

# PARENTS PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION, MALAYSIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT** - Parents are important stakeholders in early childcare and education, and the preferences they make about early childcare and education have important implications for their children, their families, and the early childcare and education system. Quality of early care and education is of concern not only to parents, but also to policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. Yet we know little about how parents' perceptions of quality compare to those of other stakeholders. This paper primarily aims to present the preliminary findings of parents' perceptions towards quality early childhood care and education in Malaysia. This research aimed to investigate parents' perspectives on early childhood care and education (ECCE) policy in Malaysia. A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-structured interviews and a focus group as a research tool to gain an insight into the experiences of parents regarding ECCE. Parents availing current ECCE programmes and services for their children were identified as a representative group of the research population. Overall, results showed parents were satisfied with their current preschool programs. The findings have implications for parents, practitioners, and policy makers; for example, parents' education; Parent-Teacher partnerships; and effective communication for teacher-parent interactions. Recommendations for future research were addressed.

**Keywords** - Early Childhood Care and Education, Parents' perspectives, Policies, Quality.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Parents are important stakeholders in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and the choices they make about early childhood care and education have important implications for their children, their families, and the early childhood care and education system [1]. Relevant studies commented on parental perceptions of ECCE regarding the quality indicators and satisfaction of various ECCE programs. Such researchers have addressed the vital aspects to ensure quality of ECCE programs.[2]. Yet as programs have expanded, concerns have risen about their quality, including whether ECE services are structured to promote young children's learning and development and satisfy parents' desires for and perceptions of quality education [3]. ECCE has expanded rapidly in Malaysia, however, gaps remain notably in relation to monitoring and evaluation of ECCE providers. ECCE includes facilities run by both government and private sectors, with some open to all children and others focused on a ethnic or religious community. In such varied system, quality standards require vigilance. For instance, although preschool teachers in MOE schools are required to hold a degree in Early Childhood Education, there is no such requirement for teachers under other government ministries or private sector. Instead, they attend short courses and are given on-the-job training. Many private schools and centres are unregistered, so quality standards are not monitored. The lack of regulation and monitoring of kindergartens and childcare centres can put children at risk [4]. Thus, there are important issues or consequences emerging in various agencies as they provide early childhood care and education.

Quality is also defined differently by different groups. These characteristics can help parents make better childcare choices for their children because they indicate a much greater likelihood of high-quality care and education. Quality indicators measure the conditions that generally foster a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment for children. They typically include the following: Low child/teacher ratios Small group size, Staff with higher education & on-going training, Prior experience and education of the director, Low teacher

turnover, Positive teacher/child interactions, Accreditation or higher than minimum licensing standards, Age appropriate/ developmental activities, Good health & safety practices.

Parents have the right and responsibility to be asked and to contribute to all matters concerning them and their children. Parents are most interested in the well-being of the child and they can, with their knowledge, experience, skills, talents, dedication and energy, contribute greatly to the well-being of their and other children. Therefore, parents' perceptions of ECCE are rarely systematically investigated. The main aspect calls for a broader construction of parent partnerships regardless of the value of parent engagement for children's learning, development and wellbeing [5]. Research evidence on this subject is scarce and limited in scope and generality. The lack of consistent findings may be partially explained by differences in the study methodologies employed or variations in ECCE preferences related to child, parent, family, and community characteristics. Parents' perspective on the quality is shaped by the influence of the society in which they live, as well as by their personal experiences and implicit pedagogies, and therefore can be distinguished from the perspective of researchers, practitioners and experts in the field of education [6].

Hewitt & Maloney find that the preference of Malaysian parents to send their children to private preschools are based on types of learning. The result shows that formal teacher-centred academic learning experiences are very popular amongst the parents interviewed. On the contrary, the child-centred or play-based learning experiences are viewed unfavourably [7]. Furthermore, Abdullah describes several indicators of quality in ECCE. According to her, the adult-child ratio and group size are significant in assessing the quality of preschool. She mentioned that the bigger the group size, the lesser the interaction between adult and child. Thus, the social stimulation and active involvement of children will become lesser. Other than that, the qualification and trainings for teachers are also essential in assuring the quality of the preschool. The staff continuity, programmes, relationship between adult and child, safe and healthy environment,

stimulating environment and family involvement are also the indicators of quality ECCE [8].

On the other hand, Myers finds that Malaysian parents have contrasting views on interpreting quality ECCE and the tension continues between definitions of quality and methods of describing quality from a “modern” way of thinking and those that begin with a “post-modern” view. Most definitions of quality continue to be made by group of “experts” and are based on a scientific position that quality is inherent, identifiable and universal are contrasting the vision of quality as uncertain, variable and contextual which require negotiation among different stakeholders. The second viewpoint is gaining ground with the recognition that the definition of quality varies and must be negotiated, involving parents and teachers as well as administrators and researchers [9]. At the same time, he suggests that international monitoring of national quality can be carried out and an internationally comparative indicator can be created that shows where nations are in the process of monitoring. He believes that it would be possible to continue to collect and compare information about such suggestive features of ECCE such as whether a national policy exists for the development of young children during their early years, the relative resources being devoted to ECCE, the number of children per teacher, and the qualifications of teacher [9].

Chiam in her study stated that ‘since children have the right to development, childcare should, like preschool education, be a means to enable children to develop their potential for their own sake and to contribute towards the human capital of the nation’. Besides, she also place much emphasis on the impact the environment has on the child’s development during the first three years of life, thus, the government should ensure that no child is deprived of this window of opportunity for development [10]. Meanwhile, Chiam learned that many of the parents still have the notion that quality ECCE is custodian care. Due to the lack of the knowledge and acquaintance of quality ECCE, this has sparked a need to raise the awareness on parents, especially parents from the lower socio-economic group. Chiam also stressed that policy makers, society, early childhood educators, and parents should make decisions based on the best interest of the child, which is in line with the principles of the Convention on Rights of the Child [10].

A study on the perceptions of parents on the quality ECCE has been done between the middle-class European American parents and Chinese immigrant parents by Yamamoto and Li [11]. Teacher qualities such as teacher’s qualifications, experiences and roles of teaching good morals are perceived as important by Chinese immigrant parents. Besides, they also mention the importance of schools taking the initiative in reporting children’s daily activities to parents. Conversely, the middle-class European American parents mention the elements related to independence and individual attention and school philosophy as essential element of high quality ECCE. The factor of socio-economic differences also reveals that Chinese immigrant parents who are from lower socioeconomic group emphasize learning outcomes as quality of ECCE more than the middle-class Chinese immigrant parents. It is due to parents from lower socioeconomic group

feel the lack of skills to educate their children and must rely on preschools to help their children get ready for school.

Moreover, several studies have documented parents’ attention to structural features when considering quality ECCE. Structural features which are most cited in studies of parental preferences for ECCE are the teachers’ education, training, and experiences, as well as the teacher-child ratio of the ECCE programme. A mixed-methods study of economically and ethnically diverse working mothers, which used ratings, rankings, and conjoint analysis to analyse parental preferences for ECCE found the education of the teachers to be among the top three priorities of parents across methods [12]. Likewise, in a study of African American parents using a survey featuring scenarios rated by parents [13] found that parents place a high value on teachers’ experience and specialised training in child development. Besides, parents from lower socioeconomic group value for a low teacher-child ratio in care arrangements has also been highlighted in several studies about parental priorities when considering quality ECCE [14, 15] by using factorial analysis and open-ended questions, respectively.

A study was done by [1] with the aim to examine the perspectives of parents about quality and quality practices and linkage between those practices’ ad outcomes for children and families. The data was collected through semi-structured telephone interviews conducted with 19 parents in Minnesota. The study reported that caregiver practices fostering developmentally appropriate interactions were most important to the parents when they consider quality in ECCE. Parents also identified the importance of practices to support social-emotional development. These two constructs of ECCE quality are valued by the parents as it focused on promoting both children’s cognitive and social-emotional readiness for school [16].

In a study developed in Switzerland by [17], parents’ and ECCE providers’ perceptions were compared. The researchers emphasized that ECCE providers seemed to placed higher value on the “professional” aspects of care, such as the availability (i.e., being patient, competent, attentive) and organization (i.e., a safe and healthy environment and caregiver sensitiveness to child’s physical well-being), while mothers placed a higher value on relational aspects of care, such as warmth, caregiver responsiveness and joyful, positive interaction.

Likewise, in USA [18], examined several stakeholder groups’ perspectives on childcare quality, including parents and caregivers. Parents tended to be more child-focused and highlighted child outcomes as a way of assessing quality, while teachers tended to focus more than parents on caregiver practices, highlighting the importance of interactions and the implementation of appropriate curricula. Similar results were found in Australia by [19]; parents and staff attributed importance to process variables of childcare services such as interactions, but whereas childcare staff also valued structural variables of childcare services. Only a small minority of parents rated these criteria as important. Harris and Tinning also verified that process quality was emphasized by Australian parents and caregivers [20]. Although quality ECCE is important, very little research has been published regarding the nature of ECCE in Malaysia especially from the

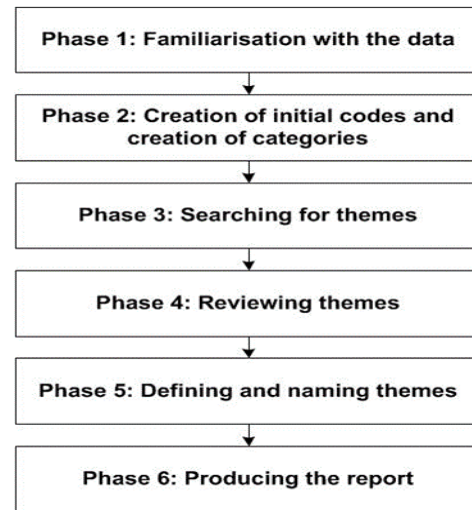
parents' aspect. Parents have different expectations about their children and the ECCE that their children are going to receive.

Hence, parental perceptions related to the quality of ECCE are critical because it will help inform programme and policymakers who are working to interest parents in the framework for ECCE, and will provide insights into opportunities for educating parents and collaborating with parents to provide and use high quality care. Given the breadth of research yielding a positive association between high quality ECCE and child outcomes, it is important for researchers and policy makers to understand parents' perceptions of the quality of ECCE. It is hoped that this study will help improve the long-term positive outcomes for students; helps students reach their full potential; increase students' performance at school; increases teacher quality; and improves parental involvement.

## II. RELATED WORK

Qualitative research is adopted in this study, which was conducted to collect data from participants' responses and gathering word and image data [21]. Focus group interviews were conducted to gather parents' views on the current practices in their preschools or childcare centres as well as regarding quality ECCE. The interview protocol was developed for this research. The existing policy documents that are relevant to ECCE were first analysed and mapped against various categories of quality (e.g. parents' knowledge of policies; policies in practice etc.) identified for the study. Prior to the interview, all participants were given the checklist on the list of the policies which were divided into seven categories namely, i) Guiding Policies, ii) Registration, iii) Building Approval and Safety, iv) Curriculum, v) Rights of the Child, vi) Health and Safety, and vii) Assessment of Quality Standards. The division of categories serves as a conversational guide in the focus group interview, as the questions were grouped into sets of topics to represent the various components of quality ECCE. The focus group participants were selected from a large, early childhood education and care providers, database that was available at the National Child Development and Research Centre (NCDRC). Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the sample of parents' selected could provide an in-depth understanding of issues involved in ECE [21]. There were 71 participants from the focus groups, who are the parents of children in TASKA and TADIKA from different states in Malaysia such as Perak, Kedah, Perlis, Penang, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johore, Sabah and Sarawak from both public and private ECCE settings.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed inductively. Thematic analysis is for rich description of the case to understand the complex contexts [22]. This methodology ensures that the themes were strongly linked to the data and not driven from a theoretical perspective [23]. Five stages of inductive thematic analysis method involved: (1) Becoming familiar with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Refining; and (5) Defining and naming themes [23].



**Figure 1. Thematic analysis phases (adapted from [23]).**

The researchers sifted the data analytically and provided detailed description of themes from each focus group interview. The themes generated will be the proposed quality standards for the guideline. A written approval was obtained from the National Child Development and Research Centre (NCDRC), in getting the database of the registered childcare centres and preschools in Malaysia. The database was used solely for this research purpose and it was kept private and confidential. For reasons of confidentiality, the participants were given pseudonyms according to focus group interview sessions. A consent letter was obtained from the participants to state their permission for the interview sessions to be recorded. Participants were assured that all information collected are kept strictly confidential. Participants were also informed of their rights to withdraw from the research or interview at any time, and the interview sessions will be deleted with immediate effect and will not be used in this research, as part of the ethical considerations.

Triangulation method was used in this research. Triangulation means to collect data information from different sources, methods, individuals or types of data [24]. To increase the trustworthiness of the data, transcribed verbatim was then validated by the interviewers and the assistants who were present during the interview sessions and checked against the field notes. In order to establish confirmability of the data, the data was checked by research members on the verbatims and identified themes to ensure consensus was reached. Peer debriefing was conducted with the members in advance to ensure consistency across the board.

## III. RESULTS AND FINDING

### 3.1 Theme 1: Centre Characteristic

#### 3.1.1. Centre Registration

*"... We feel safe if we know is a registered centre... because as a registered centre you have to follow all the protocols policy all these... as long as we know it is registered, then we feel safe."* (FG2/P1/p5). Result of this study indicates that all parents are cognizant of the issue regarding centre registration and have enrolled their child in centre that is legally registered and licenced under the government.

#### 3.1.2. Location

The location of the centre is cited by most of the parents when considering an ECCE centre for their child. As

mentioned in FG2/P3/p9 *“For me location is important ... more for emergency situation, if in a case where I’m unable to pick up the call, the school can call someone else to pick my child up, so it should be somewhere that is convenience for... for family members to pick up”*

### 3.1.3. Curriculum Offered

From the findings of this study, it was noted that vast majority of the parents (88.89%) are mindful about the curriculum used in their child’s ECCE centre. As cited in (FG2/P3/p40) *“for my son when he was in Kinderland is aa... Singapore syllabus I think, but they added in BM and also extra Chinese... For my daughter, because I prefer her to play more, went for the international syllabus... For me is the child’s learning... learning styles. My daughter learns through play, so she needs a school that teaches through play.”* This indicates that the specific methodology or approach employed by the centre that caters the individual’s needs and learning styles appeared to be a guiding force in the selection process.

### 3.1.4. Centre’s Philosophy

*“For me is important. Centre’s philosophy erm is important that the philosophy is aligned with parents’ philosophy. Ya so if, if the core values of the children centre and what the parents expectation are not aligned, I think it would not be long la, you may transfer your kid after sometime, but if the philosophy is somewhat aligned, then it will work out.”* (FG2/P3/p27). Only one parent that mentioned it is important that the philosophy of the centre is aligned with the parents’ expectation so that the school and the family could cooperate well in promoting the child’s well-being whereas the majority of the participant from this study cited that centre’s philosophy is not important in the selection process.

### 3.1.5. Health and Safety Procedures

All parents from this study agreed that health and safety procedures are one of their priorities when selecting a preferred care arrangement for their child. As cited in the comment below: *“My son’s kindergarten is located aa... in between the housing area, the one is the first thing I looking at, and the second one the main gate is always locked, they having a bell outside the gate so any visitors come they should ring the bell first, so I think inside other than that they have the first aid kit for the kids, and all the time the students will be in the class, aa... other than that I think okay with the safety part.”* (FG2/P4/p47)

As recommended by the Ministry of Health Malaysia, all preschools and childcare centres must meet the standard of health practices. Based on the results, most of the preschools adhered with the guidelines. Healthy and nutritious food, clean toilets and education on health practices are the basic important aspects to be emphasised in preschools [27].

#### 3.1.5.1. Physical Environment

The first area to be considered is the physical environment of the child, highlighted by 66% of the participant from this study. Hygiene condition of the centre is one aspects of the quality concerning the parents. As commented in FG1/P2/p7 *“... I think hygienic is more important. Because when the school is not in proper hygiene condition, they cannot learn, because they keep on taking leave on sick, and ill, so I think hygienic is a very important factor...”*, parents believe a safe

and clean environment plays a significant role in supporting the child’s learning and development.

Besides, parents have pointed out the advantages of having an outdoor play space and of a suitable atmosphere as important elements in determining quality ECCE. As commented in FG2/P1/p20: *“They have field for the kids to run at the school, they have a trampoline, because they find if the child’s mood is down, so they ask them to jump, so after they jump, so their mood will be better and coordination also better, aa they have a gym, not gym room I would say programme room for them to do yoga, for them to do aa ya they have ninjutsu for them to...”*

Moreover, parents from this group also cited the importance of translating the idea of community into reality in an ECCE classroom. Parent 3 cited in FG2/P3/p3 *“... if possible, school should be a small community for the child to have a taste of real world. Because erm... nowadays one of it is because of safe la of course we want our kids to be safe, but besides being safe we don’t want to paint or false the image of the society, we want them to be exposed to the real world also even from a young age.”*

The physical environment of ECEC settings is one of the structural factors that enable good quality care and education. Indoor and outdoor spaces, and equipment and learning materials, which are appropriate and stimulating, safe and protective, impact on children’s learning opportunities, their physical activity, and their health and safety [29].

## 3.2 Theme 2: Teacher – Principal Characteristics

### 3.2.1. Qualification vs Experience

Findings from the study indicate that very little information is provided to the parents in respect to the qualification of the teacher, however, parents are aware that in order work in an ECCE setting, one has to at least pass their SPM or O-level or possess a diploma in Early Childhood Education. As stated in FG1/P2/p21 *“...the lowest standard I think... SPM, right? After SPM should be la, now I think everyone also minimum SPM level.”*

Findings from the research also showed that majority of the parents considering experience of teachers have more integral role in establishing quality. As cited by Parent 2 in (FG2/P2/p31) *“I think that experience is contributing to their qualification as well, so experience is very much important than the qualification.”*

Unlike teachers, many parents think that principals should definitely be highly qualified and must possess certain years of experiences within ECCE centre. The qualification and experience of principals is playing an integral role because they are the backbone of the operation, principals should be able to provide their teachers with the support and guidance necessary to constantly improve their teaching practices. The dialogues below typified this concern:

*“Ya I think the qualification is important for the principal and like I said my son’s kindergarten the principal is the main teacher over there, I think the principal in all other kindergarten also should play the same role, so that the first person to educate other teachers as well to be more aa... what do you call, conscious for the teaching.”* (FG2/P1/p38)

*“Absolutely we need someone who is very experienced and aa... qualified, highly qualified so that as what she said erm... the person lead the team so in terms of the direction is*

*very-very important, what kind of value they try to create, and what type of curriculum they should follow, ya, is very-very important.... because if any incidents happen, I mean certain thing comes out unexpected aa... incidents, so the principal will first step out to solve the problem..." (FG2/P1/p38)*

From the above, it is very evident that the importance of preschool education in Malaysia is developing rapidly when the teachers pursue higher academic qualification. Many preschools, however, hire teachers with a minimum qualification. Only MOE preschools prepared their teachers to hold at least a diploma/degree. In order to meet the parents' expectations, preschool teachers must equip themselves with appropriate professional qualifications and the right skills [27].

### 3.2.2. Teacher-Child Ratio

Vast majority of parents from both focus groups agreed that a lower ratio between the teacher and the children is more likely to promote the child's learning and development. Therefore, it depends on the unique needs of each child when determining good ratio. As cited in FG2/P3/p26 "*... my daughter maybe 1 teacher to 6 child for younger age, if for my son, when he was in 5 or 6 years old I prefer like 1 teacher to 10 or 12, I think is still okay. Ya small group, 8-12 I think is okay...*"

### 3.2.3. Disposition of Teachers

All parents agreed that teachers that they valued should be caring, genuine, patience, and must have personal interest in helping and supporting the children. A teacher may have acquired high qualification and yet not being caring to children.

As accordance to Parent 1 in (FG2/P1/p32) "*I don't think qualification it comes secondly... I want to know how caring they are, that comes first, the chemistry between the kid and the teacher how she treats my kids, that matters most rather than the experience and the qualification....So what matters most is how they treat my kid, is not their qualification, or it's not their experience. Because teacher can be very experienced or very qualified but not caring at all. So I cannot accept that*".

Parents also cited that teachers should be setting up a good example and have good value so that their child can grow up with proper values as mentioned in FG2/P3/p34-35 "*We want the kids to grow up with the proper value....So we want the teachers to have good values, to set a good example.*"

## 3.3. Theme 3: Teaching-Learning Approaches

### 3.3.1 Equipment, Materials, and Resources

In response to the materials and equipment utilised in the centre, workbooks, exercise books, flashcards, and other sensorial materials are most cited by parents from both focus group. This could be evidenced in the following dialogues: "*I think they, they using workbooks la... Some exercise books for their homework.*" (FG1/P4/p20-21). "*... for my daughter two and the half, is erm... I think they are using a mixture of materials, so cards, but is very huge is not like a normal flash card, it's like a A4 size flashcard, and then with the song, let's say they are learning 'k', then there will be like aa "kicking key", "key, kangaroo" everything is 'k', even the food that they eat they try to put in a 'k' and animal and everything, erm... material is also various. 3D, 2D, colour so*

*I think that's why she enjoys it la, it's a variety of materials...." (FG2/P3/p21).*

Also, some parents think that technology is important in facilitating the children's learning as it helps to promote an early foundation for the child's digital literacy. As cited, "*I think is important at this moment because our primary schools are implementing all those phonics reading, so from the smart-board right they can actually show the children the phonics reading and then from there they can learn how to pick up to read and sing songs and so forth" (FG1/P4/p13).*

On the other hand, some parents do not see the use of technology as important, however, they agreed that with the appropriate usage of simple technology as it helps to make learning fun and interactive for the children. Results found that Malaysian preschools have limited resources in terms of providing teaching and learning materials. The most obvious needs in preschools nowadays are the technological assistance, specifically the use of computer and Internet in teaching and learning process [27]. This implies a mutual understanding between parents and teachers to ensure that digital technologies can be incorporated to some extent to maximize learning potential and consider the potential risks of the same in providing quality learning experiences for the children [28].

## 3.4. Theme 4: Parental Involvement Opportunities

### 3.4.1. Parental Involvement

While much research on relations between parents and preschools has theorized and conceptualized the characteristics of these relations as a shared responsibility for children. [25]. Besides, 33% of parents cited that they are engaged in their child's learning at home by reading with their children, doing workbook exercises with their children, and helping to prepare learning materials. as cited in the following dialogues:

*"ya they involve us, ask us to take part also and parents do the competition also and then themes yes, for every ... every what season... not season...mooncake festival, erm... erm... different race new year, they do have very nice decoration and they will do a day for party and parents who are free, ya you are welcomed."(FG1/P1/p49). "... activities they will have the annual trip to somewhere around KL or Malacca something like that, you can either just send your child alone or you can accompany..." (FG2/P4/p53).*

On the other hand, although parents agreed that parent engagement is integral to promote the child's development, therefore 22% of the parents from the study cited their belief that ECCE centre typically involve parents directly in the learning process as well as the decision making process only when the child is not coping well with the school activities.

As parent mentioned in FG2/P4/p53 "*They will do so (involve parent) if there is a necessity, because if your child is coping up with the subjects and all that activities in the school then they won't be any problem with that, they won't call you personally to discuss about the child's development and all that.*" The above findings indicate that most of the ECCE centres are involving parents by encouraging them to participate and volunteering in school events such as sports-day, annual concert, and field trips, therefore this depends upon the willingness of the parents as well as the time available.

### 3.4.2. Effective Communication

Due to the lack of parental training, parents also believe effective communication can help in adjusting and harmonizing the upbringing practice at home and in centre. Commonly, the centres communicate with the parents through the use of communication or message book, sending small notes to parents, giving out circulars to inform on the school events, organizing parent-teachers meetings twice a year and also if necessary, parents get arrange to meet and communicate with the teacher individually. As cited in the following dialogues:

*"We have a message book, so if feel like telling the teacher something, we can just write the message and normally the teacher will reply us in the message book." (FG1/P4/p51).*

*"... occasional they will have feedback book, communication book, and then for every month, it's already pre-printed for the whole year, every month like if it's a five year old is a different book, six year old is a different book with different milestones that they should hit every month. So like for example socializing, they team, playing with his friends, if yes then the teacher will colour the list...Ya, a big list, if is still learning then the teacher will colour the small list. So there is like separate la, socializing, academic for different components, so the teacher will just update per month, monthly, then it will continuous every month until the end of the day lo. Then for six years old, they will change to another book with higher skills and then they will... like a feedback la" (FG2/P3/p56-57)*

Parents are more willing to discuss the problems of their children in the kindergarten with teachers and try to figure out the solutions. Besides, they are more willing to communicate with kindergarten teachers and present the problems of their children in home to teachers. In the interview, when parents were asked about how to communicate with children's teachers, most of parents agree that pick-up time is the best time to get the connection with teachers. Making phone calls and sending messages are important approaches to keep in touch with teachers. Additionally, some parents say that blogs, forums and other mobile apps bring more useful paths for parents to communicate with teachers and other parents [26].

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Parents' multi-dimensional views about ECCE quality validates the need to integrate their understanding in analyzing the quality of early childhood education programs since parents are responsible for making decisions associated with their children's enrollment in ECCE programs. The results obtained indicated that parents have none to very little knowledge and awareness on the current policy documents, rules and regulations regarding to Malaysian ECCE. Parents are well-informed on the procedures and practices adopted by the centre, yet they are not aware of which specific policy that those practices are complying to. In parents' responses, the indicators that determine the quality of ECCE which could be used in the process of establishing and improving quality in Malaysian ECCE. The recommendation could be done in many forms for instance provide the necessary information about the existing policies in the parents' handbook and centres can organize awareness talks in order to support parents. It is also recommended that ongoing

professional development, training and mentoring is necessary to maintain the high levels of skill and expertise required to respond fully to children. Curriculum developers or ECCE providers are recommended to revise program and professional standards periodically. In a nutshell, it is quite evident that parents are important stakeholders in ECCE and the choices they make about ECCE have high implications for their children, families as well as the early childhood care and education system. Hence, understanding parental perceptions of quality ECCE are necessary to ensure that ECCE programmes are of high quality and cater to the diverse needs of the children to maximize their potential and narrow the achievement gap.

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