

Parents Preference of Montessori Preschool Education: A Case Study in Klang Valley

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ABSTRACT

This study explores parents preference of enrolling their children in Montessori preschools in Klang Valley, Malaysia. 15 Malaysian parents of four-year-olds enrolling in the same academic year participated in the qualitative case study. Individual interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded. The findings showed that parents are drawn to the following Montessori principles: respect for the child, independence, and hands-on learning. They also appreciated the prepared environment, which promotes exploration, collaboration, and inclusivity. Parents believed that the Montessori education promotes academic self-efficacy, curiosity, and a love for learning. Practical life skills and its adaptation to the local cultural contexts make the approach unique and meaningful for the children. This study suggests that parental awareness about Montessori preschools should be strengthened. Montessori operators should continue to align the Montessori practices with the local cultural contexts. This way, the Montessori preschools can continue to sustain its relevance in the Malaysia's diverse preschool landscape.

Keywords: Montessori, Preschools, Early Childhood Education, Malaysian Education, Parents

INTRODUCTION

Montessori education is rooted in Maria Montessori's early work in Rome in the early 1900s. It is built on a belief in child-centered learning, independence, and whole-child development. Over time, Montessori schools worldwide have become known for nurturing creativity, autonomy, and strong developmental outcomes. Several studies highlighted the benefits of Montessori education such as: enhanced problem-solving skills and holistic growth (Lillard, 2017; Muhid, Rosli, Omar, & Mohamad, 2025). The Montessori philosophy was formally introduced in 1986 in Malaysia. This introduction marks a significant step in the country's early childhood education landscape. The Children's House in Damansara Heights, Kuala Lumpur was the first fully accredited Montessori preschool in Malaysia. It has thus set a strong foundation in Montessori education. Today, the Children's House continues to serve as a flagship institution in Malaysia (The Children's House, 2026). Since then, Montessori education has expanded nationwide. This growth of the Montessori education garners support from the Montessori Association of Malaysia which gives accreditation, ensures that the Montessori programs are aligned with the Ministry of Education guidelines in Malaysia (Montessori Association of Malaysia, 2024).

Today, Montessori preschools are increasingly recognized as a well-received alternative preschool model by Malaysian parents. In particular, Malaysian parents who prefer the non-traditional early childhood education approaches (Little Steps, 2026; Muhid et al., 2025; My Weekend Plan, 2026). A recent survey reported there are at least 10 notable Montessori kindergartens in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. This signifies the importance of Klang Valley as the country's main hub for Montessori education (My Weekend Plan, 2026). This growth

indicated urban parents are increasingly attracted to alternative preschool models instead of mainstream, teacher-directed preschools (My Weekend Plan, 2026; Little Steps, 2026). Despite the increase of parent acceptance towards Montessori preschools, several studies reported that the Montessori approach is not always fully understood. For example, Muhid & et al. (2025)'s study found that there was an ongoing challenge associated with parental expectations and local adaptation of the Montessori education (Muhid et al., 2025). Recent studies indicated that many Malaysian parents misunderstand the Montessori principles. They likened quality pre-schooling with academic rigor rather than process-based exploration (Taha, Salleh, Adnan, & Shahdan, 2024). As a result, many Montessori preschools introduced blending practices into the Montessori preschools to meet parental expectations in the Klang Valley (New Straits Tiems, 2024; Education + TVET, 2025). These blending practices included bilingual instruction, more structured routines, formal progress assessments (Ramasamy, Kaur, Singh, & Singh, 2024), and measurable academic outcomes (New Straits Times, 2024; Education + TVET, 2025). Other parental decision-making considerations included affordability, reputation, and bilingualism for in selecting a preschool in Malaysia (Dahari, 2024).

Klang Valley is the most urbanized region in Malaysia with plenty of preschool choices. Options range from mainstream, academic driven preschools to alternative preschools like Montessori, Reggio Emilia, High Scope, and Waldorf (Little Steps, 2026; Piccoli Preschool, 2025). Montessori preschools is a popular choice amongst Malaysian parents in Klang Valley. However, little research on why parents are drawn to this approach is conducted. What shapes their decisions? And how do these choices reflect their cultural values and expectations around education?

This study intends to explore those unanswered questions. By understanding the parental decision making in Montessori preschools, Montessori preschool operators can have a clearer picture of their expectations. At the same time, it also highlights how Montessori preschools in Klang Valley adapt the Montessori principles to and align within the local cultural contexts.

Research Objectives:

The study aims to address this gap by exploring parental decision-making choices and the adaptation of Montessori curriculum in Montessori preschools in Klang Valley. The study is guided by the following research objectives:

- 1) To explore the factors influencing parents' decision to enroll their children in Montessori preschools in Klang Valley.
- 2) To explore how these choices reflect their cultural values and expectations in Montessori preschools.
- 3) To explore how Montessori preschools in Klang Valley adapt their curriculum to align with the local cultural contexts in Klang Valley.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated based on the research objectives:

- 1) What are the factors guiding parental decision making to enroll the child in Montessori preschools in Klang Valley?
- 2) How do these choices reflect parents' expectations of Montessori preschools in Klang Valley?
- 3) How do Montessori preschools in Klang Valley adapt their curriculum to align with the local cultural contexts in Klang Valley?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Montessori Education

Hiles (2018) conducted an extensive study on Montessori education and identified six interdependent and interacting principles that guide its practice (see Table 1). The table outlines how classrooms are structured and organized, the roles of teachers and children, and the processes through which learning occurs in Montessori preschools. The researchers adopted Hiles' table as a reference because it gives a clear and coherent framework. In addition, many complex ideas are consolidated and presented clearly in the framework. The table is therefore useful and relevant for the study objectives.

Table 1 Montessori Principles, Manifestations, and Outcomes

Principle	Observable Manifestations	Purported Outcomes
Respect for the child (Morission, 2014; Schmidt & Schmidt, 2009)	Children are supported in:	Learning autonomy
	Doing and learning things for themselves	Positive self-esteem
	without unnecessary help or interruption	Self-discipline
	Having long time blocks during the day	
	Choosing their own materials	
	Working at their own pace	
Support for absorbent mind (Morrison, 2014; Montessori, 1995)	Becoming fully engrossed in what they are working on	
	Classroom environment and experiences	Heightened learning experience
	help children soak up as many experiences as possible	
Allowance of sensitive periods (Enright, 2010; Seldin & Davies, 2006)	Children are allowed to intensely focus their energy and attention on specific aspects of the environment to the exclusion of others	Passion Commitment Often leads to mastery
Support for auto-education (International Montessori Council, n.d.; Morrison, 2014)	Curriculum features:	Natural curiosity
	Children teaching themselves	Intrinsic motivation to learn
	Self-directed curriculum	
	Avoidance of external rewards	
	Absence of preselected courses of study	
Prepared environments (NAMTA, 2014; Schmidt & Schmidt, 2009)	Well-organized and equipped classroom	Stimulate brain development
	Availability of didactic, hands-on, and developmentally appropriate materials	Independent learning and exploration
	Immediate learning feedback	Engagement of all sensorial functions
Protection of child's right to learn (Enright, 2010;	Lead teacher:	Steady development and learning
	Closely monitors each child's development	

Montessori, 1995)		
	Keeps child supplied with appropriately	
	challenging learning opportunities	
	Keeps child supplied with materials and works	
	suitable to the child's strengths	

Preschool Education in Malaysia

Preschool education in Malaysia began in the early 20th century with the efforts of Christian missionaries. At that time, opportunities to send children to preschools were only limited to wealthy and aristocratic families (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). In general, preschool education refers to institutions that provide young children with a structured setting for social and early learning experiences (Adnan Abd. Rashid, 1993). In Malaysia, this includes nurseries and kindergartens that cater to children aged three to six. It has a simple but very important goal: to prepare children for formal schooling. This goal was made possible with the support of trained teachers, so they can move smoothly into Year One of primary school.

In 1970s, significant expansion took place with the introduction of KEMAS preschools by the Ministry of Rural Development. The KEMAS preschools catered to low-income families with children in rural areas. These preschools were government-funded early childhood centres (KEMAS, n.d.). Around the same period, in 1969, the Asia Foundation supported preschool initiatives known as the HEADSTART program. The HEADSTART program operated in several rural towns (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Another major step came in 1992. The Ministry of Education set up 1,131 annexed preschool classes within the government primary schools across the country (Puteri, 2005). Efforts to align and standardize early childhood education continued with the introduction of the National Preschool Curriculum under the Education Act 1996. This marked the formal inclusion of preschool education within Malaysia's national education system. It also provided a unified framework for practice nationwide (KPM, n.d.).

The Malaysian government has long viewed preschool education as a key foundation for national development, especially in support of its vision to become a developed nation by 2020. Children are viewed as the country's most prized assets, and early childhood education was crucial in shaping their future potential (Puteri et al., 2005). Over the years, the number of preschools has grown rapidly across the country. This expansion reflects Malaysia's multicultural society and the wide range of educational needs among families. Preschools vary in many ways. They may differ in their language of instruction, such as Malay, English, or Chinese and also the curriculum approach (either locally developed or internationally adopted or with a religious orientation). Some are even linked to political or community groups (Puteri et al., 2005). In recent years, preschools are often grouped as either branded institutions, including local and international franchises, or non-branded centers operated by independent individuals. Together, parents are spoiled with choices when selecting a preschool for their children in Malaysia.

There are five types of preschools in Malaysia:

- Ministry of Education preschools
- KEMAS preschools
- PERPADUAN preschools
- Preschool education for children with special needs
- Preschools operated by private sectors and NGOs

Theories Related to Parents' Choice

Parents' choice of Montessori preschools in Klang Valley can be explained using the several theoretical frameworks. This includes rational choice theory, cultural capital theory, and consumer behavior models. These theories indicate how parents see educational philosophy, social expectations, and perceived outcomes in their preschool choice.

Rational Choice Theory

Parents' decisions to enroll their children in Montessori preschools in Klang Valley can be understood through Rational Choice Theory. This theory suggests that individuals make decisions by carefully weighing costs, benefits, and future outcomes. In making this choice, parents often consider the unique characteristics of Montessori education. These include its focus on independence, bilingual learning, and holistic child development. These perceived outcomes are crucial for a child's long-term growth and future success. Parents believe these outcomes support not only immediate developmental needs but also later academic performance. Given the many preschool choices in Klang Valley, parent often compared Montessori preschools with more traditional, academically driven ones. Ultimately, parents will carefully weigh the factors such as affordability, perceived quality, and perceived outcomes in their decision-making (Tee et al., 2024).

Cultural Capital Theory

Parents' preference for Montessori preschools in Klang Valley can be explained using Cultural Capital Theory. This theory highlights how families try to pass on values, skills, and ways of thinking that can give their children social advantages (Bourdieu, 1986). Many middle-class urban parents appreciate the Montessori education for its prepared learning environment and child-centered approach. Research on early childhood education in Malaysia shows that parents often choose preschools not just for practical reasons. They prefer to enroll their children in internationally recognized educational settings. In this setting, Montessori becomes more than just a schooling option; it represents modern thinking and social status (Nuzha Mohamed Taha et al., 2021; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). This perspective suggests that preschool choices are deeply cultural, as parents orientate towards educational models that support their social identity and shape future opportunities for their children.

Consumer Behaviour and Service Quality Models

The ideas of consumer choice and service quality are increasingly shaping the preschool models in Klang Valley. In this context, parents are careful when deciding which preschool to enroll the children. Research shows parental choices included practical factors such as a preschool's reputation, branding, bilingual programs, teacher qualifications, and academic outcomes (Nuzha Mohamed Taha et al., 2021). For example, studies in Malaysia reported that parents prefer branded or franchise-based preschools for consistency, quality standards, and international recognition. This perception gives parents a sense of security in a highly diverse preschool landscape in Malaysia (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Similar observations are found internationally, where parents select preschools not only based on educational philosophy but also on service-related features like safety, facilities, and readiness for formal schooling (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Within this context, Montessori preschools in the Klang Valley appeal to urban parents for its child-centered approach and internationally recognized standards. This reflects a broader shift in which preschool decisions are shaped as much by consumer thinking as by educational beliefs.

Postmodern Perspective on Parenting

From a postmodern perspective of parenting, other than the learning outcomes, preschool choice is also shaped by parents' identities, lifestyles, and personal values. In this respect, education is associated with a symbol of modernity and social status. In Klang Valley, a urban parents opted for Montessori preschools because of its child-centered practices that promote independence, creativity, and readiness for a globalized world. This trend reflects wider changes in Malaysian society, where early education is associated not only with academic

performance but also to cultural identity and social positioning. Research by Rahmatullah et al. (2021) shows that Malaysia's wide range of preschool types mirrors its multicultural context and parents' growing preference for progressive education. Similarly, Nuzha Mohamed Taha et al. (2021) found that parents chose Montessori education for its international recognition and contemporary approaches to parenting. Lareau (2011)'s findings in her global studies further illustrated how middle-class parents embrace preschools which reflect their values and aspirations.

Taken together, these perspectives offer an understanding of why parents choose Montessori preschools and how Montessori preschools can adapt to response to the local cultural contexts.

Conceptual Framework

The study is guided by the following conceptual framework:

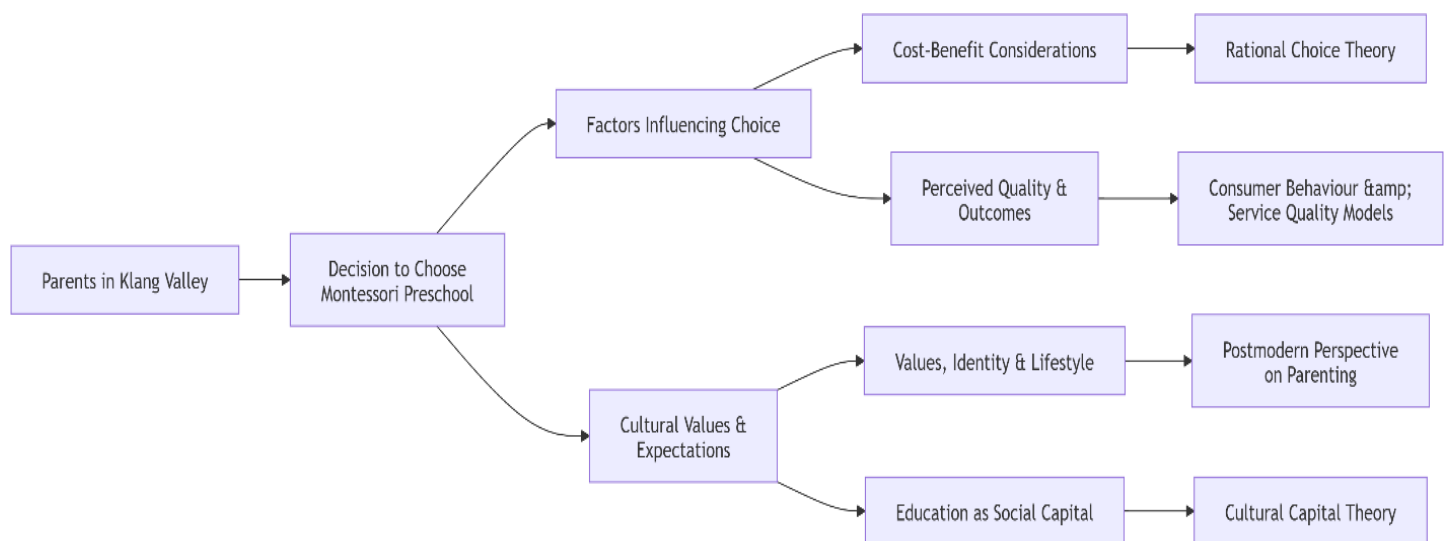


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Parental Choice of Montessori Preschools

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study on why parents in the Klang Valley choose Montessori preschools. At the center of the framework is parental decision-making, which reflects both practical considerations and deeper cultural meanings attached to early childhood education. On one hand, parents' choices are influenced by cost-benefit factors and perceptions of quality, such as curriculum outcomes and service standards. This is presented in the Rational Choice Theory and consumer behaviour and service quality models. On the other hand, decisions are influenced by parents' values, identities, and lifestyle aspirations. These cultural dimensions are explained through Cultural Capital Theory and a postmodern perspective on parenting. Educational choices as expressions of social identity as they also reflect modern parenting ideals. To sum up, the framework illustrates that enrollment decisions are driven by the interactions between rational evaluation and cultural expectations within a competitive preschool landscape in Klang Valley.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory case study design, which is well-suited for investigating complex, context-dependent phenomena such as parental decision-making in preschool selection (Yin, 2018). Three Montessori preschools operating under a shared organizational umbrella were purposefully selected based on their historical presence, enrollment size, and reputation within Klang Valley. Collectively, these preschools enrolled 357 students. The researcher contacted the headquarters administrator via email to explain the study's intent. Subsequently, 15 parents, five from each preschool were identified and agreed to participate. Inclusion criteria required that participants be Malaysian, working professionals residing in Klang Valley, have a four-year-old child enrolled in the same academic year, and represent any ethnic background. Informed consent was obtained to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted

online over a two-week period, each lasting 20-30 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic coding techniques, allowing for the identification of patterns and categories grounded in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The resulting codes and themes were then matched against Hiles' (2018) Table 1, which outlines six interdependent principles of Montessori education, to assess how parental perspectives align with core Montessori pedagogical constructs.

RESULTS

The findings indicated that parents chose to send their child to Montessori preschool for four reasons: attraction to Montessori principles, attraction to Montessori classroom, perceived outcomes from Montessori education and curriculum adaptations to the local cultural contexts.

Attraction to Montessori Principles

Parents sent their child to Montessori preschools because they were attracted to the Montessori principles (see Table 2).

Table 2 Parents attraction to Montessori principles as decision making factor (n=15)

Principles	n	%
Respect for the child	15	100
Prepared environment with learning materials	11	73
Self-directed learning and exploration	6	40
Teacher role	6	40
Sensitive period	1	2
Absorbent mind	1	2

All parents (n=15, 100%) in Klang Valley said that they valued the Montessori principles where the child is respected. One parent mentioned that "it is very important to treat the children like partners instead of giving them orders due to their age differences and opinions" [Parent 3].

They also mentioned that they chose the Montessori preschools because of the prepared environment with learning materials. Parents explained that the prepared environment "encouraged curiosity" [Parent 1], "help children to develop independence, confidence, and responsibility", and "allowed the children to develop a good sense of responsibility and confidence" [Parent 7]. Other parents explained that "Montessori's self-directed learning fosters autonomy from a young age" [Parent 4], and "prepares the children for future academic and personal success." [Parent 5]. Parents also appreciated the teacher role: "Unlike traditional educational settings where the teacher is the primary source of information and instruction" [Parent 15], "The Montessori teacher serve as mentors, providing guidance and assisting the process of learning" [Parent 10], and "empowering every child within the classroom environment" [Parent 14].

Hands-on learning was also a major decision-making factor. Parents described "Montessori materials such as the pink tower and knobbed cylinders as fostering problem-solving and concentration" [Parent 9]. "Through hands-on manipulation of these materials, my child not only learns academic concepts but also developed important life skills such as concentration, problem-solving and decision-making" [Parent 13]. This resonates with broader parental expectations in Klang Valley, where experiential learning is seen as more engaging and effective than rote memorization (Eduwis, 2023).

Attraction to Montessori Classroom

9 of the 15 parents (60%) reported choosing to send their child to Montessori preschools was their attraction to the Montessori classroom (see Table 3).

Table 3 Parents attraction to Montessori classroom as decision making factor (n=9)

Classroom Features	n	%
Freedom to explore	9	60
Freedom to express	9	60
Peer learning and collaboration	6	40
Mixed-aged classroom	6	40
Problem-based learning	3	20
Development of a holistic child	2	14
Enquiry-based learning	2	14
Warm and inclusive	2	14

9 parents (60%) stated that they liked the Montessori classroom where their child had the freedom to explore and express. Comments included: “[My child] was given the autonomy to select the activities” [Parent 10], “Children were given the freedom how they learn” [Parent 12] and “are free to explore” [Parent 8].

Parents appreciated the Montessori classroom because it was warm and inclusive. In addition, the Montessori classroom was also equipped with child-sized furniture, open shelves, and specialized materials that encouraged exploration and concentration. One parent explained,

There is a simple open-spaced playroom for the children to move around, jump, climb and explore. There are some child-sized furniture such as tables, chairs and open shelves to sort out the toys and some learning materials. Selected learning materials are set up to keep [the children] engaged while learning new knowledge and the materials are updated from time to time. [Parent 3]

Another parent also mentioned that,

There is a child-sized kitchen, dress up table, drawing and painting sets and playing blocks. Through these learning materials, the children learn about practical life skills that help them to be independent. [Parent 7]

Two parents (14%) liked the mixed-age classroom which encouraged peer learning and collaboration. They said that “the classrooms with students of different ages fostered teamwork and peer learning” [Parent 11], “Older children were guiding the younger children to trace the sandpaper letters” [Parent 12]. Other attractive classroom features included problem-based learning, enquiry-based learning and the development of a holistic child.

To sum up, these Montessori classroom features reassure parents about safety and engagement, echoing findings from the Montessori Association of Malaysia, which emphasizes the importance of aligning environments with Ministry of Education guidelines while maintaining Montessori authenticity (Montessori Association of Malaysia, 2024).

Perceived Outcomes from Montessori Education

Analysis of the parents indicated that all of them (n=15, 100%) sent their child to the Montessori preschools because of the perceived outcomes from the Montessori education.

Table 4 Parents perceived outcomes from Montessori Education as decision making factor (n=15)

Perceived Outcomes	n	%
Academic self-efficacy	15	100
Intrinsic motivation to learn (5)		
Enjoyment of learning (3)		
Natural curiosity (3)		
Self-discipline (3)		
Learning autonomy (2)		
Self-confidence and self-esteem (1)		
Competencies	12	80
Life skills and practical experiences (6)		
Progressive cognitive development (3)		
(comprehension, mathematics)		
Social skills (3)		

Regarding academic self-efficacy, parents wanted their child to develop an intrinsic motivation to learn ($n=5$), enjoyment of learning ($n=3$), natural curiosity ($n=3$), learning autonomy ($n=2$), self-confidence and self-esteem ($n=1$). One parent said that “Children are born with a curious mind and they love to explore and learn in their surroundings” [Parent 3]. Several parents noted that, “I want my child to have joy in her learning journey” [Parent 6], “We wanted our child to pursue her interests without fear and develop a love for learning” [Parent 2] and “I’ve discovered that the Montessori principles helped provide the children with a feeling of independence and confidence” [Parent 8]. Parents identified several competencies that they wanted their child to develop and that they believed would be cultivated in Montessori schools. These include life skills and practical experiences ($n=6$); progressive cognitive development, such as progressing from conceptual to abstract thinking and reading comprehension skills ($n=3$), and social skills ($n=3$). One parent noted “The materials facilitated children’s comprehension of abstract mathematical concepts” [Parent 1]. Another commented, “I like that the Montessori experience encourages children to develop their senses through practical experiences” [Parent 11].

Curriculum Adaptation to Local Cultural Contexts

Montessori preschools in Klang Valley adapt their curriculum to meet local cultural contexts in several ways.

Table 5 Curriculum Adaptation to Local Cultural Contexts as decision making factor ($n=13$)

Curriculum Adaptations	n	%
Bilingualism	13	87
Practical life skills	9	60
Literacy skills	9	60
Numeracy skills	9	60
Writing skills	7	47
Observation and formal assessment	3	20
Mainstream practices	2	14

Almost all of the parents ($n=13$, 87%) stated they chose Montessori preschools because Montessori curriculum was adapted to the local cultural contexts. Bilingualism was a key adaptation: parents encourage English for global competitiveness and Bahasa Malaysia for national identity. One parent explained, “Most syllabus these days are taught in English and children need to be familiar with the Bahasa language so they will not struggle in the future understanding what they are learning” [Parent 3]. Another parent also noted “When children are familiar with the languages [English and Bahasa], they tend to build confidence and carry themselves well when

they are speaking to their teachers and friends.” [Parent 15]. Montessori preschools in Klang Valley respond by integrating bilingual instruction, ensuring alignment with national curriculum demands.

Another adaptation involves hybridization with mainstream practices. While Montessori emphasizes exploration, parents often expect academic rigor and measurable outcomes. As one educator observed, “parents sometimes expect academic rigor and structured] outcomes, while Montessori emphasizes exploration” [Parent 14]. To bridge this gap, Montessori preschools incorporate structured routines, exam preparation, and progress reports alongside observation. This reflects broader trends in Malaysia, where ECCE policies encourage blending child-centered approaches with national academic standards (Mohd Zuri Ghani et al., 2025).

Finally, practical life skills are localized to Malaysian households. One parent described that “my child learns to tidy up, wash hands, and engage in bilingual communication” [Parent 15]. Another elaborated, “Activities such as wet pouring, sieving, and whisking evoke the same joy children find in *masak-masak* games at home, and my child spoke in both English and Bahasa” [Parent 6].

These adaptations ensure Montessori principles remain culturally relevant while maintaining its core philosophy of independence and holistic growth. Despite these adaptations, misunderstandings between parental expectations and Montessori philosophy still exist. Parents often associate “holistic development” with academic achievement, thus negating the Montessori’s emphasis on process-oriented growth. Montessori preschools in Klang Valley overcome this by introducing a more structured timetable with academic rigor into the Montessori curriculum. Recent comparative analyses of ECCE in Malaysia highlight this challenge, noting that parental demand for academic outcomes often conflicts with child-centered philosophies (Mohd Zuri Ghani et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

The results highlight four main themes: attraction to Montessori principles, attraction to the classroom environment, perceived outcomes, and curriculum adaptation.

Montessori Principles

Parents saw that “respect for the child” was important for developing children’s autonomy and self-confidence. Recent studies reveal that Malaysian parents embraced child-centered approaches which promoted independent learning in the early years (Tan & Lee, 2022). They also appreciated the prepared environments with hands-on materials that encouraged curiosity and problem-solving. This echoes Rahman and Aziz’s (2023) findings that experiential learning is more engaging than rote memorization. Parents further supported the teacher’s role as a facilitator rather than an instructor. This perspective aligns with Lim’s (2021) work on facilitative teaching in progressive classrooms.

Classroom Environment

Sixty percent of parents mentioned the Montessori classroom environment as the main decision-making factor. They liked mixed-age classrooms that allowed peer learning and collaboration. Chong and Abdullah (2024)’s studies similarly found that such environments promote teamwork and social development. Parents also noted the importance of child-sized furniture and practical life areas, which they believed could foster independence. They also liked the classroom design that allows children the freedom to explore and take ownership of their own learning (Yusof, 2020).

Perceived Outcomes

It was found that parents in the study wanted academic self-efficacy in their children as a desired outcome. They expected the children to develop intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and self-discipline from the Montessori preschools. Similar findings are cited in Hassan and Noor (2021) which indicated that Montessori education

supports both academic resilience and socio-emotional growth in preschoolers. Eighty percent of parents also emphasized competencies like the development of life skills, cognitive and social skills in the children. These expectations reflect broader parental desires for balanced outcomes that combine academics with practical skills (Ismail & Tan, 2023).

Curriculum Adaptation

Parents welcomed curriculum adaptation in Montessori preschools in Klang Valley. Montessori operators often integrate bilingual instruction, structured routines, and measurable academic outcomes. This is often done to meet the parents' expectations to prepare the children for formal schooling. This reflects the reality that many Malaysian parents equate quality education with academic rigor. This type of hybrid approaches is increasingly common, blending Montessori principles in the local cultural contexts (Taha et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Parents in Klang Valley chose Montessori preschools because they value respect for the child, independence, and experiential learning. They also appreciated the prepared classroom environment that emphasizes freedom of choice, collaboration, and inclusivity. Most importantly, they believe Montessori education produces confident, curious, and capable children. When Montessori preschools adapt their curriculum to the local cultural contexts through bilingualism or structured routines, parents feel reassured that Montessori can meet both cultural and academic needs. However, this adaptation could dilute the essence of the Montessori principles.

Implications

For Montessori preschool operators, the findings suggest a need to invest in parental education. Parents' understanding of Montessori principles can mitigate misunderstandings and strengthen trust between preschool and parents. Montessori teachers, meanwhile, must be trained to balance facilitative teaching with structured practices that parents expect in the Malaysian context. Together, these efforts can ensure Montessori preschools remains a preferred choice for parents in Malaysia's diverse preschool landscape.

Limitations

This study was limited to just 15 Malaysian parents with four-year-olds in Klang Valley. This is an urban setting that does not account for perspectives from parents of rural areas in Malaysia. The reliance on only interviews also means findings are shaped by self-reported views, which may be biased. Future research should expand to larger samples, include rural contexts, and adopt longitudinal studies on the success stories of children graduating from the Montessori preschools in Malaysia.

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