through interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents connected to one Malaysian private preschool. Accordingly, the study aimed to explore perceived longer-term influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's learning and development, preschool-to-primary transition experiences, and home-school relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted early childhood education worldwide, with preschools among the hardest hit. Children lost opportunities for social interaction, play-based learning, and structured routines essential for holistic development. In Malaysia, Amar-Singh et al. (2022) reported significant deficiencies in children's learning progress following the pandemic. A report by the World Bank (2023) reiterates this, highlighting the "learning loss" among preschool children in Malaysia caused by prolonged closures of early childhood settings. Preschool teachers also expressed concern over "missing learning," particularly in literacy and numeracy readiness, due to extended school closures (Mazlan et al., 2024).

These local findings align with international evidence showing that preschoolers were particularly vulnerable, not only academically but also emotionally. A meta-analysis by Jing et al. (2024) confirmed significant increases in behavioural and socioemotional difficulties, while Vincent et al. (2024), studying preschool children in India, highlighted both psychological distress and the protective factors families drew upon to cope. Taken together, these studies reveal that the developmental costs of pandemic restrictions extended far beyond academics.

Socioeconomic status (SES) consistently emerges as an important factor shaping these outcomes. In Malaysia, evidence from low-income urban families showed that online learning was constrained by limited access to suitable devices, internet connectivity, and study space (UNICEF Malaysia, 2020). By contrast, families with greater resources may have been better positioned to sustain children's learning through private provision or home-based support (UNESCO, 2021). These inequalities are not unique to Malaysia. Engzell et al. (2021) showed that school closures exacerbated existing achievement gaps, while European evidence from Maldonado and De Witte (2023) identified larger setbacks for vulnerable groups. In Finland, Lerkkanen et al. (2023) found slower development in reading fluency and comprehension among a COVID-affected cohort, although mathematics trajectories did not differ in the same way. Such findings suggest that family resources and learning conditions can operate as risk or protective factors during educational disruption.

The sudden transition to remote learning posed major challenges for early childhood teachers. Preschoolers have relatively short attention spans and are generally not suited to remain seated in front of a screen for long periods. The pandemic abruptly shifted preschool learning from onsite experiential and sensorial activities to online, mostly asynchronous, device-based instruction. Online synchronous learning proved particularly challenging for both teachers and children. Teachers reported difficulty sustaining preschoolers' attention during online sessions and adapting play-based pedagogies to virtual platforms (Mazlan et al., 2024). Limited training in online instructional methods, especially among senior teachers, compounded the problem (Singh et al., 2022). Despite these obstacles, some educators demonstrated creativity by sending home activity packs and guiding parents in hands-on tasks (Mazlan et al., 2024). These adaptive strategies, however, were highly uneven. International research illustrates the broader consequences of such disruptions. Le et al. (2025) found pandemic-related disadvantages in early mathematics, social-emotional development, and executive functioning. In Malaysia, Kong et al. (2024) further found that, among refugee children, synchronous and hybrid digital learning were associated with stronger academic readiness than asynchronous learning. Together, these studies reinforce the view that early learning disruptions cannot be reduced to academic delays alone and that the form and context of digital provision matter.

In 2020, private preschool enrolment in Malaysia stood at 51.8%, higher than that of public preschools (World Bank, 2023), underscoring the need for more research in the private sector. To continue operations, private preschools still charged parents monthly fees during the pandemic, though many operators were forced to provide significant discounts due to fully online learning. Parents assumed greater responsibility for their children's education during this period. Their perspectives highlight the importance of stronger school-home

partnerships and practical support to sustain learning continuity in times of disruption (UNESCO, 2021). While some Malaysian parents valued increased involvement, many reported stress in balancing work, household responsibilities, and instructional support (Ahmad & Sukor, 2023). For parents unwilling to both pay preschool fees and assume full responsibility for learning, withdrawal from preschool became a practical choice, resulting in many children missing foundational experiences necessary for primary education.

Existing literature demonstrates that COVID-19 profoundly affected preschool children’s developmental and learning outcomes, with socioeconomic status emerging as a critical determinant of access and resilience. Both teachers and parents faced significant challenges but also demonstrated adaptability in supporting children’s learning. Current Malaysian studies remain limited, particularly regarding longitudinal evidence tracking the long-term developmental impact of COVID-19 on preschool children. This research article therefore seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the effects of the pandemic on preschoolers during their critical period of development and learning.

METHOD

Research Design and Context

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine perceived impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic within one Malaysian private preschool. A case study approach was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth investigation of a bounded setting (Yin, 2018), namely a private preschool that operated during the 2020-2022 pandemic period, while capturing perspectives from multiple stakeholders. By drawing on the experiences of teachers, administrators, and parents connected to the same setting, the study sought a contextualized understanding of how the pandemic disrupted children’s learning and development and how families and educators responded across home and school contexts. The private preschool context was relevant because private provision represents a substantial share of Malaysian preschool enrolment and faced distinctive financial and operational pressures during prolonged closures (World Bank, 2023).

Participants

Participants were recruited voluntarily through purposive sampling. Two participant groups were included: preschool teachers or administrators and parents. All participants had direct experience with the same private preschool during the pandemic period.

The sample comprised 11 participants. Eight were preschool teachers or administrators aged 32 to 63 years, with between 4 and 43 years of preschool experience. Their qualifications ranged from the Malaysian secondary school certificate (SPM) to master’s degrees. The remaining three participants were parents aged 29 to 35 years, each of whom had a child aged four to six enrolled in a private preschool during the pandemic.

The three parent participants represented Malaysia’s three broad household-income groups: B40, M40 and T20. In the Malaysian context, B40 denotes households within the bottom 40% of the national household-income distribution, M40 refers to the middle 40%, and T20 represents the top 20%. These classifications were included to provide socioeconomic variation among the parent participants. Participants’ demographic details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Participant	Role	Age	Experience (years)	Qualification	Household Income Group
T1	Teacher	32	4	Diploma (Early Childhood)	N/A
T2	Teacher	35	7	High School Certificate	
T3	Teacher	41	15	Bachelor’s degree	
T4	Teacher	48	20	Diploma	
T5	Teacher	50	22	Bachelor’s degree	
T6	Administrator	55	30	Master’s degree	

T7	Teacher	58	35	Diploma	
T8	Administrator	63	43	Master's degree	
P1	Parent	29	N/A	Bachelor's degree	B40
P2		33		Diploma	M40
P3		35		Bachelor's degree	T20

The sample size was appropriate for an in-depth qualitative case study in which contextual depth was prioritized over statistical representativeness (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). Including teachers, administrators, and parents, together with socioeconomic variation among the parent participants, enabled the study to capture differing stakeholder perspectives and strengthen the contextual richness of the analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews conducted online using secure video-conferencing platforms. The online format reduced geographical and scheduling barriers and allowed participants to engage from familiar environments. Each interview lasted 45-70 minutes and was conducted in English or Mandarin, depending on participant preference. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were translated where necessary, with back-translation procedures applied to reduce semantic distortion.

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Coding was primarily inductive. During theme development and interpretation, the researchers also considered three temporal dimensions represented in the accounts: immediate impacts during lockdown, adjustments after reopening, and perceived longer-term implications for primary school readiness. Themes were compared across teacher, administrator, and parent accounts to identify areas of convergence and divergence. To enhance rigor, two researchers independently coded initial transcripts and reconciled discrepancies through discussion. Reflexive memos documented analytic decisions, and peer debriefing was used to challenge interpretations.

FINDINGS

Three themes were formulated based on data collected, which will be elaborated subsequently: 1) holistic developmental trajectories of preschool children post-COVID, 2) shifts in parent-teacher dynamics, and 3) pandemic as a generational marker in children's lives.

Theme 1: Holistic Developmental Trajectories of Preschool Children Post-COVID

The pandemic affected preschoolers' development across academic, socioemotional, and physical domains in interconnected ways. Teachers repeatedly described how children's learning was disrupted by the sudden shift to online platforms. T1 recalled that *"some children were able to follow our Zoom classes, a few would watch the recording; but a few just did not join any classes."* Similarly, T5 emphasized that *"it was very difficult to get the children able to focus in an online classroom,"* while T7 described the challenge of *"shorter attention span, parents at home with them so we need to plan fun activities or games for them."* T8 gave a detailed account of these struggles:

...during the pandemic online class, children are hardly focused as parents [are] on their side and it is hard to get their attention. There are a few parents who tend to help children to do their homework, which cause them to learn less... children also will tend to on and off the video cam of the Zoom, which is hard for teacher to teach them as we need to make sure they learned the lesson that we taught them.

Parents noticed similar inconsistencies at home. P1 explained that her child *"could not concentrate on online lessons, or the recorded videos. Sometimes [the child] even refused to do them, thinking that no school meant no learning."* P2 similarly reflected on mixed experiences: *"my child's attention span was definitely being challenged but certain sessions were highly engaged with the teachers and peers. The kindergarten hybrid learning per session max. 20-40 minutes, inclusive of the opening song, game, greetings, hands-on materials,*

and worksheets academically preparing my child for age 6 or Primary One.” She further stressed that “online learning requires adult’s extra time, supervision and motivation. My child wasn’t getting sufficient support where both working parents were fully occupied, and grandparents’ support could be limited.” By contrast, P3 offered a more positive view, stating that “my daughter participated willingly, eagerly and excitedly.”

The consequences of these academic gaps were keenly felt during the transition to primary school. T5 predicted that *“due to lack of coaching, probably most of the children [will be] unable to catch up with the lessons... these two years are very challenging for school teachers to help them to pick up the pace.”* T3 added that *“children lack confidence to communicate,”* while T8 observed that:

The most impacted area for transition to primary school is in the areas of social and emotional, as children unable to socialize with each other face to face... they don’t know how to approach or talk to their new friends when they enter a new environment and with new people. Emotionally they will get fearful when they see lots of people and with the new environment.

The socioemotional domain was particularly fragile. Teachers spoke of heightened instability, with T4 noting that *“children’s emotion are not stable. They cry and [show] anxiety,”* while T5 observed that *“they refused to socialise with others.”* T7 elaborated:

Some kids became less sociable because they are just looking at the screen. I gave my kids some time to interact among each other daily after lessons. Some kids became very emotional as they feel insecure [because they stayed home too long].

Parents reported similar concerns. P1 reflected that *“my child’s emotions became extreme... mood swings became severe, with big ups and downs, even becoming slightly rebellious.”* P2 noted that enrichment opportunities such as *“ballet, taekwondo, drama, music and violin”* were postponed, explaining that *“it’s not practical or effective learning via online platforms,”* and that this further limited children’s chances for emotional expression and peer interaction.

Teachers also linked children’s socioemotional wellbeing to classroom dynamics. T8 explained that *during Zoom [sessions], teachers often ask children to answer questions but if not careful, we will leave out other children who want to answer too, and this will affect their social and emotional areas as they can’t express what they have learned.”* Yet not all changes were negative. T8 also remarked that *“parents and teacher’s relationship are strengthened as both need to work together for children’s progression... the relationship being strengthened made children more joyful as they observe their parents’ relationship and teacher relationship is good.”*

Physical development showed similar contradictions. Several teachers worried about sedentary lifestyles. T3 commented on *“over body weight due to lack [of] physical activities,”* and T5 noted that *“some four- and five-year-old children show delays in speech and physical development”* and *“take longer time to adapt to school environment.”* T6 observed that *“kids gained weight, but at the same time became more aware of personal hygiene and were willing to go back to school.”* Parents also raised physical health concerns. P2 explained, *“frequent on screen [time meant] we supplied anti-blue ray glasses for eye protection.”* T8 warned that *“eyes health [was] impacted,”* adding that long hours in front of the screen led to frustration and decreased motivation.

At the same time, teachers and parents noted positive changes in hygiene habits. T4 remarked that *“children learn about personal hygiene,”* while T6 confirmed that *“they are more aware of personal hygiene.”* P2 shared that her child practiced *“frequent hand washing to eliminate germs, using sanitizer and wearing a face mask,”* which became part of everyday routines. These enduring behaviours suggest that, even while children’s physical activity decreased, preventive health practices were strengthened.

Looking across these accounts, it is apparent that the pandemic reshaped children’s development in holistic ways. Teachers and parents saw children struggling with literacy, attention, and readiness, while also battling mood swings, social withdrawal, and physical inactivity. Yet within the struggles were new competencies and resilience: digital skills, strengthened hygiene practices, and stronger school–home collaboration. T5 captured this balance by stating that *“negative impacts are more obvious compared with positive, unless the caregiver*

[is] able to provide a good environment for them to grow healthily in their various developments.” Similarly, P2 concluded on a note of cautious optimism, observing that “overall from my point of view, the pandemic was another good platform to prepare my child for future education, additional online learning skills, quick to adapt, transition and practice new norms.”

Theme 2: Shifts in Parent-Teacher Dynamics

The pandemic reshaped the boundaries between home and school, creating a reconfiguration of parent–teacher roles that was unprecedented in Malaysia’s ECE sector. Teachers described how parental involvement became unavoidable when learning moved online. T8 explained in detail:

During the pandemic online class, children are hardly focused as parents [are] on their side and it is hard to get their attention... a few parents tend to help children do their homework, which cause them to learn less. We encouraged them to just scaffold them, just be their guide in their learning, [which] will be better, as guided learning is not by doing their job for them.”

T8 continued to elaborate: *“parents and teacher’s relationship are strengthened as both need to work together for children’s progression... the relationship being strengthened made children more joyful as they observe their parents’ relationship and teacher relationship is good.”*

This observation highlights how well-meaning parental involvement sometimes undermined children’s independence, reducing opportunities for authentic engagement with lessons.

At the same time, teachers also acknowledged how critical parents were in sustaining any form of learning continuity. T7 noted that *“some [children] can learn well, some needed more of their parents’ help,”* while T6 reflected that *“without physical learning activity, the learning value decreased,”* making parental support even more essential for bridging these gaps. Teachers were acutely aware that home support determined whether children thrived or fell behind.

Parents described both the benefits and burdens of these new responsibilities. P2 reflected candidly that *“online learning requires adult’s extra time, supervision and motivation. My child wasn’t getting sufficient support where both working parents were fully occupied. Grandparents’ support could be limited.”* P1, in contrast, appreciated the new visibility into learning processes, explaining that *“I could monitor my child’s progress and accompany my child in learning.”* P3 offered yet another perspective, sharing that her daughter *“participated very willingly, eagerly and excitedly,”* suggesting that for some families, this intensified partnership created a positive and motivating environment.

Teachers also reported that these dynamics had long-term relational consequences. T8 emphasized that *“parents and teacher’s relationship are strengthened as both need to work together for children’s progression in Zoom online class learning,”* while adding that stronger teacher-child bonds were also formed through more frequent online communication. P2 supported this, highlighting that hybrid learning worked best when teachers prepared *“hands-on materials well in advance”* and maintained *“two-way interaction with the students.”* These accounts suggest that the pandemic created a cultural shift: parents and teachers were no longer operating in parallel spheres but as co-constructors of the learning process.

This shift, however, also exposed inequalities. As T5 explained, *“online class is not effective for the children without assistance from adults,”* revealing how children from families with limited time or resources were disproportionately disadvantaged. P2 confirmed these disparities, describing how enrichment programmes such as ballet, taekwondo, and piano were *“postponed and not practical via online learning,”* reducing opportunities for holistic growth that higher-income families might still be able to supplement.

Overall, the evidence points to a redefined parent-teacher partnership that is both promising and problematic. Parents gained closer insights into pedagogy, teachers found new ways to collaborate with families, and children benefitted from stronger relational ties. Yet blurred boundaries also created tensions around over-involvement, inequities in family capacity, and questions about sustainability. These changes indicate a long-term shift in early

childhood education, where strong home-school partnerships are important, but clear guidance and fair support are needed to ensure all children have equal opportunities to learn and grow.

Theme 3: Pandemic as a Generational Marker in Children's Lives

For many participants, the pandemic was described not only as a disruption but as a defining moment that would mark this generation's experience of childhood. Parents, in particular, reflected on what their children had lost. P1 explained that her child had *"lost valuable moments of sharing and playing with friends, as well as the joy of experiencing nature at this age, and instead became stuck at home every day, doing nothing, holding a tablet or smartphone, either in online classes or playing games."* Teachers echoed similar sentiments. T5 lamented that *"no peer groups and school experience is such a loss for their precious preschool childhood memories,"* while T7 observed that *"it has impacted them in terms of emotional and social skills."* T5 went further, warning that *"these two years are very challenging for teachers to help them to pick up the pace,"* positioning the pandemic as a rupture in children's developmental trajectories.

At the same time, participants also viewed the pandemic as equipping children with new forms of resilience and competencies. P2 emphasized that *"children are exposed to hybrid learning tech skills such as Zoom meeting and breakout rooms, screen sharing, annotate drawing; explore Google Meet, how to control and respond [to] virtual interaction between adults and peers."* She concluded that *"children are equipped for future education and skills,"* suggesting that this generation may carry forward digital fluency as a core part of their identity. Teachers similarly recognized these emerging competencies. T2 remarked that children *"pick up very fast,"* and T8 described how *"teachers created online learning games, which children love and through which they learn even faster,"* indicating that digital play and adaptability were normalized for this cohort.

Health awareness was another marker of generational identity. P2 highlighted that *"health awareness and hygiene concern, frequent hand washing to eliminate germs, sanitizer, and face mask mandatory"* became ingrained in daily routines. Teachers confirmed these observations. T4 noted that *"children learn about personal hygiene,"* while T6 added that *"they are more aware of personal hygiene and willing to go back to school."* These accounts suggest that the pandemic instilled enduring practices of self-care and health protection, which may persist into adulthood as part of this generation's learned resilience.

Still, the duality of loss and gain was evident. P2 acknowledged both sides, noting that *"overall from my point of view, the pandemic was another good platform to prepare my child for future education, additional online learning skills, quick to adapt, transition and practice new norms."* In contrast, P1 described her child's disrupted schooling transition, explaining that *"school was delayed for three months, leaving a gap, and when entering Primary One, my child was not used to the sudden change in environment, sometimes feeling helpless with the teacher's style."* This juxtaposition illustrates how the pandemic will likely be remembered differently within the same generation, depending on context and resources.

In a nutshell, these reflections position the pandemic as both a constraint and a catalyst. It constrained children's access to play, sociability, and carefree exploration, while simultaneously accelerating digital literacy, health awareness, and resilience. As T8 summarized, *"the pandemic... has made everything a new normal,"* encapsulating how this experience has reshaped what childhood means for this generation. The pandemic thus functions as a generational marker — a defining event that will shape not only developmental outcomes but also the ways in which this cohort conceptualizes education, health, and social life in the years ahead.

DISCUSSION

Teachers and parents in this study described how the pandemic affected children across multiple domains, underscoring the importance of viewing early development through a holistic lens. Beyond academic delays in literacy and numeracy, participants reported socioemotional disruptions, reduced opportunities for play, and diminished physical activity. At the same time, they observed adaptive gains such as improved hygiene practices and growing digital fluency. These findings echo international evidence of multidomain impacts during school closures (Chen et al., 2024; Le et al., 2025; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2021), while also aligning with resilience

perspectives that highlight children's capacity to adapt across interconnected systems (Masten, 2021). This combination of vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities suggests that recovery must adopt a whole-child framework, integrating socioemotional, cognitive, and physical supports rather than focusing solely on academic remediation (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF Malaysia, 2020; World Bank, 2023).

The pandemic also reshaped the relationship between homes and preschools. Teachers extended their pedagogy into households through digital guidance and learning materials, while parents assumed greater responsibility for instructional and emotional support. Some families valued this closer involvement, but participants also described the burden of balancing work, household responsibilities, and home learning. These dynamics mirror international accounts of parental ambivalence, with families experiencing both empowerment and strain (Garbe et al., 2020; Ahmad & Sukor, 2023). In the Malaysian private preschool context examined here, financial considerations and family capacity also influenced continuity of participation. The findings therefore highlight the importance of clear guidance for parents and accessible forms of learning support. They also complement Malaysian evidence showing that the quality and mode of digital learning, together with home learning conditions, can shape children's readiness during disruption (Kong et al., 2024).

Participants further emphasized that COVID-19 will likely be remembered by children as a defining experience of their early years, shaping habits, perspectives, and identities. Teachers noted that pandemic cohorts differ in both vulnerabilities and strengths: they are marked by socioemotional fragility and lost play opportunities, yet also by digital fluency, adaptability, and heightened awareness of hygiene. This framing positions the pandemic as a generational marker in children's identity formation, consistent with broader accounts of COVID-19 as a defining childhood event (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). While meta-analyses underscore the global scale of learning loss (Hammerstein et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021), this study demonstrates that pandemic childhoods also involved the acquisition of new capacities, producing a complex legacy that may shape long-term educational trajectories.

These findings have several implications for early childhood practice and policy. Recovery efforts should address multiple dimensions of children's development, ensuring that socioemotional wellbeing, physical health, play, and social interaction receive attention alongside academic learning. Parent-teacher partnerships that became more visible during the pandemic can be sustained through clear expectations, practical guidance, and support that does not overburden families (Mazlan et al., 2024). For private preschool settings, attention to continuity of participation and family affordability may also be important during future disruptions. Structured preschool-to-primary transition support may be particularly valuable for children who continue to experience communication, confidence, or adjustment difficulties.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. It involved a small purposive sample from a single private preschool and included only three parents; consequently, the findings are context-specific and should not be generalized to all Malaysian preschool settings or used to compare B40, M40, and T20 households as distinct groups. The study relied on retrospective stakeholder interviews rather than direct observations, standardized child assessments, children's work samples, or longitudinal follow-up. The findings therefore represent teachers', administrators', and parents' perceptions of longer-term impacts rather than objective evidence of developmental change over time. Although two researchers independently coded initial transcripts and discussed discrepancies, the qualitative interpretation remains shaped by the researchers' analytic decisions.

Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to examine whether reported learning, socioemotional, and transition difficulties persist and whether adaptive skills endure. Studies with larger and more diverse samples should compare public and private preschool settings and investigate socioeconomic variation with sufficient representation within each group. Including direct child assessments, classroom observations, and children's learning artefacts would strengthen evidence about developmental change. Future work should also examine how parent-teacher relationships evolve after the pandemic and give greater attention to marginalized populations, including refugee and stateless children, whose experiences may differ substantially from those represented in this case.

CONCLUSION

This case study shows that the legacy of pandemic-era preschool disruption was perceived by teachers, administrators, and parents as multidimensional. Participants described continuing concerns related to learning, social-emotional adjustment, physical activity, and school transition, alongside gains in digital competence, hygiene awareness, adaptability, and home-school collaboration. These accounts underscore the value of a whole-child approach to post-pandemic recovery and the need for support that recognizes differences in family capacity. Because the evidence is retrospective and drawn from one private preschool, the study does not establish causal or longitudinal effects. Instead, it provides contextual insight into how one preschool community understood children's post-pandemic trajectories and identifies priorities for longer-term research and practice.

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