UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

STRUCTURAL QUALITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS: A STAKEHOLDER-BASED CASE STUDY

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NADZMIN BINTI AHMAD NAZIR

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS

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I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the structural quality elements required in Malaysia's federally funded preschools from stakeholders' perspectives and identifies the challenges and barriers to their implementation within the Malaysian public preschool programme. While previous research has largely focused on process quality and its relationship with structural quality variables, limited attention has been given to structural quality features in promoting high-quality preschool programmes. Addressing this gap, the study aims to propose a framework to support the standardisation of structural quality based on stakeholders' inputs. A single case study design was adopted, involving policymakers, policy implementers, and policy receivers. Data were collected through interviews, document reviews, and visual instruments. Thematic analysis was utilised for interview and photographic data, while content analysis was employed for document analysis. The findings reveal three core structural quality elements essential in the Malaysian preschool context: human, conducive environment, and other supporting factors, with teacher assistants identified as a newly significant structural quality element. From the policymakers' perspective, four major challenges emerged - planning and monitoring, governance, evaluation and accreditation, and leader identification. The policy implementers' perspective revealed challenges related to resource constraints, capability and capacity, and adaptive implementation, while the policy receivers highlighted issues concerning parents' perceptions, expectations, involvement, and responsibility. The study further highlights the importance of collective support and shared responsibility among these tripartite stakeholders. This research adds to the field by proposing a framework that incorporates a 360-degree perspective of key stakeholders and outlines a minimum structural quality standard that allows for contextual and situational adaptation rather than a rigid uniform approach. This study contributes three principal novelties to the existing literature. First, it advances the understanding of structural quality elements in public preschools by integrating top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches and outside-in Katz's model of childcare quality through the perspectives of tripartite stakeholders, alongside Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory in conceptualising structural and process quality elements. Second, the study employed the visual technique as an alternative to conventional observation methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby contributing a relatively novel methodological approach to educational research. Third, the findings identified teacher assistants as a significant structural quality element in preschool programmes, despite receiving limited emphasis in previous studies. As an exploratory qualitative study, this research provides initial insights into preschool structural quality and recommends future quantitative studies apart from investigations in rural and remote areas to enable broader generalisation across Malaysia's public preschool sector.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

This thesis examines the need for policy on the standard structural quality of Malaysia's public federally funded preschools. Through the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB), Malaysia aspires to raise the quality of all preschools and encourage universal enrolment by 2020. Thus, it is only timely to gauge Malaysia's performance on that aspiration given that it has surpassed five years after the target date. The emphasis on the quality aspect in preschool education places high demand on relevant federal agencies to ensure standardisation of quality within the public providers is set in place prior to extending it to all other providers nationwide. This chapter presents the research background in section 1.2, followed by the statement of the problem in section 1.3. The research objectives and research questions of the thesis are later elaborated in section 1.4 and section 1.5, respectively. The scope of research is discussed in section 1.6, followed by significance of the research in section 1.7. Subsequently, the contribution of the study is highlighted in section 1.8, with study limitation is presented in section 1.9. This introduction chapter also highlights the ethical committee approval obtained for the study in section 1.10 and gives operational definitions of key terms in section 1.11, besides highlighting the summary of the chapter in section 1.12 Finally, this chapter concludes with a description on the organisation of chapters in the thesis by giving synopses of every chapter in section 1.13.

1.2 Research Background

The benefits of quality early childhood experiences are indisputable, as more studies have demonstrated the positive results of high-quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) on child outcomes (Akinola & Isunueo, 2024; Olanrewaju & Omeghie, 2024; Duncan et al., 2022). These benefits have recently spurred many countries to prioritise preschool programmes in their national plans and pursue a quality preschool agenda (Camovic & Becirovic, 2022; Fajinmi & Naqvi, 2025; Matjokana & Bipath, 2024).

Referring to the wide practice of experts in ECCE, the common categorisation aspects of quality in preschool programmes as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) is divided into two: (1) structural quality and (2) process quality (Harms et al., 1998). Structural quality refers to elements that are measurable and regulated such as class size, teachers' educational level, and teacher–child ratio (Hanno et al., 2021; Næsby & Sperling, 2022). Process quality, in contrast, refers to a more proximal factor of direct contact by caregivers who assist children in their physical, linguistic, intellectual, emotional, and social development (Cryer et al., 1999). Process quality includes teacher-child interactions, peer interactions, and management of learning materials (Eadie et al., 2022; Hartman et al., 2016; Slot et al., 2015, Zaslow et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that structural elements may not only be correlated with process variables, but essentially, they may be significant preconditions to process quality (Hanno et al, 2021; Hu et al., 2017; Slot et al., 2015). Process quality has been found to improve once structural quality is well regulated (Eadie et al, 2022; Hanno et al., 2021; Slot et al., 2015). In contrast, process quality could be hindered if structural quality is poor (Eadie et al, 2022; Hanno et al., 2021; Slot et al., 2018).

Today, early childhood education has been regarded as of paramount importance across the globe by governments, policymakers, and societies alike. The quality aspect of preschool education programmes is of concern worldwide. Challenges to improve and strengthen it are highlighted by Smidt and Embacher (2023, 2020) in the case of Austria, Hardy et al. (2021) in the case of Singapore, and Marjanovič (2021) in the case of Slovenia. Smidt and Embacher (2023, 2020) highlights the need for academic training for preschool teachers besides the need for ECCE research infrastructure establishment in Austria. Their propositions are being supported by Hardy et al. (2021) who emphasises the need for uplifting teachers, centres, and programmes, apart from enhancing the affordability and accessibility of preschool education in Singapore. Slovenia, on the other hand, according to Marjanovič (2021), needs a definition of national preschool quality standards at the legislative levels as well as the development of quality assessment procedures, both at self and external evaluation levels.

In the context of Malaysia, similar issues have been highlighted by Abdul Aziz et al. (2021), Ismail & Ismail (2015), Masnan et al. (2021), and Ghani et al. (2025). Coming from the policy implementation perspective, Abdul Aziz et al. (2021)

highlights few tasks to ensure successful implementation of preschool policies, ranging from effective dissemination of policies, and maintaining a sustainable monitoring mechanism, to coordination and integration aspects. Ismail & Ismail (2015) address the comprehensive and vital roles of preschool leaders. Their views are supported by Masnan et al. (2021), who stress the need to reflect and improve preschool management, apart from the need for higher teachers' quality. However, such actions require funding and coordinated support from the involved parties. Ghani et al. (2025) sums up the pertinent issues on preschool education that encompassed not only curriculum and teachers' training, but also equity and accessibility as well as assessment and monitoring of preschool centres.

ECCE in Malaysia has progressed substantially given the government's effort and emphasis in ensuring education and care for all children (Ministry of Education, 2013). This can be seen through concerted efforts from local communities, religious bodies, private entities, and charitable organisations as well as the increase in the government's budget for funding of ECCE (Kong, 2022). Several initiatives have been undertaken by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to ensure the quality provision of ECCE, namely the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Children, the enactment of children's education related acts, and the inclusion of preschool education as part of the formal education system through the Education Act 1996 (Ahmad et al., 2022; Kong, 2022; Mamat et al., 2023; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024).

1.3 Statements of Problem

Studies worldwide revealed that preschool education programmes in many of the countries are conducted by multiple agencies, resulting in quality variations of the service provided. For example, United States preschool programmes are provided at multiple government involvement levels (federal, state, and occasionally local) (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Dorsey, 2015; Vargas-Barón, 2019). Furthermore, the programmes are largely decentralised, with the state rather than the federal government shouldering primary responsibility (Brown et al., 2019; Hartman et al., 2016). Each programme is guided by specific goals for service provision and the target population. Thus, there are differences in programme design, community involvement, human resources, staff training, and quality assurance (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Dorsey, 2015). Denmark goes down even further, whereby the preschool programmes provision

is put under the obligation of municipalities or the local level. Denmark has 98 municipalities that each offers different types of preschool programmes (Næsby & Sperling, 2022). Although Danish preschools are publicly funded, the programmes are not regulated at the state level (Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Slot et al., 2015, 2018). Similar to the United States, Austrian preschool programmes are regulated by nine federal states. Consequently, Austrian preschool education is not subjected to a uniform level of legislation (Smidt & Embacher, 2023).

In the context of Asia, in China, for instance, most preschool programmes are funded by the private sector, while public preschools are funded by public agencies (Hu et al., 2016, 2017; Li et al., 2016; Li, 2023; Rao et al., 2023). Nevertheless, public preschools in China are of higher quality than private preschools due to their superior policies (Li, 2023; Rao et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023; Zhan & Fan, 2022). In Hong Kong, kindergartens are independent institutions, owned either by charitable organisations or private enterprises (Wong & Rao, 2015). According to them, kindergartens can be categorised as either the non-profit making or private independent kindergarten, essentially in the amount of financial resources received from the government. This situation is also true in Singapore, where preschool programmes are predominantly funded by the private sector, which include community organisations, religious groups, and social and business entities (Hardy et al., 2021). The Singaporean government only focuses on regulation and assigns the provision of preschool education to the private sector (Tan, 2017). Indonesian preschool programmes are quite similar to those of the United States where there are various preschool programmes with different purposes and administrations by multiple ministries (Madhakomala et al., 2022; Neni Komalasari et al., 2024; Siagian & Adriany, 2020). The two main preschools are kindergartens and playgroups under the authority of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Anisyah et al., 2025; Brinkman et al., 2017; Sulistyowati et al., 2025). Interestingly, Indonesia was among the countries with a standard national policy on structural quality (Brinkman et al., 2017; Elyana & Munawar, 2025; Madhakomala et al., 2022).

Preschool education in Malaysia is no different than the rest of the world, with both public and private sectors providing the service (Abdul Aziz et al., 2021; Hamid et al., 2020; Ghani et al., 2025; Nazir et al. 2023). Malaysian public preschools focus on social obligation functions and are funded by both the federal and state governments (Ahmad Nazir et al., 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Contrarily, private preschools

focus on profit-making without neglecting the main objective of providing quality preschool education (Hamid et al., 2020; Nazir et al. 2023). Principally, Malaysian state-funded preschools are operated by the state Islamic departments while federally funded preschool programmes are operated by the MoE, Department of Community Development, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (the local acronym is KEMAS), and the Department of National Unity and National Integration, Ministry of National Unity (the local acronym is JPNIN) (Ghani et al., 2025; Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022). In the past two decades, preschool institutions, which include state-funded, private, and non-governmental (NGO) centres, have proliferated nationwide (Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). According to them, such preschools complement federal government efforts at providing quality education to children aged four to six years, particularly for parents who can afford the service.

There are, however, important issues emerging as numerous agencies have started to provide preschool education. Since every agency has its own missions, expectations, orientations, priorities, and abilities, the situation evokes imbalance and unstandardised quality provided by each of these agencies (Kong, 2022; Nazir et al. 2023; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Preschool quality does not only vary among the wide array of preschool providers; it in fact varies even within the few public providers. As each of these agencies has its own core services besides providing preschool programme apart from being governed by different authorities, each is accountable to its individual sets of goals and objectives (Ahmad Nazir et al., 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Thus, resulting in preschool quality discrepancy, ranging from different daily operations to the very details of structural quality aspects (Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). According to Ahmad Nazir et al. (2022), the structural quality variation among the preschool providers includes, but is not limited to classroom size, teacher-student ratio, and teachers' qualifications. Besides that, different regulations set by different implementing agencies have also resulted in a vague and unclear guideline on the overall standard quality of public preschool programme (Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

Many prior studies emphasise on the process quality factors and its association with structural quality variables that contribute to the quality of preschool education (Eadie et al, 2022; Hanno et al., 2021; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2017; Slot et al., 2015, 2018). Focus has been directed towards the process quality factors as these yield the direct effect on the quality of preschool programmes (Næsby & Sperling, 2022;

Zaslow et al., 2021). Little has focused and looked deeply on the structural quality features towards promoting a quality preschool programme (Brinkman et al., 2017; Eadie et al., 2022; Hanno et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2017), particularly challenges and barriers in implementing a standard for structural quality among public preschool providers. The existing studies found on structural quality elements are either focusing on childcare aspects of ECCE (Abd Aziz et al., 2025; Abdul Aziz et al., 2021; Abdul Mutalib et al., 2024; Saad et al., 2023; Shdaimah et al., 2018; Rosli et al., 2024) or private providers of preschool education programme (Chan & Mazlina, 2021; Chin et al., 2021; Foong et al., 2018; Hamid et al., 2020; Tee et al., 2018).

Studies in the past largely centred on parents as consumers or the demand side of the chain, giving due emphasis to parents' voices as a proxy for children's needs (Bassok et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2021; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Demissie & Pearse, 2024; Hu et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2018; Kamaruddin et al., 2017). Discussions on the supply part or views from the governmental agencies providing preschool education are limited, or rather neglected (Cohrssen et al., 2023; Davis et al., 2021; D'Amico et al., 2023; Emberling, 2020; Ferrette, 2022; Hadley et al., 2024). Views of both demand and supply sides are being minimally studied and hard to locate. In the case of Malaysia, studies have looked into factors influencing parents' choice of preschool (Abd Aziz et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2018; Kamaruddin et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2022) and their satisfaction (Mohd Daud et al., 2017; Mustafa, 2016) towards the specific preschool programmes enrolled by their children. These studies have found the emerging trends or parents' preference towards certain types of preschool programme offered (Abd Aziz et al., 2025; Kamaruddin et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2022).

The MEB has established Malaysia's commitment to raise the quality of all preschools and encourage universal enrolment by 2020. The MEB 2013–2025 was subsequently succeeded by the National Education Plan (NEP) 2026–2035, which was launched in early 2026. The transition from the MEB to the NEP reflects an evolution in national educational priorities, moving beyond broad system-wide reforms toward strengthening educational resilience, innovation, and future readiness. While the MEB primarily emphasised enhancing educational quality through structural, governance, and pedagogical improvements, the NEP expands this agenda by addressing emerging challenges associated with technological advancement, changing workforce demands, and sustainable human capital development. This progression underscores the growing

need for educational quality frameworks that are adaptable, responsive to stakeholder expectations, and aligned with evolving societal and economic requirements.

Prior to MEB, the National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC) was also introduced and became part of the National Education Act 1996 (Ghani et al., 2025; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024). The NSPC establishes that all preschools, regardless of their types, whether private or government-owned are required to adhere to the NSPC (Hamid et al., 2020; Mamat et al., 2023; Rahmatullah et al., 2021; Ramasamy et al., 2024). The NSPC however, focuses purely on the curriculum aspect of preschool programmes, which concentrates on one element of preschool quality that is process quality.

Later, the implementation of the Preschool Curriculum 2026 (KP2026), officially introduced nationwide at the beginning of the January 2026 school session, represents a substantial advancement from the NSPC. Whereas the NSPC focused primarily on developmental benchmarks and school readiness through prescribed learning outcomes, KP2026 adopts a competency-based, child-centred approach that prioritises holistic child development, socio-emotional wellbeing, bilingual competence, and play-based learning. This curricular transition aligns with Malaysia's broader educational reform agenda outlined in the NEP 2026–2035, which aims to nurture future-ready learners possessing the knowledge, skills, values, and adaptability necessary to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven environment.

Though Malaysia has the National Standard Preschool Quality (NSPQ) to supplement the NSPC, a similar standard guideline focusing exclusively on structural quality variables is still absent as NSPQ focuses both on structural and process quality (Ministry of Education, 2013). Should this continue to be the case, whereby structural quality elements are not strategically and systematically highlighted in the policy documents, it would perhaps result in the persistence of quality variation among preschool providers and widen the gap of quality.

In response to changing educational demands and the increasing emphasis on evidence-based quality assurance, the MoE introduced NSPQ 2.0 as an enhanced version of the original framework. Officially implemented in 2021, NSPQ 2.0 was designed to strengthen quality assurance practices and improve the effectiveness of preschool self-assessment processes. The revised framework is administered through the *Sistem Maklumat Prasekolah Kebangsaan* (SMPK), which facilitates more

systematic data management, reporting, and monitoring of key preschool quality indicators.

With both MEB and NEP stressing on the importance of improving the quality of ECCE, it is essential that Malaysia has a NSPC-alike guideline that looks exclusively after the standardisation of structural quality elements in preschool programme. Perhaps such existence would not only address the issue of policy absence but also weak implementation of structural quality aspects. The emphasis on quality aspect in preschool education calls for relevant federal agencies to set a standard of quality within the public providers prior to extending it to all other providers nationwide. Therefore, in view of enhancing process quality, the focus should be directed towards improving the structural quality aspects as well. Hence, for this reason, it is essential that the government intervenes at the right juncture, focusing on the areas that are directly under its jurisdiction to ensure a high-quality public preschool, particularly on structural aspects. Therefore, the policy implementation of structural quality in Malaysian public preschools based on multiple stakeholders' perspectives is set to be the aim for this study.

1.4 Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to explore the structural quality elements that influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives. In addition, this study aims at investigating stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme.. There are very few studies investigating the structural quality aspects of Malaysian public preschool programmes, particularly from both perspectives; the federal agencies providing the service, and the parents who are receiving the service on behalf of their children. Therefore, this study will give voices to the federal agencies providing the preschool programme as the supply part of the chain apart from parents on the demand side, in order to achieve the aspiration highlighted in MEB. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1.4.1 Research Objective 1 – Structural Quality Elements Required

a) To explore the structural quality elements that influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives.

1.4.2 Research Objective 2 – Structural Quality Implementation

a) To investigate stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme.
b) To examine the extent to which these challenges act as barriers to the implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia.

1.4.3 Research Objective 3 – Structural Quality Framework

a) To develop a framework for ensuring standardisation of structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated in correspondence to the research objectives:

1.5.1 Research Question 1 – Structural Quality Elements Required

a) What structural quality elements influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?

1.5.2 Research Question 2 – Structural Quality Implementation

a) How do stakeholders experience and interpret challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?
b) To what extent do these implementation challenges constitute barriers to achieving standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia?

1.5.3 Research Question 3 – Structural Quality Framework

a) How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework for ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools?

1.6 Scope of Research

First and foremost, the scope of the research concerns preschool education programme with emphasis on structural quality elements of public preschools in Malaysia. Structural quality is an alternative approach or view of preschool programme quality, specifically when resources are limited. Process quality varies vastly as it is dynamic, whereas structural quality can be conveniently regulated by policy and therefore, should be emphasised. Efforts, however, have been directed towards increasing preschool process quality instead of structural quality, thus policy implementation of public preschool structural quality has been undermined and neglected.

Secondly, there are gaps in Malaysian public education policy implementation. In this study, the main issue addressed is quality discrepancies in preschool programme variation, which stems from multiple policy implementation approaches. As highlighted in the earlier part of the chapter, public preschool education in Malaysia is presently being provided by three different agencies, namely MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN. However, this research is a single case study on MoE as the lead agency and the main reference point regarding preschool education in Malaysia. Selecting MoE as the case study puts this research at the advantage of the helicopter's view on the issue as the

ministry's tasks coverage ranges not only from the initial stage of policy drafting but also include policy implementing as well as the final phase of monitoring and assessing the country's overall preschool education programme.

Thirdly, this study is confined to the area of Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya due to practicality, feasibility, and familiarity with the context, apart from the fact that preschool programme in Putrajaya resembles a comprehensive setting for Putrajaya population since there is no other state in Malaysia that has a 100 percent rate of primary schools with annex preschool programme in that individual school. The geographically bounded nature of the study may limit the applicability and transferability of the findings across diverse contexts. Although the findings provide valuable insights into the perspectives of key informants within the selected locality, their generalisability to other regions, especially rural settings with differing contextual characteristics, should be interpreted with caution. Thus, implying national generalisation beyond the evidence should be avoided.

Next, the study looks at both perspectives, the federal agencies providing the service and the parents who are receiving the service on behalf of their children, by employing the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches for the supply side, and the Katz model on perspectives of childcare quality for the demand side. The three groups of key stakeholders involved from the supply side are government officials, preschool experts, and preschool teachers, while the demand side covers the parents who send their children to MoE preschool programmes and act as proxies to their children. Through this approach, the researcher could understand the actual issue of preschool quality, particularly the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality among public preschools in Malaysia. Apart from that, through the interviews, the researcher would be able to gauge on the similarities and differences of perspectives among these key stakeholders. Thus, the research could obtain two-sided stakeholders' perspectives; both from the demand and supply side so that better and holistic views on the policy implementation of structural quality in public preschool programme could be provided.

Finally, this study employed qualitative method by utilising in-depth semi-structured interview, autophotography/photovoice, and document review. The key informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Subsequently, thematic analysis was applied to analyse the interviews and photos, while content analysis was employed to analyse the documents reviewed.

1.7 Significance of Research

This study is important for several reasons. First, it is an attempt to explore and enlighten the country on the need for an improvement of policy on standard structural quality for Malaysian federally funded preschools, as a complementary to the existing policy document on process quality elements that Malaysia currently has, which is NSPC. Therefore, this study presents findings and contributes to the discussions of a case study for Malaysia federal agency providing the preschool education programme. This could contribute to inform further measures that could determine ways to improve the provision of structural quality of public preschools in Malaysia, as this study purports to investigate the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard for structural quality of Malaysian federally funded preschools.

Secondly, this study provides substantive evidence for policymakers to start giving due emphasis to structural quality aspects of preschool education and offers a sound premise upon which relevant policies can be devised. This research is poised to change the way policymakers choose to make policy. The significance in practice lies in the fact that this research stands to change the practice of decision-making among multiple federal-funded preschool agencies whereby they are used to working in silos. This research serves to change policymaking in that it could change the way each individual agency with specific responsibilities sees its roles as comparative to others, despite trying to be a champion for each of the programmes implemented. It has been argued that the reason public sector decision makers operate differently is because their bottom line is not concretely defined. This research perhaps provides a foundation that would allow the government to clearly define its bottom line and be able to make private sector-like decisions in the face of varying stakeholders and interest groups. Such decisions could better serve the masses.

Thirdly, in addition to those policymakers that are invested in this research, other prospective beneficiaries include parents and children, as well as preschool experts and educators. This study recognises the significant implications that it may contribute to the improvement of preschool education policy. The identification of more effective mechanisms for policy filtering and standardisation may enhance the quality and consistency of public preschool systems, thereby providing children with greater access to a more standardised and well-functioning early childhood education environment. While preschool experts have the advantage of voicing out the standard

structural quality elements required for public preschools once a specific policy is in place, educators could effortlessly teach the children with crystal-clear guidelines provided by these experts.

Finally, this study adds to the existing literature on preschool quality with reference to structural quality elements as well as both the demand and supply side stakeholders of preschool education programmes. Thus, it enhances and extends the existing literature on public preschool education programmes in Malaysia.

1.8 Contributions of Study

The quality of education has always been of a public interest globally. This research has investigated the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on triparty stakeholders' perspectives (policymakers or the top-downers, policy implementers or the bottom-uppers, and policy receivers or the outside-inners). This study also examined the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme apart from trying to understand to what extent these challenges become barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia. The findings from this study would perhaps share some contributions towards the betterment of the preschool system that could benefit not only the children, parents, and teachers, but also the policymakers, policy implementers, and society as a whole. The contributions made by these findings encompassing of theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects are summarised as follows:

1.8.1 Theoretical Contributions

There are a couple of contributions of the study in terms of theoretical aspects:

a) Firstly, even though this research was mainly on Malaysian context, it adds to the understanding of structural quality elements required through a different and diverse lens and context. Specifically, it enhances understanding on the structural quality elements required in public preschools through the lenses of policymakers, policy implementers, and policy receivers by employing the

top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches for the supply side that comprises of policymakers and policy implementers, with the injection of Katz model on perspectives of childcare quality for the demand side of policy receivers. By examining the stakeholders' views towards structural quality, it helps to understand 'the story' behind their response. Therefore, it contributes to the body of knowledge about structural quality elements from multiple stakeholders' perspectives, which enhances the knowledge in relation to the implementation of structural quality in public preschools holistically.

b) In addition, this study adopted the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory in the definition of structural and process quality elements of preschool quality, similar to other found prior studies.

1.8.2 Methodological Contributions

The study also recorded a number of methodological contributions, namely:

a) This study addressed the methodology gap whereby most studies in the past employed quantitative method. This research fills the gap by conducting the study using qualitative approach.

b) Next, this research utilises visual method, particularly the autophotography/photovoice technique, as an alternative to the conventional observations due to strict restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a fairly new methodological approach for studying education given the common observation method practiced in the field. This study examined images of preschools' surrounding environments, classrooms, and infrastructure as shared by the key informants. The 'check and balance' elements were introduced when employing the auto-photography/photovoice technique to confirm on the issues highlighted by the informants during their interviews. It would be challenging to record or comprehend the information that was discussed during the interviews if the evidence were not accompanied by photographs. Therefore, in this study better proofs were presented using the photo analysis technique.

c) Finally, this study adopted a case study design involving three methods of data collection (1) interview as the primary data, (2) auto-photography/photovoice,

and (3) document review as the secondary data. Each of these methods offers diverse and triangulation of multiple data approaches for gathering rich and in-depth qualitative insights. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena studied.

1.8.3 Empirical Contributions

And lastly, there are several empirical contributions of this study, which include:

a) Firstly, this research has investigated the structural quality elements required in Malaysian public preschools. It provided a clear description on the standard structural quality required in public preschools based on triparty stakeholders' perspectives. Even though there has been prior research on structural quality, this research has provided insights from both the supply side stakeholders' point of view that covers top-down perspectives of policymakers and bottom-up views of policy implementers, and demand side that centres on outside-in viewpoints of policy receivers.

b) Secondly, this study emphasised on the human factors, conducive environment factors, and other supporting factors as the key elements of structural quality elements required in Malaysia preschool education. In particular, this research has identified a new element of structural quality elements required, that is teacher assistant, which has merely been highlighted in other earlier studies.

c) Thirdly, this research also identified the challenges that may affect the implementation of standard structural quality in public preschools. It emphasised diverse challenges faced by different key stakeholders in implementing a standard structural quality in a public preschool programme and its interpretations as perceived by multiple stakeholders which influence its practice. Although there exists some common ground among the stakeholders, the interpretations by each group seemed varied. This is vital particularly for the policymakers to put themselves in the policy implementers' shoes (who are the actual actors on the ground) by giving more thoughts prior to the implementation of any policy. This study revealed that too many directives at multiple levels by MoE, JPWP, and schools have to some extent not only overburden, but also disappoint the preschool teachers.

d) Next, whilst the findings corroborated previous literature discussing on the barriers which may affect the implementation of standard structural quality in public preschools, this research contributed an understanding of how teachers (the actual implementers on the ground) may in reality exercise a considerable degree of adaptation within the settings. In other words, preschool teachers in this study would find ways to help the preschool children even though they were not provided with sufficient structural quality elements in the settings. This study provided the insights of personal commitment which helped them to embrace the teaching profession due to religious beliefs and moral values as well as caring cultural practice.

e) In addition, this research highlighted the importance of parents' involvement and responsibility towards the education of their children as the policy receivers. This is because their current perception and expectation towards policymakers and policy implementers are not enough to support the success of preschool education of their children.

f) Moreover, the findings from this research discovered the significance of collective support and shared responsibility required among the triparty stakeholders.

g) Though some standard is needed to standardise the structural quality elements, in the case of Malaysia, the very much needed by preschool programme in Malaysia is not a rigid standard, but rather a minimum standard with contextualised or situational approach.

h) Perhaps the ultimate novelty of the study is the framework for ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools, developed from the translation of responses from the triparty stakeholders' perspectives.

1.9 Limitations of Study

Every study has its own limitations and challenges that might be contributed by the constraints of data, resources, and time to complete the entire research. Hence, it is imperative to recognise such constraints so that it will do justice to the problem encountered during the conduct of the research.

For this study in particular, it commenced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, data collection was conducted during the pandemic period itself. Since such a pandemic has no precedent, it has imposed a few challenges to the study, which were:

a) The study utilised more than one qualitative data collection techniques, which are the conventional face-to-face interview and online interview depending on the convenience of the key informants. Thus, the researcher reserves the fact that such mixture of methods might contribute to the discrepancy of data collected.
b) Under certain circumstances where conventional face-to-face interview was not possible due to school closure during lockdown, it was being replaced with an online interview method. Online interview has its own downsides and disadvantages. In particular, it limits the researcher's ability to fully and directly observe the key informants' gestures and body language.
c) Direct observations at schools or sites were also not possible due to lockdown imposed during the pandemic hit. Thus, observations were replaced with photo analysis based on photos shared by the key informants involving preschool teachers and parents, a technique known as autophotography/photovoice. However, the researcher did have an opportunity to visit a couple of preschools to confirm on the situation as per the shared photos by the key informants.
d) Information shared by parents and preschool teachers were based on their limited experiences or time spent during the 2020 school session due to lockdown measure because of the pandemic.

Apart from the pandemic related challenges, there were several other limitations that should be acknowledged, namely:

a) The initially identified policymaker, Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD), MoE redirected the researcher to the Preschool Unit of School Management Division (SMD), MoE, the operational policymaker. Thus, only the perspective of operational policymaking is being elaborated in this study, while the macro policy making standpoint is still absence. In essence, the holistic perspective of policymaking was not able to be captured in this study.

b) A major limitation of this study is its strict confinement to a particular time period that was up to the year of 2025, which substantially constrains the interpretation of findings on the structural quality of preschool programmes in Malaysia. Structural quality indicators, including teacher qualifications, child–teacher ratios, physical infrastructure, and regulatory compliance, are highly sensitive to policy revisions, funding priorities, and implementation of national early childhood education reforms. By capturing data only within a limited timeframe, the study is unable to account for temporal variations or policy-driven changes that may significantly alter structural conditions in preschools. Consequently, the findings provide only a snapshot of structural quality rather than a sustained or evolving assessment, thereby limiting their applicability to other periods and reducing the strength of longitudinal or policy-related inferences.

c) While this study provides significant insights into structural quality of preschool programmes, its findings are subject to limitations in the aspect of documents analysed given the study period covered up till the year of 2025. The document analysis was exclusively based on the prior macro policy and preschool specific documents, namely Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV), 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan, and MEB as well as NSPC, NSPQ, and Preschool Management Guideline. While all these documents not only provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the educational strategies of that period, but it may also not reflect the most recent policy shifts or emerging preschool priorities implemented in the current version. Consequently, some of the findings may describe a transitional or historical state rather than the current educational landscape. This reliance on the previous documents was necessary due to the unavailability of finalised current documents at the time of analysis.

d) The document review was based on a combination of English and Bahasa Melayu documents, whereby the macro policy documents were in English while the preschool specific documents were in Bahasa Melayu. Thus, there might be concerns that the keywords selected in Bahasa Melayu might have different connotations and understandings among the preschool experts.

e) The study was confined to the area of Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya, characterised by predominantly urban/sub urban community structure. This

geographic limitation may affect the applicability of the findings to other diverse settings. As such, while the results provide valuable insights of the key informants in this specific locality, caution should be exercised in generalising these findings to other areas, particularly the rural areas.

1.10 Ethical Committee

This research has obtained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC), UiTM through reference letter dated 30th September 2020 (refer to Appendix 1). Prior to approval from REC, the research has also undergone and acquired the approval from the ethical committee at the faculty level, the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies.

1.11 Operational Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, several terms are defined as follows:

1.11.1 ECCE

ECCE, defined as the phase from birth to six years old (Anders, 2021; Bakken et al., 2017; Burchinal, 2018; Camovic & Becirovic, 2022), has more to offer than readiness for formal primary school. ECCE aims at the holistic development of children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing (Bakken et al., 2017; Cohrssen et al., 2023). Later throughout the chapter, a distinction is made between kindergartens for educational purposes and nurseries for daycare provision. For analytical purposes, as this study is focusing on the structural quality elements of public preschools in Malaysia, this thesis uses the term ECCE to refer only to educational services offered to children prior to primary education.

1.11.2 Preschool

Preschool is an establishment where children are being prepared to enter a social and academic based setting (Bakken et al., 2017; Fajinmi & Naqvi, 2025; Megalonidou,

2020). In Malaysia, children at the age of four to six years old are enrolled at preschools under the supervision of qualified preschool teachers, as a preparation to be in a structured academic environment once they enter year one of primary school (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Preschool institutions in Bahasa Melayu include *tabika*, *tadika*, and *prasekolah*. Under the Education Act 1996 (Act 550), preschools are defined as centres providing preschool education for 10 or more children (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021, Rosli et al., 2024). Preschool education in Malaysia is being provided by both public and private sectors. Public preschools are funded both by the federal and state government (Kong, 2022). Federal-funded preschool programmes are being provided by three different agencies, namely MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN. Meanwhile, state-funded preschools basically are run by the respective State Islamic Religious Department. Private preschools on the other hand, are either run by the private sector or non-governmental organisation (NGO). Preschools operated by these providers complement the federal government's effort in providing quality education to children. This study will focus exclusively on the federal-funded preschool programmes, particularly *prasekolah* MoE, and will use the words preschool and kindergarten interchangeably.

1.11.3 Preschool Quality

Preschool quality as agreed by most scholars, is categorised into two: (1) structural quality and (2) process quality (Cryer et al., 1999; Brinkman et al., 2017; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Slot et al., 2015, 2018; Marjanovič, 2021). Generally, researchers have suggested that structural quality and process quality have a direct relationship between them; that is structural quality predicts process quality (Hanno et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2016; Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Slot et al., 2015). In this study context, preschool quality refers solely to structural quality.

1.11.4 Structural Quality

Structural quality refers to elements that could be regulated or controlled by policies set by the relevant government agencies such as class size, children-teacher ratio, qualifications and salaries of teachers and staff as well as schools' infrastructure

(Slot et al., 2015; Marjanovič, 2021). These indicators typically have an indirect effect on the development and growth of children (Hanno et al., 2021; Næsby & Sperling, 2022). This study will focus primarily on the structural quality aspects rather than process quality elements.

1.11.5 Process Quality

Process quality directly shapes the educational experiences of children through interactions and manipulation of learning materials (Eadie et al., 2022; Zaslow et al., 2021). Process quality refers to the interactive activities that children experience in classrooms such as teacher-child interactions, peer interactions, and management of learning materials (Eadie et al., 2022; Hartman et al., 2016; Slot et al., 2015, Zaslow et al., 2021). Such indicators have direct effect factor to children. These elements, however, are not included in the scope of the study.

1.11.6 Stakeholders

In the context of this study, stakeholders refer to individuals or groups who have a vested interest in, influence over, or are affected by the planning, implementation, management, and outcomes of preschool education programmes. The concept of stakeholders in education generally encompasses actors who directly or indirectly contribute to educational decision-making, policy implementation, and service delivery processes. Within early childhood education, stakeholders play a critical role in shaping programme quality, governance, resource allocation, and children's educational experiences through their respective responsibilities and interactions. Consistent with stakeholder theory, educational quality is viewed as a shared responsibility involving multiple actors whose perspectives collectively influence institutional effectiveness and policy outcomes (Hadley et al., 2024). Operationally, this study categorises preschool stakeholders into three principal groups: (1) policymakers and preschool experts who are involved in policy formulation and strategic decision-making; (2) government officials and preschool teachers who function as policy implementers and are directly responsible for programme administration and service delivery; and (3) parents as policy recipients whose children are enrolled in federally funded preschool programmes. These stakeholder groups were selected because they represent the key

actors involved in the development, implementation, and utilisation of preschool services and are therefore well positioned to provide informed perspectives regarding the structural quality requirements of Malaysian federally funded preschools.

1.12 Summary of Chapter

This opening chapter gives an overview of the study by reviewing the current state of structural quality elements in public preschool programme, particularly in Malaysia setting. It presented the research questions and operational definition of key terms in guiding this thesis, as well as the research scope to address these inquiries. It also highlighted the significance and limitations of the research while wrapping up with the study contributions.

1.13 Organisation of Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter Two and Three familiarise the readers on the background of the study. Chapter Four presents the findings for the study while Chapter Five elaborates and discusses on the findings. Finally, Chapter Six is the concluding chapter.

Chapter Two provides an overview of ECCE and preschool from the perspectives of the global landscape and Malaysian context. The evolution and evaluation of preschool education in Malaysia are also deliberated in this chapter. The definitions of preschool quality are being reviewed, while elements of structural and process quality are also discussed. The issues and challenges faced regarding policy implementation of structural quality preschool provision are explored in the later part of the chapter. The theories employed in coming up with the proposed theoretical framework are also discussed in this chapter. Finally, a summary for the chapter highlights the important facts from the literature reviews.

Chapter Three introduces the research design that describes the methodology, design, and instrument of the research. The chapter starts with a section on research philosophy, followed by research methodology, research design, and research instrument, as well as a discussion on unit of analysis, sample size and sampling procedure. The descriptions of activities prior to data collection are also discussed along with data collection and data analysis phases. Finally, the issues of validity and

reliability of research quality are also deliberated before a summary section concludes the chapter.

Chapter Four presents and describes on the research findings. This chapter presents the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews, autophotography/photovoice, and document review. NVivo 13 was utilised to help organise and sort the data sets and extract salient thematic patterns from the three instruments employed.

Chapter Five further elaborates and discusses on the research findings. Three main research objectives are used to structure the chapter along with the theories anchoring the findings. The research objectives were transformed into statements whereby the significant results and themes emerged are discussed along with the support from the previous literature reviews and the findings of the study.

Chapter Six puts a concluding remark. This final chapter deliberates on the research summary, apart from reiterating the contributions of the study and highlighting the implications to policy and practice. It also puts forward recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into nine sections. This first section 2.1 introduces the chapter followed by section 2.2, which gives an overview of ECCE and preschool from the perspectives of global setting. The third section 2.3 later presents the same scenario in the uniquely Malaysian landscape, covering the evolution as well as the evaluation of preschool programmes in Malaysia. The fourth section 2.4 defines the preschool quality whereby definitions of structural and process quality as well as the relations between the two elements are also discussed. The fifth section 2.5 explores the issues and challenges related to policy implementation of quality preschool provision, while the sixth section 2.6 gives a lengthy view on the relevant theories to the study, which includes Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory and policy implementation theories. The underpinning theory and model of this study are discussed exclusively in section 2.7 followed by the next section of 2.8 that focuses on the proposed research framework. Finally, the summary in section 2.9 then recaps all the main ideas discussed in every section of this chapter.

2.2 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Preschool – Global Landscape

In 2016, The United Nations (UN) ratified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to serve as benchmarks for every nation to ensure global prosperity, protection of the planet, and eradication of poverty (UN, 2015). Goal Four of the SDGs is quality education, and it ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015). It clearly spells out a unique goal focusing solely on education. This specific goal calls for a quality education; not merely providing access to any education. It is a huge step in ensuring that all children have a quality education, right from the start of preschool programme up to the tertiary level. Thus, quality education should begin at the entry point of education that is preschool programme.

ECCE stands for early childhood care and education. It is a general term that refers to educational programmes tailored for children from birth to six years of age. ECCE programmes involve both elements of physical care and education designed for children under compulsory school age (Duncan et al., 2022; Fajinmi & Naqvi, 2025; Megalonidou, 2020). Apart from their substantial contribution to cognitive stimulation, socialisation, child development, and early education, scholars claim that they are also essential services for working parents (Bakken et al., 2017; Sahoo & Jena, 2022; Zhan & Fan, 2022). ECCE comprises of two parts: (1) programmes for young toddlers aged zero to three focusing on childcare elements, often referred to as nursery or day care, while (2) the education part of the programmes called preschool or kindergarten, are meant for older children aged four and above (Bakken et al., 2017; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

ECCE programmes comprise of a part-day and full-day programmes, beneath a wide range of education, health, and social welfare agencies, funded and provided by both the public and private sectors in a variety of ways. ECCE programmes may be (1) funded and delivered by public sector where the predominant pattern is observed in the Nordic countries; (2) funded by public sector, but delivered by private sector as in the Netherlands and Germany; or (3) include a combination of both as in many of the less developed countries such as in Brazil and most of Africa (Anders, 2021; Guerriero, 2017; Pearson, 2015; Petitclerc et al., 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2018). They may be provided for free, particularly programmes delivered under education agencies, or they may impose a charge of income-related fees. But, in the majority of Europe, they are profoundly funded by the government (Petitclerc et al., 2017).

ECCE systems differ across countries in terms of the age range and governing body responsible. About 50 percent of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have a unitary system for the age range zero to five, or sometimes until eight years of age (Guerriero, 2017). And the MoE is identified as the responsible governing body in these countries. In countries with a split system whereby nurseries and preschools are functioning independently, the Ministry of Social Affairs or the like is responsible for provisions to children aged zero to two, whereas MoE is usually responsible for the preschool provisions of children starting at age three (Guerriero, 2017; Petitclerc et al., 2017; Slot, 2015). In some European countries, children are guaranteed a place when they reach a certain age; for instance, as early as age one in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland; and age three in Germany (Guerriero, 2017;

Petitclerc et al., 2017). In African and Asian countries however, children are permitted to enter the ECCE programme at a later age when they are three or four years old, and it ends when compulsory primary school begins at age five, six or seven. Limited access is also observed in most of the countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Pearson, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2018).

Additionally, the extent of centralisation varies across countries, with some countries having a strong localised policy at the state level, such as the United States and Germany (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Guerriero, 2017; Vargas-Barón, 2019), indirectly empowering the state level governance. While others are more centralised like Malaysia and Singapore, implicitly implying the central roles played. Moreover, countries adopt different policies in addressing educational inequalities with some countries applying targeted approaches, such as the United States and the Netherlands (Anders, 2021; Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020), whereas Indonesia and China are more flexible in offering the preschool programme policy (Li, 2023; Madhakomala et al., 2022; Neni Komalasari et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2023). Consequently, selection effects in the usage of provisions exist, and more prominently, the variations of quality provision (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Li, 2023; Madhakomala et al., 2022; Melhuish, 2016; Slot et al., 2015).

ECCE in the United States, for example, is known with different names, such as childcare, day care, preschool, and prekindergarten (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Dorsey, 2015). It is offered in a variety of settings; from within a centre, within a home, and within the public or private school (Emberling, 2020; Hartman et al., 2016). Some programmes are offered at little or no cost to parents, particularly for low-income parents, while others may cost a high proportion of parents' income (Dorsey, 2015; Merrill et al., 2020). Majority of ECCE programmes that serve children from birth through age of five are private fee-based services (Hartman et al., 2016; Kaçan & Karayol, 2021). There are some distinguished state-funded or federal-funded programmes as well, but currently majority of these programmes are not available to all eligible aged children within the state (Dorsey, 2015; Kaçan & Karayol, 2021). Early Head Start and Head Start are some examples of the federal-funded programmes that prepare young children from low-income families for a formal school setting (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Dorsey, 2015; Merrill et al., 2020; Rodriguez & McKee, 2021). Early Head Start provides ECCE programme for children from birth until three years old, while Head Start programmes are offered to eligible families with children aged three to five (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Merrill et al., 2020; Rodriguez & McKee, 2021;

Sedgwick, 2016). ECCE in the United States is largely decentralised, with primary responsibility lies at the state level, rather than federal (Kaçan & Karayol, 2021; Vargas-Barón, 2019); thus, creating a barrier to the development of a national system of ECCE. The policymaking involving federal government focuses primarily on providing childcare services for mothers to gain entry to the labour market (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020). While at the state level, policy decisions are focusing more on eligibility, extent of the supply and availability of services, allocation of services and benefits as well as scope and quality of services, including health and safety standards (Rodriguez & McKee, 2021).

Meanwhile, Denmark offers a universal ECCE system with an enrolment rate of 97 percent of all three to five years old children (Slot et al., 2018). Preschools are funded by public sector, organised by and under the responsibility of local municipalities that are accountable to ensure the provision of preschools (Slot et al., 2015, 2018). Each municipality is responsible in ensuring the availability of preschools in its individual area, with its main task of monitoring the educational quality as well as the basic safety and hygiene. Denmark's ECCE system is considered a high-level public expenditure as compared to other countries (Slot et al., 2018), and by comparatively high quality in terms of structural characteristics (Næsby & Sperling, 2022). For example, the average child-teacher ratio for pre-schoolers is 7:1, while the corresponding ratio in the United States and Canada is 12:1 (Petitclerc et al., 2017). However, there is potentially considerable variation across municipalities, as the child-teacher ratio is not regulated by the state. Denmark has no standardised national curriculum, but rather a locally defined curriculum, generally at the institutional level (Slot et al., 2018).

Unlike Denmark, preschools in Austria are funded by both public and private sectors (Embacher & Smidt, 2023). Austria covers children at the age of three to six years old under its kindergarten programme (Smidt & Embacher, 2023). Since 2009, children in Austria have been made compulsory to attend the final preschool year, that is the year prior to school enrolment (Smidt & Embacher, 2020). Similar to the United States, the preschool system in Austria is regulated at nine Austrian federal states, which implies that there is no standard regulation for preschool education (Smidt, 2018). The only regulated aspect at the federal level is the vocational education of the preschool staff (Embacher & Smidt, 2023).

In the context of Asia, children aged three to six in China attend full-day programmes in kindergartens, while children from aged zero to three attend nurseries

(Chen & Yang, 2024; Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Li et al., 2016). While both the public and private sectors each serve the same student population size in China, in real numbers, there were more private centres as compared to public ones (Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Li, 2023; Tang et al., 2023). Public preschool programmes are funded by a range of public sectors, including city or state level education department, public service agencies, and other public service institutions (He & Ping, 2024; Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Li et al., 2016). Majority public kindergartens received full funding from the government (Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Li, 2023). Therefore, public kindergartens in China tend to be better funded, better equipped, and have a stable teaching force of better qualified teachers (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Li et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2023). And among public kindergartens, those provided by state or city level MoE tend to be of higher quality mainly due to their superior policies (Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Li et al., 2016; Rao et al., 2023). Private kindergartens fall short of its public counterparts in terms of quality (Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Li, 2023). As non-recipients of government funding, private centres are not subjected to quality rating programmes (Li, 2023; Rao et al., 2023), suggesting a wide range in quality, a current reality of China's private ECCE landscape.

Similarly, in Hong Kong, children aged three to six generally attend kindergarten programmes (Li, 2023). Kindergartens in Hong Kong are independent institutions, owned, and run either by charitable organisations or private enterprises (Wong & Rao, 2015). They can be categorised as either the non-profit making or private independent kindergarten essentially in the amount of financial resources received from the government (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Wong & Rao, 2015).

In Singapore, however, there are two dominant types of ECCE programmes: kindergartens and childcare centres. In addition to playing an educational role, childcare centres cater to the needs of working parents whose children require adult supervision outside regular school hours (Tan, 2016). Kindergartens, on the other hand, play an exclusively educational function (Tan, 2017). Apart from that, there are also playgroups that offer places for children to learn and socialize through structured and unstructured play, given its informal curriculum (Hardy et al., 2021). About 99 percent of all children going to year one of primary school in Singapore had attended at least one year of preschool education (Pujianti et al., 2025; Tan, 2016, 2017). Singapore's ECCE programme is predominantly private sector driven by the community foundations, religious bodies, as well as social and business entities (Hardy et al., 2021; Tan, 2017).

The Singaporean government only plays a regulatory role and adopted a 'light-touch' approach in preschool education development to permit for a diverse landscape in meeting the different needs of parents, leaving the provision of preschool education primarily to private sector (Tan, 2017). An autonomous agency, Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), was established in 2013 and functions as the governing and development authority for the ECCE sector in Singapore (Tan, 2016). ECCE quality in Singapore is monitored by licensing frameworks and ad-hoc checks by government agencies (Hardy et al., 2021; Tan, 2016). The 2011 Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK) encourages the voluntary participation of ECCE operators for a better standing in the market (Tan, 2016, 2017). It was not until 2013 that Singaporean government established public kindergartens to provide for quality and affordable preschool education (Hardy et al., 2021; Tan, 2017). While the number of public kindergartens was steadily increased from five in 2013 to 15 by 2016, it is not likely that these kindergartens will expand in the near future (Tan, 2016). Rather, they are set to be role-models for the market, for what an affordable yet high-quality ECCE provision may look like (Tan, 2016, 2017). Preschools in Singapore is non-obligatory and not part of the formal education system; it is voluntary in nature and involves fee paying (Pujianti et al., 2025; Tan, 2017).

Almost similar to Singapore, several types of ECCE services also exist in Indonesia. They serve different purposes and are managed by various agencies. ECCE in Indonesia is provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), and the National Family Planning Board (the local acronym is BKKBN) in at least eight different forms of preschool programmes (Brinkman et al., 2017; Madhakomala et al., 2022). The two main ones are kindergarten and playgroup that are under the jurisdiction of MoEC (Brinkman et al., 2017; Elyana & Munawar, 2025). Both kindergartens and playgroups focus on education with a higher emphasis on play for playgroups, while a higher academic focus for kindergartens (Pujianti et al., 2025; Tan, 2016). The vast majority of kindergarten services, however, were provided by the private sector with little public investment. While the ECCE services in Indonesia were intended to be age specific, the age of children attending such services were not always as neat, and age cut-offs are hard to enforce due to local conditions, service availability, and family preferences (Madhakomala et al., 2022; Neni Komalasari et al., 2024; Tan, 2016). Services also varied in its intensity and quality with different types of services subjected to different

standards (Elyana & Munawar, 2025; Savandha et al., 2024; Tan, 2016). It was unclear as to how much of the total government budget committed to education by the Indonesian government was channelled to ECCE. The finance of ECCE, however, comes from four primary sources: (1) MoEC, (2) local and district-level governments, (3) end-users of ECCE services, through fee collection, and (4) international organisations that support grants and loans, such as World Bank (Elyana & Munawar, 2025; Tan, 2016). While ECCE is provided by multiple ministries, an early childhood directorate under the MoEC guided the ECCE development in Indonesia (Savandha et al., 2024; Siagian & Adriany, 2020; Tan, 2016). Though government regulations provided guidance towards quality provision, quality does vary widely according to local conditions (Brinkman et al., 2017; Siagian, & Adriany, 2020). The national standard for ECCE in Indonesia was developed by the MoEC in 2009 to ensure overall quality across the country (Brinkman et al., 2017; Madhakomala et al., 2022). Interestingly, ECCE national standard in Indonesia does define policies on structural aspects of centres and focuses on key area of teachers' qualification, unlike other countries discussed so far (Brinkman et al., 2017; Siagian & Adriany, 2020).

Most countries have a wide array of policy implementation mechanism regarding preschool programme. Thus, as Akinola & Isunueo (2024), Baker et al., (2025), and Petitclerc et al., (2017) conclude, the policy implementation variations of the preschool programme include the following aspects: (1) the policymaking authority, (2) administrative agencies involved, (3) funding and delivery strategies, and (4) even to the programme details which include age group served, access and percentage of age group covered, specific eligibility criteria, location of care, primary caregiver, and programme philosophy. Studies worldwide revealed that variation of preschool programmes offered has resulted in quality discrepancy, which happened due to multiple policy implementation approaches practiced by the individual countries. Varying service quality is the main issue of global public preschool policy implementation. In many countries discussed, the preschool education programmes were conducted by multiple agencies which resulted in varied quality of the service provided.

2.3 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Preschool - Malaysian Context

A similar situation discussed is also observed in Malaysia. ECCE in Malaysia is basically categorised into two main groups: (1) the birth to four years old, and (2) the four to six years old (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). ECCE for the birth to four years old is being provided by the childcare centres and falls under the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Woman, Family, and Community Development (the local acronym is KPWKM) (Abdul Aziz, 2021; Ghani et al., 2025; Hamid et al., 2020; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). KPWKM, through its Department of Social Welfare, is the main coordinator for national programmes concerning the growth and development of children. Among KPWKM's major role is to register all childcare centres that offer care and education for children between birth to four years old (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Meanwhile, ECCE for the four to six years old is being offered by the preschool providers with three federal governmental agencies' involvement, namely MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN (Hamid et al., 2020; Nazir et al. 2023). In Malaysia, preschool normally takes in children from as early as four to six years old and is considered as preparatory class for primary school (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

2.3.1 Evolution of Preschool Education in Malaysia

The history of preschool education in Malaysia began in 1950s with the earliest institutions established and run by the Christian missionaries (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). During those days, the privilege of British early childhood education style was exclusive and barely affordable (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Thus, only few children of the rich and aristocrats had the chance to attend preschools, while leaving the majority children in suburban areas and villages with limited or no opportunity to learn.

Only twenty years later, in the early 1970s, KEMAS introduced public-funded preschools, generally known as *Tabika* KEMAS, to children of low-income families living in rural areas (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The establishment of KEMAS was driven by the initiatives after the development of the Adult Lesson Division in 1961 that focused on illiteracy issues (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The division was renamed to KEMAS after the launch

of Malaysian New Economic Policy in 1970 (Ghani et al., 2025; Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). KEMAS, which is now under the administration of the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, is the pioneer in setting up preschools in Malaysia (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ghani et al., 2025; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The aim of *Tabika* KEMAS was to provide educational and social opportunities to children from very low-income families in rural and suburban areas. These *Tabika* were set up based on demand by the local community perhaps due to the awareness on the importance of education (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Such programme introduced them to a more stimulating environment of learning not available at home.

Later, in 1976, the establishment of preschools in the urban multi-ethnic areas where there were *Rukun Tetangga* (a friendly neighbourhood scheme) was advocated by JPNIN (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). These preschools, known as *Tabika Perpaduan*, were widely accepted by parents and the community. These preschools are located in housing areas, low-cost apartments, villages, and suburban areas based on community's demand (Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). *Tabika Perpaduan* focuses on accepting children from different ethnic backgrounds (Ahmad et al., 2022; Kong, 2022).

Again, twenty years later, in the 1990s, the private sector started to offer preschool programme. Only in 1992, the first formal preschools were launched by MoE. It started with 1,131 pilot preschool projects called *prasekolah*, which were annex preschool classes to the existing public primary schools (Kong, 2022; Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The MoE preschool project was later rolled out nationwide in 2002 (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ghani et al., 2025; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

The evolution of preschool programme in Malaysia can be considered as gradual considering the history of it dated as early as the 1950s. It took Malaysia such an extended time to evolve from an informal education to become institutionalised. The landscape of preschool programme in Malaysia can also be categorised as choppy and segregated perhaps due to the break and command policy (*Dasar Pecah dan Perintah*) implemented by the British when they colonized Malaysia back in 1900s. Thus, as discussed in the earlier section, the similar issue of variation in the preschool programmes offered that resulted in quality discrepancies and the problem of multiple policy implementation approaches practiced by the individual agency are also observed in Malaysia. According to the scholars, preschool quality in Malaysia does not only vary among the wide array of preschool providers, but it is also in fact varies within the

few public providers (Hamid et al., 2020, Kong, 2022, Ahmad Nazir et al., 2022; Nazir et al. 2023). Hence, resulted in preschool quality discrepancy, ranging from different daily operations to the very details of structural quality aspects.

2.3.2 Evaluation of Preschool Education in Malaysia

Until now, preschool programmes in Malaysia are being provided by both public and private sectors. Public preschools are funded both by the federal and state government (Kong, 2022). As mentioned earlier, federal-funded preschool programmes are being provided by three different agencies, namely MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Each is governed by different authorities, with individual sets of goals and objectives, as each has its own core services besides providing preschool programmes (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ghani et al., 2025). These variations of preschool programmes offered have perhaps resulted in quality discrepancies among the providers.

KEMAS is an agency that emphasises on the development of rural communities in terms of socio-economic, physical, intellectual, and spiritual (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; KEMAS, 2013). Apart from providing early childhood education programme, KEMAS is accountable for the implementation of literacy education and skills training programme (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). These programmes that focus on soft skills, spirituality, family, and self-excellence, are aimed at enhancing the socio-economic status of the community (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; KEMAS, 2013; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). As preschool education programme is only part of the services it provides, KEMAS gets all the support from MoE, particularly in terms of teachers' training and curriculum (Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

Unlike KEMAS, JPNIN plays a distinct role in meeting the challenges of globalisation, which involves the right to freedom of expression, social justice, and democratic space (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). JPNIN deals with sensitive issues involving races, religions, and political belief (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Thus, the focus on social cohesion in Malaysia's diverse ethnicity, religion, and culture becomes a very important task for JPNIN. The existence of *Tabika Perpaduan* is seen as having a significant impact to Malaysia because the values of respecting and understanding among races and religions are being taught and instilled in JPNIN preschool programme (Mamat et al., 2023; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

On an important note, MoE is the lead agency and main reference point when it comes to provision of preschool education in Malaysia. MoE's task coverage is wider than the other two agencies, ranging from the initial stage of policy drafting to policy implementation and to the final phase of monitoring and assessing Malaysia preschool education programme (Foong et al., 2021; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The distinct similarity among all these agencies, however, is that all of them cover the same age group; some even share similar coverage areas and target groups (Kong, 2022). These agencies also receive consistent funding and assistance from the federal government with regards to infrastructure, equipment, as well as teachers' salary and training (Hamid et al., 2020; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, state-funded preschools basically are run by the respective State Islamic Religious Department (Ismail & Ismail, 2015). Thus, these preschools are known based on their state locations. For example, preschools in Johor are known as *Tabika Agama* Johor, while in Melaka, they are known as *Tadika* JAIM (*Jabatan Agama Islam Melaka*) and in Wilayah Persekutuan as *Tadika* MAIWP (*Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan*).

Private preschools on the other hand, are either run by the private sector or non-governmental organisation (NGO). Preschools operated by these providers complement the federal government's effort in providing quality education to children aged four to six years old, especially to parents who can afford the price of the service (Chan & Mazlina, 2021; Phang et al., 2021). In the last three decades, preschool institutions including those of state-funded as well as private and NGO-run have proliferated nationwide (Hamid et al., 2020; Shahidin & Mustafa, 2024). Hence, preschools in Malaysia are so diverse due to the country's multicultural society and individual needs (Kong, 2022). The sign of awareness from multiple stakeholders on the significance of early childhood education is exemplified in the increased number of preschools in Malaysia since it was introduced in 1950s. Table 2.1 shows data on preschool education programmes offered by various providers in Malaysia.

Table 2.1
Number of Preschools, Classes, Teachers, and Enrolment in 2025

No.	Agency	Preschools	Classes	Teachers	Enrolment
1.	KEMAS	8,083	10,616	10,339	216,029
2.	JPNIN	1,781	1,781	3,411	34,817
3.	MoE	6,318	10,129	9,538	214,828
4.	State-funded	1,010	2,507	3,503	34,391
5.	Private	7,546	29,113	37,916	257,460
6.	Total	24,738	54,146	64,707	757,525

Source: Quick Facts 2025, Malaysia Educational Statistics

Despite the variation of preschool providers discussed, the development of preschool education in Malaysia has been guided by a series of national policy frameworks aimed at strengthening educational quality, expanding access, enhancing equity, and improving governance across the education system. Malaysia's commitment towards quality preschool education is clearly highlighted in its strategic documents, which involved a macro policy document, that is MEB, and preschool specific documents, that are NSPQ and NSPC. Collectively, these frameworks reflect Malaysia's long-term commitment to educational transformation and demonstrate a progressive policy trajectory towards strengthening quality assurance and standardisation within early childhood education.

2.3.2.1 The Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025

Launched in 2013, the MEB is a comprehensive review on education in Malaysia. It has drawn on five outcomes that highlight the aspirations that Malaysia education system aims to achieve. They include access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. Preschool education has been given due emphasis within these aspirations, with the focus area being increasing the number of preschool teachers, classrooms, and children attending the public preschools (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Blueprint outlines 11 shifts to be achieved within a 13-year period (Ministry of Education, 2013). Thus, necessitates a transformation of the national education system to be at par with developed nations. The transformation is staggered in three waves: (1) Wave 1 (2013-2015) - strengthening existing foundations that calls for the implementation of extra support for teachers and emphasis on core students' skills, (2) Wave 2 (2016-2020) - scaling up initiatives that calls for building upon progress, and

(3) Wave 3 (2021-2025) - evaluating and consolidating initiatives that envisages schools having autonomy in their administrations (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The first shift of the Blueprint emphasised precisely on the need to raise the overall quality of preschools and push to universal enrolment by 2020. In this regard, a series of initiatives have been and will continue to be implemented by MoE through the increase of investment in physical and teaching resources for preschool children. These aspirations give impact not only in the progression of quality preschools in Malaysia, but also specifically in the implementation of standard quality public preschools. Given that Malaysia is currently in the last year of the final wave of the Blueprint, it is highly timely to assess the achievement of the shifts outlined in the Blueprint.

This 292-page thick document has less than half of the total pages discussing on the preschool programme. Majority part of this document deliberated on other levels of education, implying less emphasis given on preschool education programme as compared to other levels of education. In short, the quality of preschool is not being given equal emphasis as education in general. Therefore, the focus of the government should not only be on quality education in general but could specifically be directed to preschool programme as the entry point for education.

MEB 2013–2025 is later succeeded by National Education Plan (NEP) 2026-2035 which was launched in early 2026. The transition from MEB 2013–2025 to NEP 2026–2035 demonstrates a shift from system-wide educational reform towards future-oriented educational resilience and innovation. While the MEB concentrated on improving educational quality through structural and pedagogical reforms, the NEP extends this focus by addressing emerging challenges related to technological disruption, workforce transformation, and sustainable human capital development. This evolution highlights the increasing importance of educational quality frameworks that are adaptive, stakeholder-responsive, and aligned with future societal needs.

2.3.2.2 National Standard Preschool Quality (NSPQ)

The quality of early childhood education has increasingly become a policy priority in Malaysia, reflecting growing recognition of the critical role of preschool education in fostering children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. To ensure that preschool programmes operate in accordance with established quality standards, the MoE in 2013 introduced the *Standard Kualiti*

Prasekolah Kebangsaan (SKPK) or NSPQ as a national quality assurance framework for preschool education. The framework was developed to provide a systematic mechanism for assessing, monitoring, and improving the quality of preschool provision across the country while promoting greater consistency among diverse preschool operators.

The first version of NSPQ was designed as a self-assessment and quality improvement instrument that enabled preschool providers to evaluate their practices against predetermined quality standards. The framework sought to encourage continuous quality enhancement by identifying areas of strength and areas requiring improvement. More importantly, NSPQ served as a common reference point for preschool quality assessment, supporting the government's broader objective of ensuring equitable access to quality early childhood education regardless of provider type or geographical location.

The development of NSPQ was informed by both national educational aspirations and international understandings of quality in early childhood education. Consistent with prevailing theories of preschool quality, the framework recognised that children's learning outcomes are influenced not only by pedagogical practices but also by structural factors such as teacher qualifications, leadership, governance, learning environments, and safety provisions. Consequently, NSPQ incorporated multiple dimensions of quality that collectively contribute to effective preschool programme delivery.

In response to evolving educational needs and the growing emphasis on evidence-based quality assurance, the MoE subsequently introduced the NSPQ 2.0 as an enhanced version of the original framework. Officially implemented in 2021, NSPQ 2.0 was developed to strengthen quality monitoring mechanisms and improve the effectiveness of preschool self-evaluation processes. The revised framework is administered through the *Sistem Maklumat Prasekolah Kebangsaan* (SMPK), allowing for more systematic data collection, reporting, and monitoring of preschool quality indicators.

NSPQ 2.0 adopts a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to quality assessment through five principal dimensions. The first dimension focuses on the quality of teachers and assistant teachers or pupil management assistants, emphasising the importance of professional competence, qualifications, and teaching effectiveness in supporting children's development. The second dimension addresses governance

quality, encompassing leadership practices, organisational management, administrative efficiency, and institutional accountability. The third dimension evaluates curriculum quality, particularly the implementation of NSPC and the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. The fourth dimension examines parental and community involvement, recognising the contribution of collaborative partnerships between families, communities, and educational institutions in enhancing children's educational experiences. The fifth dimension focuses on health, nutrition, and safety, acknowledging the importance of providing a secure, healthy, and developmentally appropriate learning environment for young children.

A significant strength of NSPQ 2.0 lies in its alignment with contemporary conceptualisations of preschool quality, which distinguish between structural quality and process quality. Structural quality refers to relatively stable and regulatable aspects of preschool provision, including teacher qualifications, staff-child ratios, physical facilities, governance structures, curriculum resources, and health and safety standards. Process quality, in contrast, relates to children's day-to-day learning experiences and interactions within the preschool environment. Research has consistently demonstrated that structural quality serves as a foundation for process quality, as adequate resources, qualified personnel, and effective governance systems create conditions that support high-quality educational interactions and positive child outcomes.

From a policy perspective, NSPQ 2.0 represents a strategic effort by the Malaysian government to establish greater standardisation and accountability within the preschool sector. Given that preschool services in Malaysia are delivered through multiple providers and agencies, including the MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN, variations in implementation practices and resource allocation may occur. The introduction of a common quality assurance framework seeks to minimise such disparities by providing standardised benchmarks against which preschool performance can be assessed and monitored.

Nevertheless, the implementation of NSPQ 2.0 is not without challenges. Differences in institutional capacity, infrastructure availability, financial resources, workforce readiness, and stakeholder commitment may influence the extent to which preschools are able to comply with prescribed quality standards. Furthermore, while the framework establishes a uniform set of expectations, implementation realities may vary across different organisational and geographical contexts. Consequently, understanding stakeholders' perspectives regarding structural quality requirements and

implementation challenges remains essential for ensuring that quality standards are both achievable and sustainable.

In relation to this study, NSPQ 2.0 provides an important policy and conceptual reference for examining structural quality within Malaysian federally funded preschools. The framework's emphasis on governance, teacher quality, curriculum implementation, parental involvement, and health and safety reflects many of the key structural elements that underpin preschool quality. Examining stakeholders' perspectives on these dimensions can provide valuable insights into existing implementation challenges and inform the development of a stakeholder-informed framework aimed at strengthening the standardisation of structural quality across federally funded preschool programmes in Malaysia.

2.3.2.3 National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC)

Preschool education was formally introduced as part of the national education system under the Education Act 1996 (Ministry of Education, 2013). To unify and standardise the early childhood education programmes offered by various providers, the NSPC was introduced and became part of the National Education Act 1996 (Ghani et al., 2025; Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024). This Act allocates important aspects of preschool education, such as the establishment, the authority of minister, preschool curriculum, medium of language, and religious teaching (Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024). The NSPC is applied to all preschools including the private operators as stipulated in Section 22 of the National Education Act 1996 (Ghani et al., 2025; Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024).

Tracing back on the history of NSPC, the only available guideline on preschool education programme in 1986 was the Bulk Material Preschool Education Programme. This is followed by the establishment of Malaysia Guideline of Preschool Curriculum in 1993. Only a decade after, in 2003 that the National Preschool Curriculum (NPC) was made obligatory in the teaching and learning process. The requirement to teach in accordance with NPC was later documented in the revision of Education Act 1996. The 2003 NPC is the first comprehensive national curriculum established for preschools in Malaysia; the target being the four to six years old children. The objective of this curriculum is to enhance children’s potential in most of the development aspects,

ensuring that children grasp the basic skills and inculcated with positive attitude; thus, preparing them for a smooth transition to formal primary school. The NPC also recommends thematic and integrated approach as well as learning through play as the most appropriate method for teaching. The NPC stresses that students should be given opportunity for group activities along with individual assessment. In addition, learning centres need to be developed within the preschool classroom according to each component of the curriculum and furnished with materials that could stimulate the development and growth of the children. In short, learning need to be fun and informal for the preschoolers.

The 2003 NPC was then upgraded and became NSPC in 2010. The thrust of NSPC is built upon six components which are (1) communication; (2) spiritual, attitudes and values; (3) humanity; (4) self-esteem; (5) physical and aesthetic development; and (6) science and technology. The NSPC was revised in 2017 taking into account the launching of MEB and country's current needs (Ministry of Education, 2013). Among the emphasis given in the revised version of NSPC include thinking, decision making and problem-solving skills, strengthening the element of unity, health, and safety aspects as well as introduction to the international community relationship. The revision covers the content, pedagogical, and evaluation aspect of curriculum. The evolution process of NSPC is summarised in Figure 2.1.

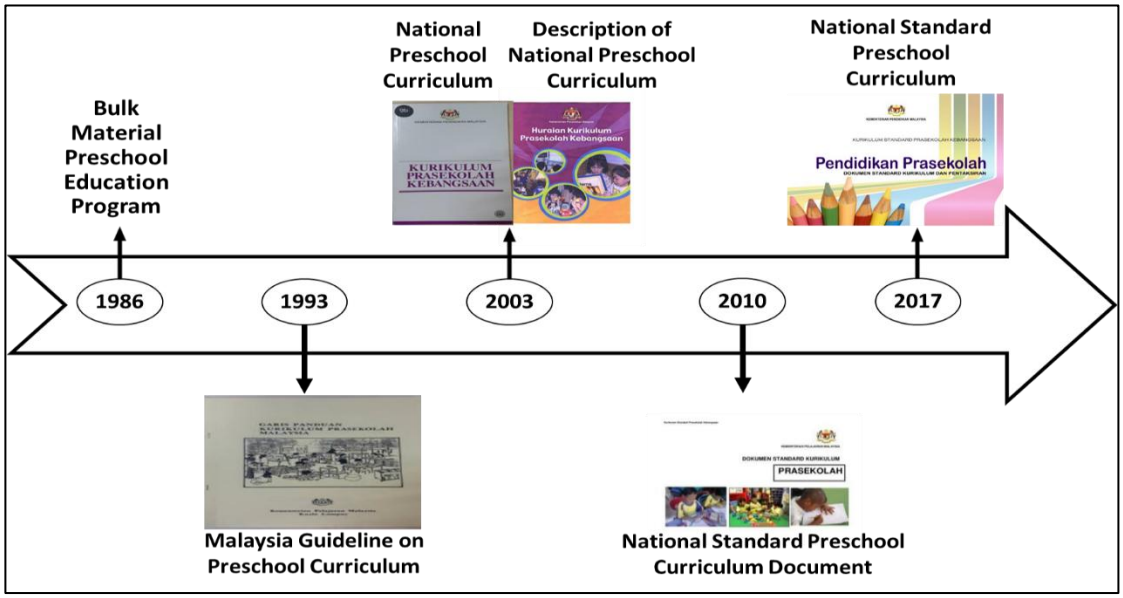


Figure 2.1 Evolution of NSPC

Source: Ministry of Education, 2017

The introduction of the Preschool Curriculum 2026 (KP2026), officially launched and implemented nationwide at the start of the school session in January 2026, signifies a significant evolution from the NSPC. While NSPC primarily focused on achieving developmental standards and school readiness through structured learning outcomes, KP2026 adopts a competency-based and child-centred framework that emphasises holistic development, socio-emotional wellbeing, bilingual proficiency, and learning through play. This shift reflects Malaysia's broader educational transformation agenda under the NEP 2026–2035, which seeks to develop future-ready learners equipped with the competencies, values, and adaptability required in an increasingly complex and technology-driven society.

Similar to the case of preschool programme as compared to education in general, structural quality is being given less focus as compared to process quality. NSPC, a 188-page thick specific policy document on process quality, is available for public reference, but no similar policy document focusing exclusively on structural quality has been found in existence thus far. Looking at the duration taken to develop NSPC, it would perhaps roughly give us an idea on how long it would take to develop a similar standard document of structural quality for Malaysia preschool programme.

In the context of preschool education in Malaysia, issues of quality have focused exclusively on process factors and, to a specific extent, on curriculum aspect. Such specific criteria, although important, are nonetheless inadequate; particularly when the weight of evidence points to the structural quality as being critical to process quality that eventually result in positive outcomes for children.

2.4 Understanding Preschool Quality

Part of the challenge in ensuring high-quality preschool is that there is no single specific formula for achieving it. The consensus is that quality must be comprehensive. Consequently, defining and measuring preschool quality becomes a complex task. There is no single or universal definition of quality as it varies by national and international context. Preschool quality has become the universal focus of provision and practice, as more voices are added to the discourse, covering policymakers, policy implementers, preschool teachers, parents, researchers, and educators. Each of these stakeholders tries to define quality in their own context. Quality possibly revolves around decent teaching syllabus for preschool teachers, while for parents, quality might

mean the availability of proper infrastructure and equipment. In a comprehensive review of the factors affecting quality, OECD (2006) has identified seven aspects of quality, which are summarised in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2
Aspects of Quality

No.	Aspect	Description
1.	Orientation Quality	Government engagement through national legislation, regulation, and policy initiatives
2.	Structural Quality	The overarching structures needed to ensure quality in early childhood programmes
3.	Educational Concept and Practice	The curriculum framework underpinning staff knowledge and the application of this in practice
4.	Interaction or Process Quality	Children's day-to-day experiences
5.	Operational Quality	The management and leadership (including policy and process) that guide the way in which a service operates
6.	Child Outcome Quality or Performance Standards	The environment and interactions that improve the present and future well-being of children
7.	Standards Pertaining to Parent/Community Outreach and Involvement	Outreach to parent groups, efforts to improve the home learning environment, responsiveness to local cultural values and norms, and participation in integrated programming

Source: OECD, 2006: 129-130

While there is no definite meaning of quality, the concept obviously includes both structural and process elements (Chen & Yang, 2024; Hu et al., 2016). Although consideration to the process factors of what children experience in the preschool settings is essential (Ahmad Nazir et al., 2022; Slot et al., 2018), it is equally obvious that the crucial element in terms of achieving quality also relates to what makes up the preschool settings, such as class size, adult-child ratio, and teachers' qualification, which is known as structural quality (Hu et al., 2017). As presented in Table 2.2, four out of seven aspects, namely orientation quality, structural quality, operational quality, and child outcome quality or performance standards, touched on the structural quality elements, leaving three others covering the process quality aspects. This clearly shows the importance of structural quality elements in the overall quality of preschool programme. Several prior studies found structural quality variables to be the precursors to process quality (Hu et al., 2016, 2017; Li et al., 2016; Slot et al.,2018), which in turn is most strongly related to child development, well-being, and learning. Therefore, in view of

enhancing process quality, the focus should be directed towards improving the structural quality aspects as well.

2.4.1 Defining Preschool Quality

There is a large body of literature that attempts to understand the definition of preschool quality (Anders, 2021; Camovic & Becirovic, 2022; Cryer et al., 1999; Brinkman et al., 2017; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Slot et al., 2015, 2018; Marjanovič, 2021). The meaning of ECCE quality varies across numerous studies of the quality of care. Historically, the meaning of quality in ECCE have included multiple proximal (for example, curriculum and classroom interactions) and distal (for example, programme and state policies) features of classrooms that promote children's development in multiple aspects (Camovic & Becirovic, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2019; Marjanovič, 2021). Nevertheless, due to limited consensus on what indicators are most important, thus it has resulted in a broad or nonspecific definition of quality (Anders, 2021). Taking into consideration on such broad definitions, some researchers have conceptualised ECCE quality in terms of global quality with two primary elements: structural and process quality. Examples of structural quality elements include class size, teachers' qualifications, and teacher-child ratio. These elements are often the regulated aspects of classrooms and programmes. Elements of process quality, on the other hand, focus on a more dynamic aspects of early childhood education, including human interactions occurring in the classrooms such as teacher-child and peer-to-peer interactions (Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Zaslow et al., 2021).

Assessment measures and tools, developed and designed to improve ECCE programming quality, are used as an on-going system of programme monitoring and evaluation. Programme assessments, created to assist practitioners in the collection of data and programming information, help to improve practices and guide policy development. Some of the commonly used and effective evaluation tools are summarised in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3
Preschool Quality Measuring Instrument

No.	Measure	Description
1.	CIS Caregiver Instruction Scale	Emotional tone, discipline, and style as well as responsiveness of teachers
2.	CLASS Classroom Assessment Scoring System	Teacher-child interactions in three domains: instructional support, emotional support, and classroom organisation
3.	ECCOM Early Childhood Classroom Observation Measure	Quality of instruction, management, social climate, cultural sensitivity, and resources
4.	ECERS – R, E Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale	
	R – Revised	Global quality and seven subscales: space and furnishing, personal care, language and reasoning, activities, interactions, programme structure, and parents/staff
	E – Extension	Developed to supplement the ECERS-R with more focus on academic achievement: literacy, mathematics, science, and diversity; reflects the British national preschool curriculum
5.	ELLCO Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation	Three tools: literacy environment checklist, classroom rating of 14 dimensions of literacy; and Literacy Activities Rating Scale with a summary rating
6.	ITERS – R Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised	Global quality and seven subscales: space and furnishing, personal care, listening and talking, activities, interactions, programme structure, and parents/staff
7.	ORCE Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment	Focus on an individual child's interactions with adults; sensitive, warm, and responsive caregiving; several discrete behaviours and five qualitative ratings
8.	PQA Preschool Programme Quality Assessment	Three observed domains: learning environment, daily routines, and adult-child interactions; four domains via interview: curriculum planning and assessment, parents' involvement, staff qualifications, and programme management
9.	PROFILE Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programme	Five subscales: learning environment, scheduling, curriculum, individualising, and interacting
10.	SNAPSHOT Emerging Academics Snapshot	Child's exposure to instruction and engagement in six academic activity settings, 11 content areas, and six levels of teacher responsivity
11.	CASEBA Classroom Assessment of Supports for Emergent Bilingual Acquisition	Assessment of the developmental areas of English Language Learners, focusing on language and literacy

No.	Measure	Description
12.	PRISM Preschool Rating Instrument for Science and Math	Addresses the quality of instructional support and delivery for early mathematics and science

Source: Weiland, & Guerrero Rosada (2022)

Further explanation to Table 2.3, the most widely used and best developed observational instrument for measuring indicators of quality in ECCE is the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). ECERS was originally developed by Thelma Harms and Richard Clifford during the late 1970's and published in 1980 in the United States (Harms et al., 2005; Weiland, & Guerrero Rosada, 2022). It has been used to measure the quality of preschool settings in terms of both process and structural features in more than 20 countries including Singapore, Germany, and Chile (Chen & Yang, 2024; Cryer et al., 1999; Hanno et al., 2021; Hartman et al., 2016; Slot et al., 2015; Sylva et al., 2006).

ECERS was designed to provide an overall picture of a preschool environment and created to be a reasonably precise and effective means for viewing quality and for improvement in planning (Harms et al., 2005; Weiland, & Guerrero Rosada, 2022). It has 43 items with seven areas covered: (1) space and furnishings; (2) personal care routines; (3) language and reasoning; (4) activities; (5) social interaction; (6) organisation and routine; as well as (7) adults working together. Every item brings a possible rating of 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent). In 1997, the scale was revised to ECERS-R, and later in 2003, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension (ECERS-E) was developed to supplement the ECERS-R in assessing the curricular quality provision. ECERS-E includes four new subscales: (1) Literacy, (2) Mathematics, (3) Science, and (4) Diversity (Sylva et al., 2006).

ECERS offers a helpful technique of classifying and highlighting many aspects of the preschool environment which have a bearing on quality (Harms et al., 2005; Weiland, & Guerrero Rosada, 2022). Additionally, with ECERS, both researchers and practitioners are provided with a systematic way of recording certain observable aspects of childcare settings. The ECERS measures quality of an ECCE programme, as well as the extent to which the programme meets the needs of the children it serves. The results can assist in the realignment or reorganisation of the programme. Reliability and validity tests on this scale have been conducted by many researchers (Harms et al., 2005; Sylva et al., 2006) and it is widely accepted and used as a reliable and valid

instrument for measuring quality in early childhood programmes (Eadie et al., 2022; Hartman et al., 2016; Slot et al., 2015, Zaslow et al., 2021).

Based on the wide practice of experts in ECCE, the common categorisation aspects of quality in preschool programme as measured by the ECERS evaluation instrument, is divided into two: (1) structural quality and (2) process quality. Therefore, this study too is defining and measuring quality in two similar aspects, that are structural and process quality.

2.4.2 Elements of Structural Quality

Regardless of the different perspectives on what makes up a high-quality preschool setting, a common meaning found in most academic literature is in terms of structural and process quality. While the two elements are closely related, they offer different ways to comprehend, differentiate, and measure the quality in ECCE settings.

Structural quality comprises of inputs-to-process characteristics which create the framework for the processes that children experience (Cryer et al., 1999; Eadie et al, 2022; Hanno et al., 2021). In the ECCE context, these inputs include factors such as staff qualifications and skills, group size, as well as the facilities of teaching and care. A situation considered to be of high structural quality may have teachers with high qualifications, small group size, with a hygienic environment and equipped with proper facilities and furniture. Most structural quality measures can be regulated by policy as it is typically contributed by human, financial, and time resources (inputs) that are required to deliver services.

Scholars also refer structural quality elements as features of preschool settings which are often translated into regulatory form and policies (Cryer et al., 1999; Eadie et al, 2022; Hanno et al., 2021) due to its quantitative features. Structural variables determine the presence or absence of resources that facilitate the interactions characteristic of preschool environment. They are variables that can be more easily controlled (Hanno et al., 2021; Næsby & Sperling, 2022) but are measured through the indirect ways. Structural quality refers to a host aspect of ECCE learning environment and workforce conditions that are often controlled by the relevant government agencies involving centres, classrooms, and teachers' characteristics (Eadie et al, 2022; Hanno et al., 2021; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2017; Slot et al., 2015, 2018). The common structural quality aspects known as 'iron triangle' are the adult-child ratio, group size

as well as teachers' education and training. The element of continuous in-service professional development and the use of educational programme, however, was later added to this traditional 'iron triangle' features of structural quality (Slot et al., 2015).

Several studies have relied on structural characteristics as the measure for preschool quality (Brinkman et al., 2017; Chen & Yang, 2024; Hanno et al., 2021; Ismail & Ismail, 2015; Ahmad Nazir et al., 2022; Næsby & Sperling, 2022). Studies have also found that these structural characteristics are associated with children's development (Brinkman et al., 2017; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Melhuish et al., 2015; Nores & Fernandez, 2018), the ultimate indicator of quality care. Thus, it has motivated some countries to set minimum standards for at least some aspects of structural quality due to its regulatable features (Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Brinkman et al., 2017; Chen & Yang, 2024; Camovic & Becirovic, 2022; Hardy et al., 2021). Though these characteristics represent only a piece of the overall quality, they help in setting the stage for process quality. Thus, this study gave exclusive emphasis to structural quality elements.

2.4.3 Elements of Process Quality

A comprehensive understanding of the quality components requires another part of quality elements: an examination of what actually happens in the early care setting, that is, the process quality. The interactions between teachers and children, the availability of learning and teaching materials for children as well as supervision and support in the use of those materials are termed as process elements, which tells much more about the quality-of-care children received.

Basically, process elements refer to daily experiences that children undergo in preschool settings. Process indicators tend to focus on dynamic aspects (Hanno et al., 2021; Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Zaslow et al., 2021) and directly impact the children learning experiences through teacher-child interactions, peer interactions, and manipulation of learning materials. Process quality is often referred to the interactive activities that children experience in the classroom, or simply put, the experience children have in childcare settings. These process characteristics are often tougher to measure than their structural counterparts. They include the warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness of the caregivers, the emotional tone of the setting, the activities available to children, the developmental appropriateness of activities, and the learning

opportunities available to children (Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2017). Studies have shown that children's cognitive and socio-emotional development are highly associated with these process measures (Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Zaslow et al., 2021). Unlike the structural quality features, process characteristics are not generally subject to state or local regulations (Hanno et al., 2021; Hartman et al., 2016).

Scholars also refer process quality as the aspects of the classroom environment experienced by children – their interactions with teachers and peers, and the materials and activities available to them (Slot et al., 2015, 2018). Several studies have shown that process quality elements have influenced children's experiences, wellbeing, and development (Brinkman et al., 2017; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Melhuish et al., 2015; Nores & Fernandez, 2018). Process quality is essentially measured by methods in delivering the ECCE services and how children experience the inputs; for instance, how those inputs affect the relationships between staff and children, communication with families and wider community support services. A setting considered to be of high process quality may involve regular, supportive engagement between teachers and children, a stimulating curriculum, and effective pedagogical practices.

To understand the entirety of quality care children are receiving, it is necessary to understand both aspects of quality. Only with that comprehension, can we examine the relationship between structural and process characteristics of quality to begin to address ways to improve and standardise the quality of early childhood care and education. Despite the importance of addressing both elements, this study however, focused exclusively on structural quality elements.

2.4.4 Relations between Structural Quality and Process Quality Elements

ECCE quality is a multidimensional concept and widely defined as promoting children's well-being and positive developmental outcomes (Brinkman et al., 2017; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2020; Melhuish et al., 2015; Nores & Fernandez, 2018). Repetitively mentioned throughout the chapters, a common distinction is made between structural and process quality (Chen & Yang, 2024; Hanno et al., 2021; Næsby & Sperling, 2022). As mentioned in the earlier section, structural quality involves the distal and regulatable factors, such as child-staff ratios, group size as well staff training and education (Hanno et al., 2021; Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Zaslow et al., 2021). Structural quality is partially determined by legislation, policy, and funding; and it is a

major factor in the macroeconomic costs of ECCE. On the contrary, process quality concerns more of the proximal processes of children's daily experiences which involves the social, emotional, physical, and instructional aspects of teacher-child and peer interactions while being in the childcare settings (Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Slot et al., 2015; Zaslow et al., 2021).

Structural and process quality indicators thus, provide two different perspectives when it comes to defining the quality of ECCE. While each has a unique approach to observation, a high process quality generally resulted from a high structural quality. The general belief is that structural quality may not only be correlated with process quality, but more importantly, they may also be precursors to process quality. In simple term, structural quality helps to set a stage for process quality, whereby a positive structural quality will lead to positive process quality, while negative structural quality will result in negative process quality. Studies have shown that structural quality provides a basis and is linked to process quality (Burchinal, 2018, Hu et al., 2018, Slot et al., 2015, 2018). Bowne (2017) and Williams et al., 2018 found associations between group sizes and ratios, and staff–child interactions, while Surianshah (2022) pointed out that the staff–child ratio may be specifically important for young and vulnerable children, who need more one-on-one attention. In addition, studies also found that staff members' formal education and training are associated with a higher quality of care and sensitivity in interactions (Bentley et al., 2025; Burchinal, 2018). Other structural factors, such as years of experience (Bentley et al., 2025; Embacher & Smidt, 2023) and in-service professional development (Slot et al., 2015), have also found to be related to process quality. Some claimed that strong structural features may produce the positive outcome of process quality (Cryer et al., 1999; Slot et al., 2018). However, it is asserted that process aspects are more predictive to child development as compared to structural aspects when they are concurrently assessed (Embacher & Smidt, 2023; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023).

Structural features are theorised to set the stage for process quality by creating the conditions in which high-quality, developmentally supportive processes can occur (Slot, 2018; Slot et al., 2015). This hypothesis has motivated some countries to set minimum standards for at least several aspects of structural quality due to its regulatable features (Brinkman et al., 2017). Yet, there exists mixed empirical evidence in support of the hypothesis that structural features drive process quality (Burchinal, 2018; Cryer et al., 1999; Hu et al., 2018; Pianta et al., 2009; Slot et al., 2015). Despite this large

body of research, Slot et al. (2015) claim that the relationship between structural quality and process quality has not yet been fully investigated across a range of cultural contexts, especially in countries outside the US with different structural quality policies.

2.5 Structural Quality Challenges for Public Preschool Policy Implementation

Establishing a standard for structural quality in preschool programme is a constant challenge. Studies have identified several challenges that form barriers to structural quality policy implementation that have also been discussed globally. The challenges include wide-ranging policy aims, combined public and private funding, complex governance and management system with mixed national and state involvement, persistent fragmented structural and organisational aspects between ECCE and primary schooling, and varied ECCE services regulation and quality assurance.

Firstly, the ECCE policies and systems vary widely globally and were established to fulfil different and varied aims (Anders, 2021; Bamdad & Lloyd, 2020; Hardy et al., 2021; Kong, 2022; Pujianti et al. 2025; Rahmatullah et al., 2021; Yoshikawa et al., 2018). In some countries, the main objective is to ensure school readiness and support children's well-being, healthy socioemotional development, and sense of citizenship (Hartman et al., 2016). While in others, it is to facilitate working parents or cultivate cultural values and community integration (Duncan et al., 2022; Bakken et al., 2017). This implies that ECCE policies were established to meet a range of social, economic, educational, and political needs in each country. With these differing goals, the early childhood system may focus on achieving different outcomes for children. It is common for ECCE to have multiple policy aims as it reveals the potential value and impact of quality, but the aims might occasionally be competing or conflicting.

In addition, typically, ECCE programme funding involves combined public and private sector efforts (Chan & Mazlina 2021; Hamid et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2016, 2017; Li et al., 2016). Thus, the mixed funding affects the accessibility, sustainability, and viability of the sector (Feng, 2025). Securing adequate funding for a high-quality yet affordable and accessible ECCE system is challenging. Furthermore, the existence of multiple organisations complicates the funding mechanism as there is typically a mix of private, voluntary, and public ECCE providers (Brinkman et al., 2017; Hamid et al.,

2020; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). This situation often leads to a wide array of provider types and service delivery models with different staffing, curricula, and regulatory requirements. Although this scenario provides parents with alternatives and options, it can also lead to variation in provision and quality for the children.

Thirdly, in most countries, preschool programme governance and management systems are complex, and responsibilities are distributed between different levels in the system (Slot et al., 2015, 2018; Smidt, 2018). Globally, the ECCE system is managed by mixed national and regional or local governments and between a range of national agencies or ministries (Akinola & Isunueo; 2024; Brinkman et al., 2017; Hadley et al., 2024; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2017, 2016; Li et al., 2016; Slot et al., 2018; Smidt, 2018). This not only presents challenges to ensuring effective communication, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and effective coordination and integration but is essential for ensuring the governance and management systems that support the development of a coherent ECCE system (Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The mixed governance also implies the need for collaboration between different agencies (Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024; Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

Additionally, the persistent fragmented structural and organisational aspects between ECCE and primary schooling suggest the absence of systemic coherence within ECCE, and between ECCE and primary schooling (Hartman et al., 2016). The ECCE programmes among the OECD countries featured an equal ratio of unitary and split systems (Duncan et al., 2016). This ratio implicitly implied that although some countries were progressing towards a more coherent and integrated ECCE system, there remained countries with split ECCE provision settings. Globally, national governance increases as programme provision progresses towards the pre-primary year and transition to the schooling system (Hartman et al., 2016; Slot et al., 2018, 2015; Smidt, 2018) and very few countries have secured complete structural and systemic integration of ECCE with later phases of education (Hartman et al., 2016; Pearson, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2018). This implies that ECCE has become an established government responsibility to integrate all education levels (Brinkman et al., 2017).

Finally, the ECCE service regulation and quality assurance are utilised differentially to verify the standard of an improved and comprehensive quality assurance system. Typically, governments aim to deliver high-quality ECCE and recognise the need for greater regulation to achieve high-quality ECCE (Brinkman et

al., 2017; Hadley et al., 2024; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2017, 2016; Slot et al., 2018, 2015; Smidt, 2018). Most countries manage their ECCE services and regulatory obligations are distributed among national and local agencies (Akinola & Isunueo; 2024; Brinkman et al., 2017; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2017, 2016; Slot et al., 2018, 2015; Smidt, 2018), which demonstrates the need to guarantee that all ECCE services satisfy the provision of minimum standards. Some countries manage better ECCE programme and some service delivery aspects are more controlled than others, with the most regulated aspects being health and safety in service delivery, and securing child protection (Slot et al., 2015; Hartman et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2016; Brinkman et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2017; Slot et al., 2018; Smidt, 2018). This service delivery variation suggested that the accreditation mechanism is underutilised as compared to inspection regarding quality assurance. Nevertheless, accreditation and inspection are complementary mechanisms in most countries.

Most countries have similar variations in preschool quality due to multiple policy implementation approaches. Thus, policymaking should emphasise the multiple challenges that hindered the embrace of new approaches or views regarding the establishment of a standard structural quality for preschool programme in most countries. ECCE is experiencing a period of robust and significant structural and systemic development; hence requires ongoing policy attention and investment. The evidence demonstrates the dynamic nature of ECCE policy and reflects the growing visibility and importance of ECCE development as a significant part of the educational and social systems worldwide. However, the continued complexity of the sector as well as the diversity of providers and funding mechanisms make the policy challenges hard and the change agenda complex.

2.6 Relevant Theories

Research has been described as a systematic investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) or inquiry whereby data are collected, analysed, and interpreted in some way to understand, describe, predict, or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower people in such contexts (Creswell, 2014). It has been suggested that the researcher's theoretical framework has influenced the exact nature of the definition of research (Yin, 2011), with theory being employed to determine relationships between or among constructs that describe or explain a phenomenon by going beyond the local

event and attempting to attach it with similar events (Creswell, 2013). There are a couple of theories relevant to this study, namely (1) Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory and (2) Policy Implementation Theory.

2.6.1 Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979) looks at child's development in the context of an ecosystem that form his environment. This theory defines intricate layers of environment that affects a child's development. It stresses on child's own biology as a key factor influencing his development. The interaction between a child's natural biology, his immediate family and community environment, as well as the societal landscape plays significant roles in his development. Changes or conflict in any of the layers will essentially affect the other layers. This theory principally highlights the importance of an ideal ecosystem that resulted in a proper and ideal child development.

The context, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), consists of four unique systems: (1) micro, (2) meso, (3) exo, and (4) macro; each having either direct or indirect effect on a child's development. The fifth system, chrono, was later added to incorporate the time dimension as it relates to a child's environment. A graphic representation of the key features in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory Model is presented in Figure 2.2.

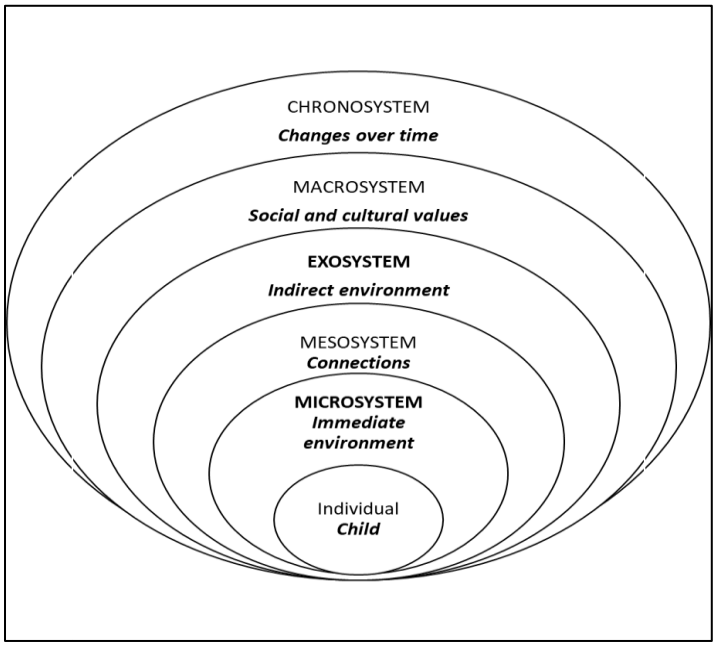


Figure 2.2 Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory

Source: Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory, 1979

The microsystem is the innermost part, the closest to the child and has direct contact and the greatest impact on the child. The microsystem involves the relationships and interactions between a child with his immediate surroundings. This layer of process quality has the most immediate and earliest influence on the child. However, interactions at outer layers can still impact the inner structures. The mesosystem is the next layer and contains the microsystem. The mesosystem layer provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem. It focuses on the connections between two or more systems, for instance, a parent's and a teacher's involvement in the child's education, if mutual, will result in well-functioning mesosystem. The exosystem is the third layer that contains micro and mesosystem. Even though this layer is not directly encountered by the child, it does have an impact on his development. The second outermost context layer is the macrosystem. This societal blueprint influences all lower layers of the ecosystem. The time component of Bronfenbrenner's model or the chronosystem layer is the final layer that involves various aspects, such as chronological age, duration, and nature of periodicity. An event has varying degrees of impact on development, and the impact decreases as time progresses.

In summary, the development of this ecological theory is supported by the concept that children do not grow in silos but instead develop in a variety of contexts in which they interact continuously. The interaction of structures within a layer and between layers is the key to this theory. Development is not only shaped by the immediate environment, but also by the interaction with the larger surroundings. Thus, the definitions of preschool quality deliberated in the earlier section is in line with the Ecological Theory introduced by Bronfenbrenner, whereby this theory gives emphasis not only to the immediate, but also larger environment in children's development.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Theory in this study context is utilised to analyse ECCE policy implementation within two ecological contexts: (1) microsystem, and (2) exosystem, as depicted in Figure 2.3. The microsystem in this study context is process quality but is not covered under the scope of this research. Meanwhile, aspects of the exosystem that influence other lower layers (microsystem and and mesosystem) is the structural quality, which can exclusively or collectively shape a child's development. Policies and decisions made at a wider level can indirectly affect the child. Thus, policy implementation on preschool education can be considered as an exosystem

that indirectly impacted the child. This is the crux of the study, primarily on the exosystem aspect of structural quality.

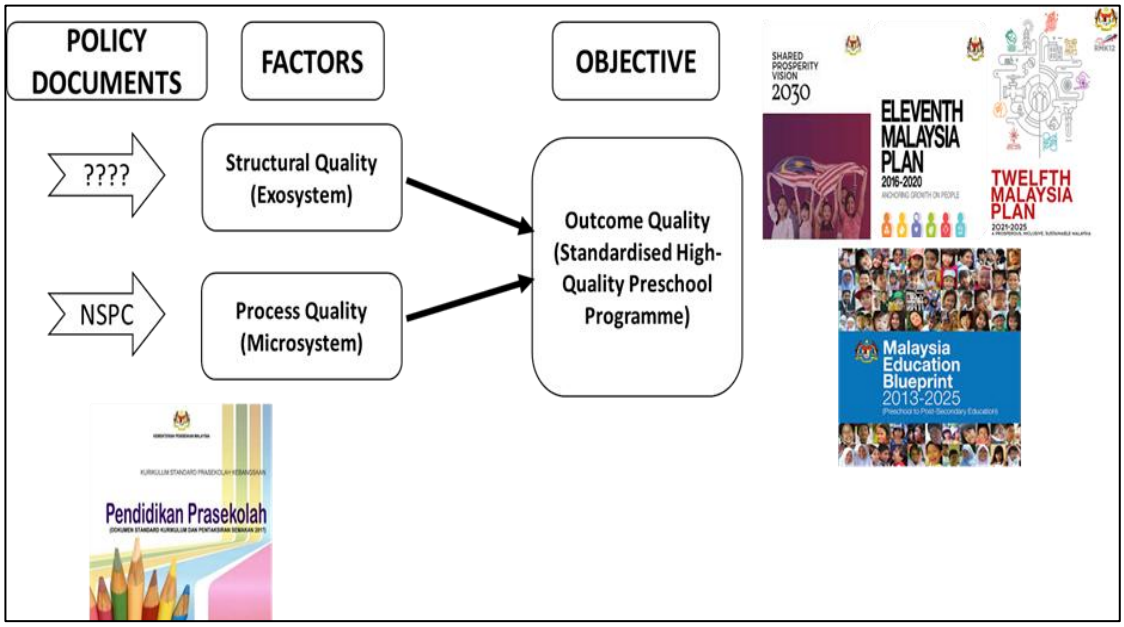


Figure 2.3 Interpretation of Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory in the Study Context

2.6.2 Policy Implementation Theory

Policy process involves five major sequential stages (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003), which can be illustrated in Figure 2.4. Policy identification or agenda setting refers to the first stage in the process when a problem is initially sensed by policy actors, and a variety of solutions is put forward. The second stage, policy formulation, refers to the development of specific policy options within government. It is when the range of possible choices is narrowed down by excluding infeasible ones and efforts are made by various actors to have their favoured solutions ranked highly among the remaining few. Policy adoption refers to the third stage in which formal actors in government adopt a particular course of action. This is followed by the fourth stage of policy implementation, whereby government puts their decisions into effect using some combination of the tools of public administration in a way that is broadly compatible with the sentiments and values of affected parties. Finally, policy evaluation refers to the fifth stage in the process in which the results of policies are monitored by both the government and societal actors. This stage is often lead to the reconceptualisation of policy problems and solutions in the light of experiences encountered with the policy in question and the start of a new iteration of the cycle.

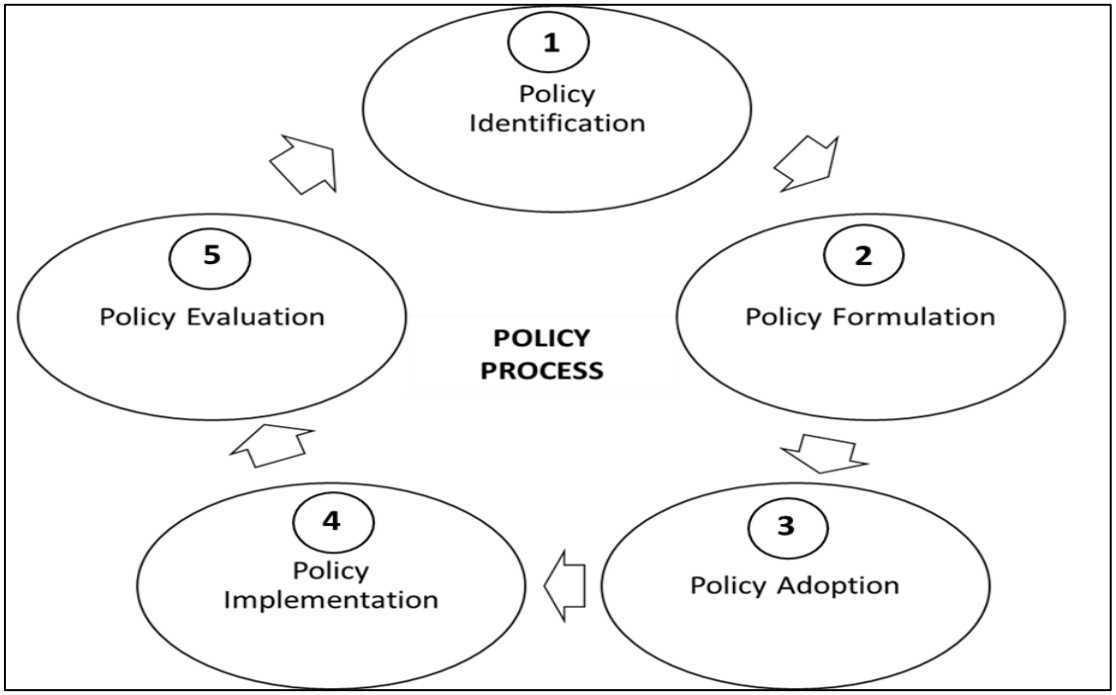


Figure 2.4 Policy Process Stages

Source: Howlett & Ramesh, 2003

Since the focus of this study is on the policy implementation aspect (the fourth stage of policy process), it is worth to examine the evolution of theory related to this stage. Policy implementation theories evolved in three eras: (1) the first era ranged from the early 1970s to the 1980s, began with the individual case study, (2) the second era in the 1980s, emerged with systematic theories of top-down and bottom-up approaches that can be generalisable to many cases, and finally, (3) the third era began later in 1990s onwards, focusing on the synthetisation of the first and second eras (Hill & Hupe, 2002).

Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) is the prime example study of the first era. While the second era involved works by few researchers including Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) as well as Mazmanian and Sabatier (1981) who represent the top-down researchers, while Lipsky (1980) and Hull and Hjern (1987) signify the bottom-up scholars. The third era scholars involved names such as Goggin et al. (1990) and Matland (1995).

The first era implementation research was centred on how a single authoritative decision was carried out, either at a single location or at multiple sites (Goggin et al., 1990). It was more of a systematic effort to understand the factors that facilitated or constrained the implementation of public policies. The analysis showed how local factors such as size, intra-organisational relationships, commitment, capacity, and institutional complexities mould responses to policy (McLaughlin, 1987).

The second era implementation studies later focused on describing and analysing the relationships between policy and practice. It also taught researchers the importance of time periods apart from recognising implementation's variability over time and across policies and units of government. This era of research was engaged in the development of analytical frameworks, which led to the onset of the two schools of thought, top-down and bottom-up policy implementation perspectives.

Finally, the third era research surfaced with its unique trait involving research design. As this era of researchers are known as the synthesisers, they came up with explicit theoretical model, operational definitions of concepts, and an exhaustive search for reliable indicators of implementations and predictor variables. They also outlined the specification of theoretically derived hypotheses, with analysis of data using appropriate qualitative and statistical procedure as well as case studies for testing them (Goggin et al., 1990). A model was developed by Goggin et. al. (1990) based on the communications theory perspective of intergovernmental implementation, which includes many variables from the top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The model indicates that implementation is influenced by a combination of inducements and constraints from layers of level (federal, state, and local). Matland (1995) later presents the ambiguity and conflict model as a combination of the top-down and bottom-up perspectives. His model suggests that their relative value depends on the degree of ambiguity in goals and means of a policy and the degree of conflict. In this third era research, the macro world of policymakers is integrated with the micro world of individual implementers. As highlighted by Berman (1978), policy implementation process takes place at two levels: macro and micro. At macro implementation level, centrally located actors devise a government programme. While at micro implementation stage, local organisations react to macro-level plans by developing and implementing their own programmes.

In this study context, the top-downers or policymakers are the ones who deal with the preschool policymaking process, whereas the bottom-uppers or policy implementers involve the actual actors of the preschool programme on the ground or the street-level bureaucrats, as Lipsky terms it.

2.7 Theories Underpinning the Study

The theories that underpin a study are often viewed as lens and intended to explain 'how' and 'why' things happened the way that they do. The underpinning theory for this study comprised of the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation theory, while the model underpinned the study involved the Katz model on perspectives of ECCE quality.

2.7.1 Top-down and Bottom-up Policy Implementation Theory

Implementation literally means carrying out, accomplishing, fulfilling, producing, or completing a given task. According to Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), policy implementation may be viewed as a process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieve them. Meanwhile, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1981) define policy implementation as carrying out a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a statute, but which can also take the form of important executive orders or court decisions. O'Toole (2003) later describes policy implementation as the connection between the expression of governmental intention and the actual results. In short, policy implementation can be conceptualised as a process, output, and outcome. It is a process of a series of decisions and actions directed towards putting a prior authoritative decision into effect. It is also an output or extent to which programmatic goals have been satisfied. And finally, implementation outcome implies that there has been some measurable change in the larger problem that was addressed by the programme, public law, or judicial decisions (Lester et al., 1987).

In this study context, the top-down and bottom-up approaches are being explored through the lens of the supply side of the policymakers and policy implementers, respectively. The top-down perspectives asserted that policy goals are nominative by policymakers with effective implementation be anticipated through mechanism setting (Palumbo & Calista, 1990). This view is policy driven and signifies the policymaker's perspectives. It emphasises on the policymaker's capability to control over the surroundings and implementers. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) as well as Mazmanian and Sabatier (1981) emphasise that effective implementations depend very much on how the implementing officials carry out the goals set by the authoritative call for specific target groups. Additionally, Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) suggest that

implementation will be most successful when linkages between various organisations and departments at local level exist. Hogwood and Gunn (1984) later provide policymakers with recommendations regarding effective implementation.

The top-down perspective displays a powerful urge for generalising policy recommendation. This requires finding consistent and distinguishable patterns of behaviour across different policy areas. The top-down perspective emphasises formal steering of problems and factors, which are easy to govern and result in centralisation and control. Emphasis is given towards aspects like funding formulas, formal organisation structures and authority relationships between management entities, regulations, and management controls like budget, planning, and evaluation requirements (Hill & Hupe, 2002). The top-down perspective generally confines its consideration to actors who are officially associated with the implementation of a particular programme (Paudel, 2010). In addition, the top-downers focus on a specific political decision, normally a law (Sabatier, 2007). They track down the implementation through the system, often with special interest in higher-level decision makers. They typically assume a control perspective of implementation, attempting to provide decent recommendation to structure the implementation process in order to accomplish the motivation behind legislation and to minimise the number of decision points that could be vetoed.

In addition, this study is hoped to unveil the other perspectives of the supply side of policy implementation through bottom-up approach. In contrast to the top-down perspective, the bottom-up normally focuses at the formal and informal relationships comprising the policy subsystems engaged in creating and implementing policies (Birkland, 2005). This perspective sets a problem in society as its starting point and focuses on people and their behaviour (Hill & Hupe, 2002). Lipsky (1980) advocates a theory of 'street-level bureaucracy', whereby the scholar emphasises on the significant role of street-level bureaucrats in bringing policies to people. This role in delivering services or imposing regulations makes street-level bureaucrats the important actors in implementing public policies. In this regard, street-level bureaucrats become the focal point in the policy implementation process. With the advantage of having direct contact with the public, the street-level bureaucrats are thought to have a more robust understanding of clients' needs. Indeed, Lipsky (1980) claims that street-level bureaucrats are the actual policymakers, contrary to the claim made by the top-downers.

However, implementation failure relates to discretion and routine, together with personal failures (Elmore, 1979).

Similarly, in Hull and Hjern (1987), the bottom-up perspective recognises the interactions among numerous actors and maps relations between them. These network analyses recognised the importance of both public and private actors. The analysis typically embraces several policies that affect the identical problem, regardless of whether it is intended in those policies. Hull and Hjern (1987) focus on the role of local networks in affecting a given problem in the implementation process and further propose a method of identifying the networks. This method enables them to map a network that identifies the relevant implementation structure for a specific policy at local, regional, and national level; thus, permits them to gauge the significance of government programmes vis-à-vis other influences such as market. Strategic alliances and unintended effects as well as the dynamic nature of policy become visible to them (Paudel, 2010). According to them, central initiatives are poorly adapted to local conditions, whereby it depends only to a limited degree on central activities. (Hill & Hupe, 2002). The skills of individuals in the local implementation structure, who can adapt the policy to local conditions, is the key to successful programmes (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). Therefore, their analysis is important in drawing attention to implementation activities and structures at local operational level.

The theories underpinned this study involve both the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches as this research intends to look at both perspectives of policy implementation involving policy directives from the policymakers (top-down) and everyday practices by the policy implementers (bottom-up). The comparisons of both top-down and bottom-up perspectives discussed in few of the earlier paragraphs of this section are summarised in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4
Comparisons of Top-down and Bottom-up Perspectives

No.	Scholars of Top-Down Perspectives	Top-Down Perspectives	Variables	Bottom-Up Perspectives	Scholars of Bottom-Up Perspectives
1.	Pressman & Wildavsky (1984)	Policymakers	Policy decision maker	Policy implementers	Lipsky (1980)
2.	Van Meter & Van Horn (1975)	Statutory language	Starting point	Social problem	Elmore (1979)
3.		Formal	Structure	Both formal and informal	

No.	Scholars of Top-Down Perspectives	Top-Down Perspectives	Variables	Bottom-Up Perspectives	Scholars of Bottom-Up Perspectives
4.	Mazmanian & Sabatier (1981)	Purely administrative	Process	Networking, including administrative	Hull & Hjern (1987)
5.		Centralisation	Authority	Decentralisation	
6.	Hogwood & Gunn (1984)	Prescriptive	Output/outcomes	Descriptive	
7.		Top-level bureaucrats	Discretion	Bottom-level bureaucrats	

Source: Paudel, 2010

The importance of top-down and bottom policy implementation approach is evident and has been surfaced in several studies. For instance, in the human trafficking aspect, Nigeria's National Policy on Protection and Assistance to Trafficked Persons (NPPATPN) showcases a top-down approach where implementation is controlled by higher level bureaucrats with limited discretion for lower-level officials (Sani et al., 2023). This study found that such approach has led to challenges in effectively protecting trafficked persons due to the rigid hierarchical structure. In its efforts to protect and assist trafficked persons, the Nigerian Government designed and formulated a comprehensive NPPATPN in 2008. However, the country's efforts in the protection of Trafficked Persons have been considered inadequate. Thus, the challenges facing Nigeria are not that of policy formulation but the implementation of the policy. The study by Sani et al. (2023) aims to explore the implementation of the NPPATPN from the perspective of top-down and bottom-up approaches using qualitative methodology whereby participants from government agencies, NGOs, international governmental organisation (IGOs) and trafficked persons were purposely selected and interviewed. The implementation of the NPPATPN in Nigeria is seen as primarily top-down characterised by directives from higher authorities with strict hierarchical control. Conversely, a bottom-up approach would involve grassroots participation and input from NGOs and trafficked persons, fostering collaboration and flexibility in policy implementation. Thus, such situation leads to inadequate protection and assistance for trafficked persons, limiting discretion for lower-level bureaucrats. The findings accordingly revealed that the top-down approach is more pronounced compared to the bottom-up approach in NPPATPN implementation. This is because the lower-level bureaucrat operates under strong hierarchical command and control with no freedom to exercise any discretion in the implementation process. The study recommends that the

policymakers (top officials) should take into cognisance the significance of the implementers (lower-official), NGOs and other relevant stakeholders in the policymaking process for the policy to be effective and legitimate. Therefore, the study has contributed significantly to providing a clear understanding regarding the performance of NPPATPN's implementation in Nigeria.

In contrast, in the healthcare settings studied by Yarbrough (2017), the United States healthcare reform law – the Affordable Care Act – provides an opportunity to study the dynamics of implementation for complex, politically contentious policies. Yarbrough (2017), in this study, exploits variation across states in the implementation of online health insurance marketplaces to test whether the federal (top-down) or state-managed (bottom-up) implementation model produced better outcomes. Specifically, the study examines if state, federal or partnership exchanges were most effective at offering generous plans for consumers based on premiums, deductibles, and copayments, the first year of operation. Top-down policy implementation examples include federally facilitated health insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act, where centralised authority dictates objectives and compliance. In contrast, bottom-up implementation is exemplified by state-operated health insurance exchanges, which leverage local discretion and stakeholder relationships to adapt policies to specific contexts. Such approach allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness to local needs, leading to more effective outcomes in offering generous health plans. This success highlights the importance of local discretion and adaptability in policy execution, aligning with the bottom-up perspective.

Meanwhile, there are several other examples illustrating the diverse applications of top-down and bottom-up policy implementation strategies across different sectors. In climate mitigation policy, Norway's hybrid management strategy combines top-down global efforts with bottom-up national measures, demonstrating a contested hybrid of policy approaches to curb emissions (Hermansen & Sundqvist, 2022). A study by Hermansen and Sundqvist (2022) represent another example of hybrid policy implementation approach. It is widely accepted that the Paris Agreement implies a shift in global climate mitigation policy from a top-down approach focused on global distribution of emission cuts and international cost-effectiveness to a bottom-up approach based on national efforts. Less is known about how this shift at the global level trickles down and manifests in national climate mitigation policy. Norway is in this respect an interesting example, since it has long been portrayed as an important

driver of an international top-down approach. Top-down policy implementation examples include Norway's CO2 tax introduced in 1991, which aimed for international cost-effectiveness across multiple sectors. In contrast, bottom-up examples involve specific national initiatives like the mandatory share of biofuels, which aim to achieve domestic emission cuts. Hermansen and Sundqvist (2022), in this paper, argue that Norwegian policy cannot be characterised as a 'pure' top-down regime; policy instruments and measures directed at specific technology investments and deployment to complement cost-effective (international) policy instruments have been an explicit government ambition for a long time. Second, by using the case of biofuels, the study analyses how the two approaches have been combined in practice over the past decade. Using the notion of 'hybrid management', Hermansen and Sundqvist (2022) demonstrate that the top-down approach not only has left a lasting imprint on Norwegian mitigation policy, but also this approach has increasingly been challenged by bottom-up thinking, leaving Norwegian climate mitigation policy as a contested hybrid of policy approaches. The study further concluded that inadequate institutional arrangements for productively managing the tensions between the two approaches have hampered progress in Norwegian policy in curbing domestic emissions. The Norwegian Climate Settlement illustrates this hybrid approach, where top-down frameworks coexist with bottom-up measures to address market failures and enhance local engagement in climate mitigation efforts. It is expected that Norwegian climate mitigation will become increasingly hybridised in the coming decades and suggest that cultivating hybridisation can be a productive approach for policy progress.

Similarly, in the education sector, the 2023 Education Vision in Istanbul showcases a top-down policy where street-level bureaucrats face hindrances in implementation, emphasising the need for hybrid policies (Karaevli et al., 2024). The study by Karaevli et al. (2022) aims to explore the policy implementation process regarding 2023 Education Vision, a national-based top-down policy document, in the context of Istanbul through the lived experiences of local-level administrators as street-level bureaucrats. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, incorporating phenomenology as the research design whereby the participants of the study were determined in accordance with criterion sampling. In the analysis, the researchers reached three themes, which are reflections from the field, priorities, and barriers. The findings primarily unveil the contentious perspectives adopted from a great variety of education stakeholders regarding the implementation of this policy document. In

addition, the views of street-level bureaucrats reveal that some areas in the relevant policy document are much more highly prioritised than others and that these priorities are embodied in practice in a variety of ways. Finally, the findings draw attention to the hindrances street-level bureaucrats face regarding the implementation of this policy document. Also, it proposed that designing hybrid educational policies in both top-down and bottom-up ways is fundamental for efficiency in street-level policy implementation.

Another example is a study by Heidbreder (2017) that illustrates a hybrid of top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approach in financial settings. Specifically, the top-down policy implementation is exemplified by the European Central Bank's control over monetary policy, where member states confer full implementing powers to the European Union level. In contrast, bottom-up implementation is illustrated by the open method of coordination (OMC), which promotes mutual learning and policy diffusion among national jurisdictions, leading to horizontal approximation of task-specific capacities. Additionally, the LEADER approach for rural development serves as an example of policy-specific networking that enhances implementation effectiveness in a bottom-up manner. Policy implementation in the European Union is most prominently analysed taking compliance as a conceptual starting point. However, compliance has an inherent top–down and state-centred bias. To overcome this limitation, a conceptual framework that links dimensions based on top–down/bottom–up implementation and vertical/horizontal multilevel governance is proposed. The thus derived four ideal-types of implementations in multilevel settings – centralisation, agencification, convergence and networking – are complemented by functional expectations about policymakers' strategic choices over these types. A screening of existing research completes the contribution. The results show that the suggested conceptualisation offers indeed a comprehensive framework to describe the implementation strategies to propose avenues for future explanatory studies on strategic choices over implementation types.

To sum up, top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches represent two different strategies for enacting policies, each with its own strengths and challenges. Top-down approaches are characterised by centralised decision making, where policies are formulated by higher authorities that are then implemented through a hierarchical structure. Meanwhile, bottom-up approaches emphasise the roles of local actors and grassroot initiatives in shaping and executing policies decisions.

2.7.2 Katz Model

Apart from looking at the supply side of the federal agency providing the preschool service by employing the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation theory, the study also looked at the demand side of the parents' perspective, who act as proxies in receiving the service on behalf of their children, by employing the Katz model on perspectives of childcare quality. Perspectives on what establishes the quality with regards to ECCE provision relies upon several aspects; not just on a nation's financial setting and widely held views and beliefs, but also on the needs, roles and motivations of the various stakeholders involved in defining and assessing ECCE provision.

Katz (1995) proposes a model that represents various perspectives in ECCE quality as depicted in Figure 2.5. According to Katz (1995), in determining the quality of childcare, views from various stakeholders should be included: (1) the perspective of researchers (top-down), (2) the perspective of children (bottom-up), (3) the perspective of parents, social service professionals, and policymakers (outside-in), and (4) the perspective of caregivers and directors (inside-out).

Comparison between top-down and bottom-up policy implementation theories and the Katz model in terms of perspectives on childcare quality reveals distinct approaches. Top-down policy implementation, as discussed in various studies emphasises structured mandates from the policymakers for policy implementation. While bottom-up approaches highlighted in the literature, underscore grassroots involvement and agency in driving policy implementation. The Katz Model, although not explicitly mentioned, is likely to be focusing on the quality of childcare services and the impact of different implementation strategies on service delivery and outcomes.

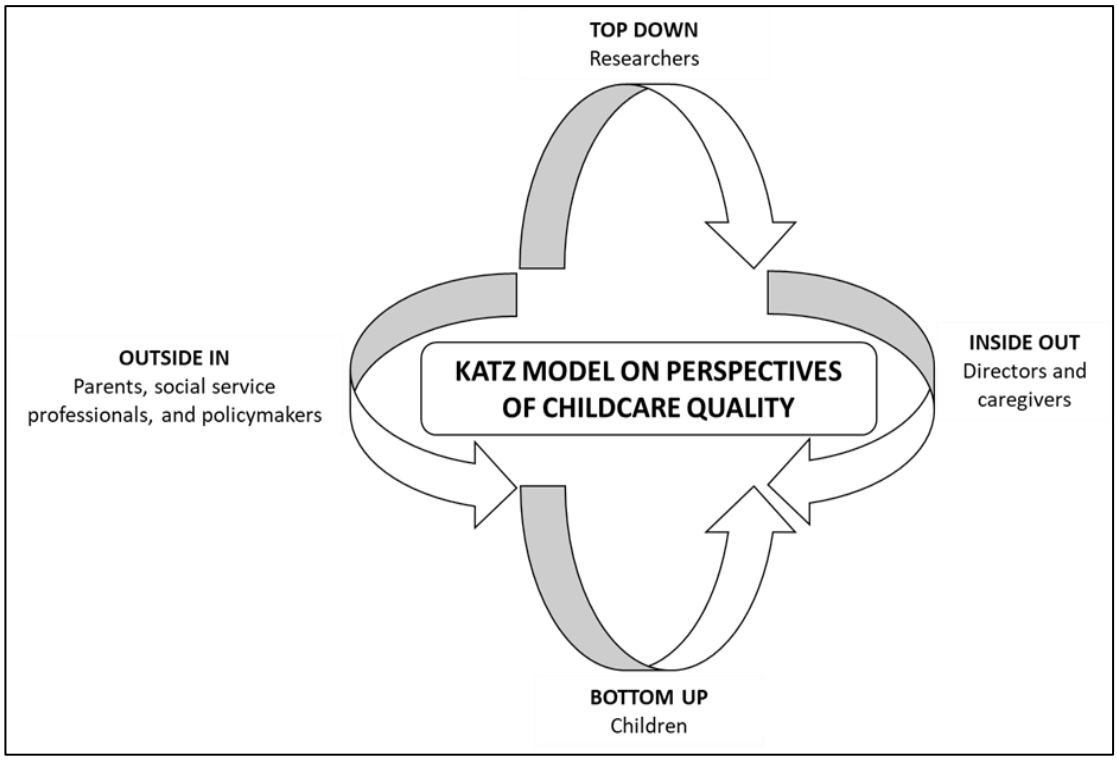


Figure 2.5 Graphical Interpretation of Katz Model

Undeniably, these two theories and model do share some similarities. The top-down perspective in policy implementation theory focuses on structuring mandates for implementation, which is similar to how the top-down perspective in childcare quality assesses selected characteristics of programmes from the researcher's' viewpoint. Conversely, the bottom-up perspective in policy implementation theory considers how programmes are experienced by participants, mirroring the bottom-up perspective in childcare quality model that aims to determine how programmes are experienced by participating children. These parallels highlight the importance of considering different viewpoints and experiences in both policy implementation theory and childcare quality model to ensure comprehensive and effective outcomes. Hence, Katz's (1995) proposition on these various perspectives on childcare quality is quite similar to the two school of thoughts developed for studying and describing policy implementation, that are top-down approach involving policymakers and bottom-up approach covering policy implementers.

Katz (1995) describes the top-down perspective as being the commonly employed in research and that the perspective of researchers dominates the discourse on ECCE quality. Of the remaining three perspectives, the outside-in perspective of parents has been modestly studied, while the inside-out views of caregivers and bottom-up lenses of the children have been minimally studied. She argues that these three other

perspectives have been somewhat neglected which could be due to the scientific nature of it that focuses on quantitative aspects and objective measurements that can be easily adopted and applied in childcare regulations. The top-down view of researchers is pretty much covered in the top-down policy implementation theories while the inside-out view of caregivers was further explained by the bottom-up policy implementation theories. The uniqueness of Katz's model that was not covered by these two policy implementation theories is the outside-in perspectives whereby the focus was zoomed to parents, who are the proxies in receiving the service on behalf of their children. Thus, it is only relevant to look at both theories and model concurrently.

2.8 Proposed Theoretical Framework

Sekaran (2000) describes a theoretical framework as a conceptual model of how one makes logical sense of the relationship between various factors identified as being important to a problem. It enlightens the breadth and depth of the study, directs the research objectives, and finally draws the big picture. Alternatively, Miles and Huberman (1994) provide an example of conceptual frameworks. The conceptual framework serves several purposes: (1) identifying what to be included in the study, (2) describing what relationships may be present based on logic, theory, and/or experience, and (3) providing the researcher with the opportunity to gather general constructs into intellectual 'bins' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The theoretical frameworks in qualitative studies and conceptual frameworks in quantitative research are the anchor to the studies and are referred throughout the research process.

The importance of having a theoretical framework in a qualitative study is as important as having a conceptual framework in a quantitative study. Not only it provides a theory-driven approach to the study, but it also gives the study a well-defined and proven basis of argument. It explains the study's significance and validity while guiding the researcher in filling up the gaps of knowledge and practice. The development of the theoretical framework helps to clarify the implicit theory in a manner that is more clearly defined. It assists researcher in considering other possible frameworks and reducing biases that may sway one's interpretation. The theoretical framework connects the researcher to existing knowledge. Guided by a relevant theory, it sets a basis for hypotheses and choice of research methods. Articulating the theoretical assumptions of a research study forces researcher to address questions of why and how. Thus, a

theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study, simultaneously introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. Hence, a critical consideration in this study is the support framework and structures in ensuring standardised structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives as portrayed in the proposed theoretical framework in Figure 2.6.

In coming up with the proposed framework, the researcher is basing it on both the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches, as well as the injection of Katz model on the outside-in perspective in determining the quality of childcare. Considering Katz's argument on the three other neglected perspectives, this study includes the outside-in perspectives of parents as proxies to their children. Thus, both perspectives from parents (outside-in perspective in Katz model) and children (bottom-up perspective in Katz model) would be captured from parents' responses. The study also broadens the scope of key informants (which will later be discussed in detail in the next chapter) to cover preschool teachers (that can be termed as caregiver, the inside-out perspective in Katz model). Therefore, the three initially neglected perspectives as emphasised by Katz perhaps would be captured in this study.

The framework provides both the supply side views in terms of policy directives (top-down) and everyday practices (bottom-up) approaches, while the demand side covers the policy receivers' perception and expectation (inside-out), to determine the levels of merging among them. This framework provides a platform for understanding the crucial part of policy implementation aspect that involves interconnectedness between the policy aims for provision of ECCE; involvement, governance, and management of various ECCE agencies; availability of resources; and perceived aspects of quality from a variety of perspectives and multiple angles. It places a specific focus on the interrelatedness of these triparty stakeholders in the policy implementation of structural quality for Malaysian public preschools.

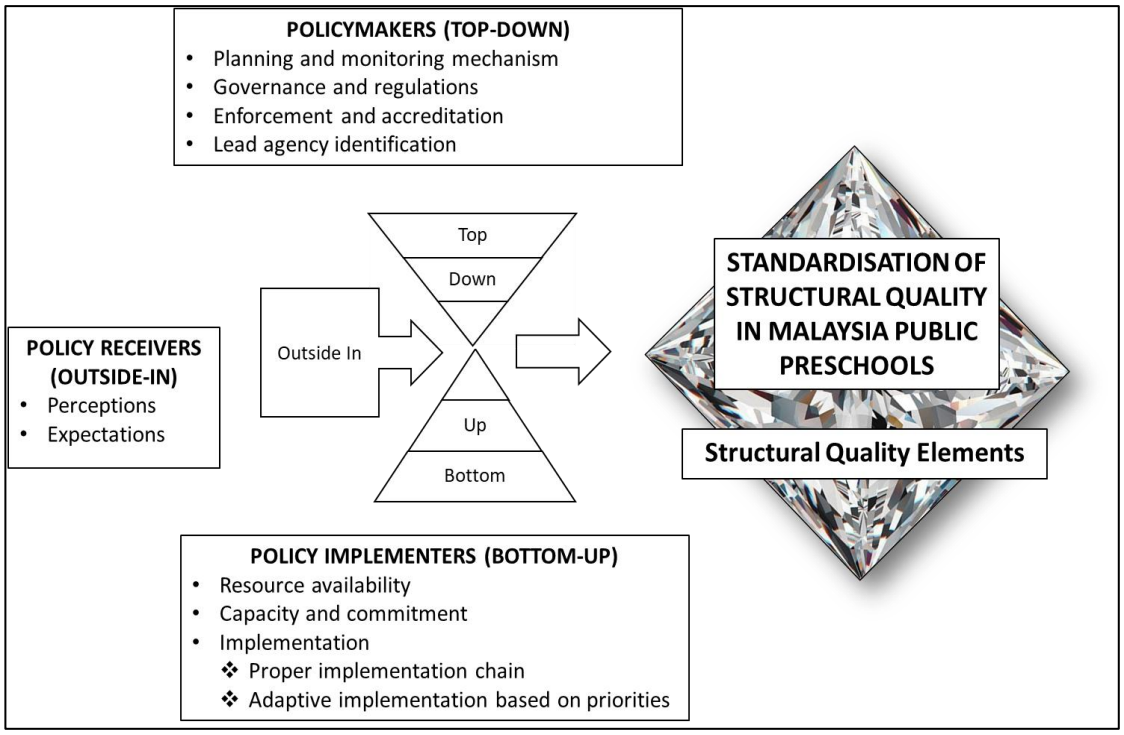


Figure 2.6 Theoretical Framework on Structural Policy for Policy Implementation in Malaysian Public Preschools

The top-down approach is based on the following important assumptions: (1) policies should contain clearly defined goals, (2) policies should clearly defined policy tools, (3) policies exist along with a proper policy statement, and (4) policy chain starts with clear policy message at the top that trickles down to the bottom.

Meanwhile, the bottom-up approach argues on the need for: (1) clear messages be sent by credible officials and received by receptive implementers, (2) sufficient resources along with capacity and commitment, and supported by the affected groups of any given policy, and (3) adaptive implementation is possible, based on priorities of the implementers.

In short, policymakers should have considered all the factors in planning, formulating, adopting, implementing, and assessing any given policy. Meanwhile, policy implementers, being the other end of the policy implementation chain, would expect all factors are leveraged on to allow for effective implementation. The policy implementation also needs feedback from its recipients, the policy receivers, who demand explanations on the elements of perceptions and expectations. This is where the outside-in perspective comes into the picture. The proposition of the research is basically to link the concepts of structural quality for policy implementation as perceived by the supply side (policymaker and policy implementer) and demand side

(policy receiver). And later reinforce each other in making them theoretically and practically complementary.

The study aims to give the policymakers and policy implementers added knowledge on what are perceived and expected by the policy receivers that can later be used to impart and improve the current policy work process. Policy receivers in turn, can benefit from the adaptations and advancement done by both the policy makers and policy implementers. In the long run, this would perhaps result in a possibility of a new policy document regarding structural quality to be put in place as a complementary to the current NSPC document Malaysia has. Thus, it affirmed the importance of having 360-degree perspectives of the dual perspectives of supply part and demand side so that a holistic view is achieved on the scenario researched on.

2.9 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has provided an overview of ECCE and preschool from the perspectives of global and Malaysian context. The evolution and evaluation of Malaysia's preschool education programme was discussed at length. The general definitions of preschool quality, which consist of structural and process quality were also elaborated. The issues and challenges related to policy implementation of quality preschool provision have been thoroughly deliberated in this chapter. The chapter also talked about the relevant theories to the study, which are Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory and Policy Implementation Theory. The chapter is finally concluded with the theory and approach being used in coming up with the proposed research framework – the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches as well as the Katz model on the outside-in perspective in determining the structural quality for policy implementation in Malaysian public preschools.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research design of the study and provides the rationale for the research methodology. The second section 3.2 focuses on the research philosophy, while the third section 3.3 presents the research methodology. The fourth section 3.4 subsequently discusses on the research design employed followed by the fifth section 3.5 that deliberates on the research instrument utilised. Section sixth of 3.6 and seventh of 3.7 touched on unit of analysis and sample size, respectively. And section eighth of 3.8 later describes the sampling procedure with sampling technique is discussed in detail in sub section 3.8.1. Meanwhile, the ninth section 3.9 explains the actions undertaken prior to data collection covering preparation of interview protocol and guide, addressing ethical issues, and obtaining the gate keeper's approval. The tenth section 3.10 later describes the data collection phase which were covered while being in the research field involving three instruments, namely in-depth semi-structured interview, autophotography/photovoice, and document review. This is followed by a description of data analysis process in the eleventh section 3.11, covering thematic, photo, and content analysis. The twelfth section 3.12 discusses the issues of validity and reliability of the research before ending up with a summary of the chapter in section 3.13 that revisits all the crucial main ideas which were discussed in each section of this chapter.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Creswell (2014) highlights four types of philosophy that are widely discussed in the literature, namely post positivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism. The first one focuses more on quantitative studies, while the second one is more of qualitative research, leaving the two latter taking the mixed method analysis.

This research takes a constructivist position. The constructivist paradigm originated from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German philosophers' study of interpretive understanding called

hermeneutics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivist approaches to research is having the intention of understanding 'the world of human experience' (Yin, 2011), suggesting that 'reality is socially constructed' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They recognise the impact on the research of their own background and experiences as they tend to rely upon the informants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2013). Constructivists do not generally begin with a theory, rather they 'generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings' (Creswell, 2014) throughout the research process. More often than not, constructivists are likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods and analysis rather than quantitative methods. Thus, since this study intended to explore the structural quality elements required in Malaysian public preschools apart from investigating the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality among these preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives, it was only appropriate to conduct the study using constructivist lens.

The theoretical framework is different from a theory and sometimes referred to as the paradigm (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), or research worldview that sets the general philosophical orientation of research (Creswell, 2014). It influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. The philosophy behind a study basically sets the intent, motivation, and expectations for the research. The absence of philosophical orientation as the initial step would leave a study without a basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature, or research design. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a paradigm comprises of four elements, namely, epistemology (knowledge), ontology (assumptions), axiology (ethical issues), and methodology (methods of data collection).

In terms of epistemology, the constructivist stance brings forward the hidden meaning to the surface through deep reflection. Thus, the distinct characteristic of constructivism lies in the interaction between the investigator and the object of investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This reflection can be stimulated by the interactive researcher-key informants' dialogue. Thus, in this study, knowledge is gathered through in-depth interview sessions and photos shared by multiple stakeholders. For example, in-depth interviews with the key informants were conducted to deep dive into their minds to gauge on what they perceived as the standard structural quality in Malaysia preschool system. While photos shared unveiled the story behind of what being shared during the interview sessions. Document review played a vital role

in this qualitative research in which it raised important epistemological questions about how knowledge is constructed, validated, and interpreted within specific contexts.

In terms of ontology, reality within this perspective is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual's experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher. Basically, constructivists suggest that reality is constructed in the mind of an individual, rather than being an externally singular entity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, in a simple analogy, there is no guarantee that two researchers working independently on the same data would achieve the same results eventually. The researcher believes that each key informant constructs unique individual reality, yet there are multiple equally valid, socially constructed versions of truth in implementing structural quality in Malaysian public preschool programme depending on each informant's unique response. In short, there are multiple meanings of policy implementation of structural quality in the minds of key informants who are experiencing it, and adding to that, are the multiple interpretations of the data by researchers. Hence, it is important to understand the views and experiences of the multiple preschool stakeholders involved in this study.

Axiology, emphasising on values and ethics, plays a crucial role in qualitative research by shaping the researcher's approach and influencing the interpretation of findings. Unlike quantitative research, which often aims for objectivity, qualitative research acknowledges that the values and beliefs of the researcher can significantly impact the research process. This understanding encourages researchers to reflect on their own biases and how these may affect their interactions with participants and the data collected. Hence, in terms of axiology, it is believed that the researchers biases are unavoidable and have influence on the understanding and analysis of data (Patton, 2002). Thus, it is best for the researcher to constantly and faithfully represent the experiences described by informants rather than communicate his/her personal experience. In this study context, the researcher tried as much as possible to segregate her own personal views and opinions from the responses given by the informants. By recognising and addressing axiological issues, qualitative researchers enhance the credibility and richness of their studies, ultimately leading to a more nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena.

The constructivist paradigm offers a valuable lens for studying the structural quality of preschool programmes, as it emphasises the roles of both supply and demand side stakeholders in shaping the learning environment. A constructivist perspective on

preschool programme quality focuses on the ways in which structural elements such as teacher qualifications, classroom arrangement, and teacher-child ratios, facilitate or hinder children's active engagement and cognitive development. A constructivist study of structural quality would explore how the environment supports children and relevant stakeholders collaborating together, within the context of a nurturing, participatory classroom environment. The findings from such a study could highlight the need for environments that promote social interaction, inquiry, and problem-solving, of which are integral to quality early childhood education. The research questions for this study cannot be answered simply just by looking at the tip of the iceberg of the issue. Thus, it is only appropriate to take a constructivist stance to dig into the breadth and depth of the issue studied. With a qualitative approach, different types of data collected can be analysed from various angles to arrive at a meaningful conclusion.

3.3 Research Methodology

The choice of methodology is important as it contributes to the findings and overall quality of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neuman, 2000). There are three primary research methodology types: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods depending on the research paradigm, as discussed in the earlier section. As the research objectives of this study were not only to explore the structural quality elements that influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded preschools but also to investigate stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among these preschools in Malaysia, a qualitative approach is employed.

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, whereby data is not manipulated but allowed to ‘unfold naturally’ (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is positioned within an interpretive frame where researchers play a proactive role, becoming immersed in the life of participating settings where observations and interviews prevail. Thus, the researcher is the instrument through whom data are mediated, rather than through ‘some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The essence of qualitative research is the researcher’s direct involvement as she attempts to process information, respond sensitively to informants, and adapt the research design as data is analysed and interpreted as new issues and questions emerge. Creswell (2013) defines

qualitative research as an inquiry approach in which the inquirer: (1) explores a central phenomenon; (2) asks informants broad general questions; (3) collects detailed views of informants in the form of words or images; (4) analyses and codes the data for descriptions and themes; (5) interprets the meaning of information drawing on personal reflections and past research; and (6) writes the final report that includes personal biases and a flexible structure.

Qualitative data can be observed but not measured as it deals with descriptions. Unlike quantitative data, which is quantifiable in nature as it can easily be measured through numbers, qualitative data focuses on the quality or richness of data. Qualitative research relies on the views of informants by asking broad and specific questions. Data collected consist largely of text or words from informants which can be analysed thematically in a subjective manner (Creswell, 2012). Thus, qualitative data is useful because informants can freely express their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences in more details. In this study context, the triparty stakeholders' views were explored through interview sessions and later triangulated with photos shared by the informants apart from the documents reviewed prior to conducting the interviews.

According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research provides a research strategy that usually emphasises the words with which individuals interpret actions and the social world, and it may be an appropriate method to be employed in social research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) mention that qualitative research involves case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, plus observational, historical, and visual texts to describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. It attempts to make sense of the meaning in people's behaviour (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Bryman, 2012). This study in particular is seeking opinions from multiple stakeholders covering both demand and supply perspectives on the policy implementation of structural quality in Malaysia preschool programme in effort to get a holistic view on the issue.

Hammersley (2000) outlines five advantages of qualitative research, of which three are relevant to this study:

a) Appreciative capacity: where human behaviour is understood as making sense within the context in which it occurs. In this study, the context includes how the informants: (1) perceive the elements of structural quality in public

preschools, and (2) perceive themselves as part of the contributors in implementing a standard for structural quality in public preschools.

b) Corrective capacity: where the research methodology informs and shapes the existing perceptions of both the supply side (policymakers and policy implementers) and demand side (policy receivers) at the macro and micro levels. Studies conducted are insignificant if it does not result in some benefit to society. This study sheds light on the policy and practice in preschool contexts. It adds to the present knowledge base, thus, influence the future practice.

c) Relevance to policymaking and practice is the essence of this study. Hammersley (2000) stresses on the capacity of qualitative research to provide valuable information in improving educational policies and practice. The research methodology used in this study is designed to develop 'bottom up' abstractions and observations. Qualitative research sets a stage for engagement with stakeholders who are working or impacted directly with policy related to preschool education, thus offering unique insights into policy implementation through their lenses.

3.4 Research Design

There are five designs of qualitative research, that are case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and narrative (Creswell, 2013). The differences among these five designs of qualitative approach include objective, focus, unit of analysis, as well as data collection and data analysis methods. Some of which may have some similarities, but differences exist in certain aspects based on the research topic. The selection of design type is determined by the objectives and problems of the study.

This study adopted a case study design. A case study is an exploration which uses in-depth data collection to gather rich information in context (Creswell, 2013). It is an in-depth study of individuals, programmes, or events for a certain period of time. There are two significant approaches that guide case study methodology: one proposed by Stake (1995) and the other by Yin (2014). Both seek to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored, and the essence of the issue is revealed. Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) use different terms to describe a variety of case studies. Yin (2014) identifies case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive. He also distinguishes between

single, holistic case studies, and multiple-case studies. Stake (1995), on the other hand, categorises case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. But, both Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm.

According to Yin (2014), a case study design should be considered when:

a) the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions,
b) the behaviour of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated,
c) contextual conditions need to be covered because they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or
d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

This study employs a single case study approach because it is believed to be the most appropriate in research focusing on society and culture in groups, programmes, or organisations that can help to understand a phenomenon of study (Yin, 2011). Predominantly, the single case study approach is chosen due to complexity and rareness organisational processes MoE possesses, thus provide basis for producing rich theory on organisational phenomena. In this design, researcher employed the exploratory case study through a thorough and detailed data collection process that involves various sources of information, namely in-depth interview, document review, and autophotography/photovoice. To report on the case, the researcher later developed themes based on the findings of the case studied.

3.5 Research Instrument

The most common research instruments used in qualitative research are observation, interview, and document review (Ary et al., 2010). This study in particular, employed three instruments, namely in-depth interview, document review, and auto-photography/photovoice.

Interviews are the main instruments used in this study to obtain not only direct but also genuine information from the stakeholders of the preschool education programme. The study utilised three distinct sets of interview guides, each tailored to a specific stakeholder category: policymakers, policy implementers, and policy receivers. The interview guide for policymakers was further divided into two groups: government officials and preschool experts. Similarly, the interview guide for policy implementers

was split into government officials and preschool teachers. However, the interview guide for policy receivers remained undivided. The first and final sections of all three interview guides, which address the first and last research questions, were consistent across all stakeholder categories. Only the middle section, designed to address the first part of the second research question, contained questions specific to each stakeholder group. As for the interview protocol, a single uniform protocol was used across all three stakeholder categories.

Prior to performing the interviews, a document review involving government policy documents was also conducted to understand the preschool education scenario in Malaysia as well as to get a clear picture in the formulation of questions during the interview sessions. Seven policy documents related to the quality of education in Malaysia were selected through a literature search. These documents varied in scope, ranging from broad, macro-level policies to more specific ones addressing particular aspects of preschool quality. The selection was then validated by officials from the Ministry of Economy (KE) (previously known as the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department), MoE, as well as preschool experts and teachers in Malaysia. Seven policy documents on education quality in Malaysia reviewed, covering four broad, macro-level policies and three documents specifically focused on preschool education.

This research also utilises visual method, particularly the autophotography/photovoice technique, as an alternative to observations due to strict restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The autophotography/photovoice was based on photos shared by the key informants and supplemented by researcher's own encounter.

3.6 Unit of Analysis

This research is designed to explore and interpret the perspectives of individuals who are directly involved in or responsible for the provision, management, and oversight of public preschool education in Malaysia. Because the research questions focus on identifying essential structural quality elements, understanding challenges in implementing standard structural quality, and translating these perspectives into a conceptual framework, the stakeholder becomes the most appropriate and meaningful unit of analysis. Thus, in this study, the unit of analysis is the stakeholder.

Stakeholders in this context, include from the supply side - the ministry-level policymakers and policy implementers, as well as preschool teachers, while from the demand side - parents who sent their children to preschool programme offered by MoE and act as proxies to their children. The data collected from these stakeholders will form the primary basis for analysis, as the study seeks to interpret how structural quality is understood, enacted, and constrained from their diverse viewpoints.

By focusing on stakeholder perspectives, the study does not treat classrooms or preschool centres themselves as the unit of analysis. Instead, it prioritises the subjective insights, experiences, and interpretations of individuals who interact with or influence structural quality standards. This focus allows the study to capture a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of structural quality elements required and implementation challenges within Malaysia's public preschool system.

Selecting stakeholders as the unit of analysis, therefore enables the study to align closely with its qualitative orientation and its objective of developing a framework for standard structural quality that is informed directly by those who operate within the preschool ecosystem.

3.7 Sample Size

The sample size for this study is guided by the principles of qualitative inquiry, where the goal is to obtain rich, in-depth insights rather than statistical generalisation. Because the unit of analysis in this study is the stakeholder, key informants are selected from key groups directly involved in the implementation, management, or regulation of public preschool education in Malaysia. These include the ministry-level policymakers and policy implementers, preschool teachers, and parents who sent their children to preschool programme offered by MoE and act as proxies to their children

In qualitative research, the adequacy of the sample is determined by the concept of data saturation, which occurs when no new themes or insights emerge from additional data collection (Saunders et al., 2017). Based on methodological recommendations for studies involving interviews and focus groups, an estimated of 15 to 25 stakeholders will be included. This range allows for adequate representation of multiple stakeholder groups while ensuring the depth and breadth required to address the research questions. A tentative distribution of the sample may include (1) two to four ministry-level

policymakers (2) two to four ministry-level policy implementers, (3) five to ten preschool teachers, and (4) five to ten parents.

The exact number within each category may vary depending on accessibility and the point at which saturation is reached. This flexible approach ensures that the study remains responsive to the complexity of stakeholder perspectives while maintaining methodological rigour. Ultimately, the sample size is designed to capture diverse yet complementary viewpoints across different levels of the preschool system, thereby supporting the development of a robust framework for structural quality in Malaysia's public preschools.

A total of 18 key informants participated in this study, representing the tripartite stakeholder structure of public preschool provision. The supply side comprised two categories of stakeholders: (1) five policymakers, including government officials and preschool experts, who were involved in policy formulation and decision-making processes, and (2) eight policy implementers, consisting of government officials and preschool teachers, who were directly responsible for the implementation of preschool policies and practices. The demand side comprised five policy recipients, namely parents of children enrolled in MoE preschool programmes, who provided perspectives as proxies for their children regarding the quality and delivery of preschool services.

3.8 Sampling Procedure

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) states that a contributing goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning for the informants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in. Thus, a proper selection of sample from the population is crucial to achieve that goal. Qualitative researchers normally limit a fairly small number of individuals or situations and preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses. Thus, this would contribute to their understanding of how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which these occur.

Qualitative studies often time rely on non-probability sampling as compared to probability sampling employed for quantitative research. After considering several factors of sampling effectiveness as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this study employed a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they possess

characteristics that are needed in the study sample. According to Creswell (2012), purposeful sampling means that a researcher selects individuals and sites intentionally to learn or understand the essential phenomenon. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2007) stated that purposive sampling is chosen for a specific purpose as it provides greater depth to the study than probability sampling does. Thus, purposive sampling is utilised when a researcher selects a sample based on the needs of the study. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling.

This study is confined to the area of Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya due to several reasons, which are:

a) Putrajaya has a total of 14 primary schools. Each of these primary schools conducts preschool programme, with at least a couple of classes in each school. There is no other state in Malaysia that has a 100 percent rate of primary schools with annex preschool programme in that particular individual school (Ministry of Education, 2019). Thus, Putrajaya was selected as the study site because it constitutes a critical and information-rich case for investigating structural quality in federally funded preschools. Unlike other states in Malaysia, all government primary schools in Putrajaya offer preschool programmes, resulting in complete coverage MoE preschool provision within the territory. This unique characteristic provides a comprehensive setting in which structural quality requirements, implementation practices, and stakeholder experiences can be examined across the entire public preschool ecosystem.
b) As the administrative centre of the Federal Government, Putrajaya occupies a strategic position within the national education system. Government initiatives, policy directives, pilot programmes, and implementation reforms are frequently introduced and monitored through federal agencies located in Putrajaya. Consequently, the locality offers a particularly relevant context for examining stakeholders' perspectives on the development, implementation, and standardisation of structural quality within federally funded preschool programmes.
c) Although the study is geographically bounded to Putrajaya, the population comprises residents originating from diverse regions across Malaysia. As a federal administrative centre that attracts civil servants and professionals from

various states, Putrajaya provides access to stakeholders with varied cultural, educational, and geographical backgrounds. This diversity enhances the breadth of perspectives captured in the study while not implying statistical representativeness of the Malaysian population.

d) Furthermore, Putrajaya's population encompasses households from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds that perhaps resembles a holistic income status, ranging from those commonly classified within the Top 20 (T20), Middle 40 (M40) as well as Bottom 40 (B40). This socioeconomic diversity enables the study to capture a wider range of stakeholder experiences and expectations regarding structural quality in public preschool provision.

e) The selection of experienced preschool teachers further strengthened the study. Many of these participants had previously served in schools located in other states before being posted to Putrajaya. Their professional mobility enabled them to draw comparisons across different educational settings and administrative contexts, thereby providing richer and more nuanced insights into the structural quality requirements and implementation challenges associated with federally funded preschools.

f) Putrajaya's demographic composition, characterised by a substantial proportion of young families with preschool-aged children, facilitated the identification of information-rich participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. This demographic profile supported the effective application of purposive sampling strategies aimed at obtaining in-depth stakeholder perspectives.

The reasons for choosing this particular area were based on practicality, feasibility, and familiarity with the context. According to Silverman (2017), recognising what is possible, given available resources is important to successful research. The selection of Putrajaya was therefore guided not merely by considerations of accessibility and feasibility, but by its strategic relevance to the research objectives. As a federal administrative centre with complete MoE preschool coverage, a diverse stakeholder population, and direct proximity to national policy processes, Putrajaya constitutes a critical and information-rich case for examining the structural quality of federally funded preschools. Consistent with qualitative case study methodology, the study prioritised depth of understanding and contextual richness over statistical

generalisation, making Putrajaya an appropriate site for generating stakeholder-informed insights and framework development. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the context of Putrajaya's distinctive administrative, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics. While the site offers a strategically important setting for understanding structural quality in federally funded preschools, caution should be exercised when transferring the findings to rural or geographically remote areas where contextual conditions may differ substantially.

3.8.1 Sampling Technique: Purposive Sampling

Similar to quantitative studies, qualitative research needs to undergo a sampling procedure as well. The process in identifying the sample basically depends on what the research questions are (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For research questions that are looking at the experience in implementing the preschool education programme, sample selection requires key informants who are able to represent the population or organisation associated with the implementation of such programme in Malaysia. It is important to select the sample and population in a purposeful way to ensure the data collected are relevant and will answer the key questions (Patton, 2002).

As highlighted in the previous chapters, population of this study consists of three federal agencies providing the preschool programme, i.e., MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN. MoE is selected as the sample of the study due to its roles as the lead agency and the main reference point in regard to preschool programme in Malaysia. In this context, MoE's officials would certainly be able to provide a bird's eye view on the issue as the ministry's tasks coverage ranges not only from policy drafting, but also monitoring and assessing nation's overall preschool education programme.

The key informants in this study consist of two groups of public preschool stakeholders, namely: 1) the supply side comprising of the policymakers (government officials and preschool experts) and policy implementers (government officials and preschool teachers); while 2) the demand side involving the policy receivers (parents who sent their children to preschool programme offered by MoE and act as proxies to their children).

The selection of key informants began with the supply side covering government officials who are involved in the policy aspect of preschool education programme and able to provide information that is essential and meaningful to the topic studied. The

selection of the government officials involved officers from: (1) School Management Division (SMD), MoE (policymaker); and (2) Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya (JPWP), MoE (policy implementer). The inclusion criteria for the government officials covers MoE officers with at least at the position of assistant director or higher; applied to both SMD, MoE for policymaker, and JPWP, MoE for policy implementer. Specifically, these officers should have more than three years' experience in service with not less than a year experience in preschool policy area. Officers who do not meet such criteria were excluded from the selection process.

To get a fair assessment on the issue from the supply chain perspectives, the research also tapped on the opinions of preschool experts in Malaysia. For the key informants' selection involving preschool experts, the selection was done through purposive together with snowball sampling technique whereby they were referred by the government officials, besides being well-known as the expert in the field. Preschool experts' selection was among university lecturers with a wide knowledge and experience in the field of preschool policy, particularly relating to the government policy on preschool programme. Selection of the preschool experts was limited to a pool of lecturers from either Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), or Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI). Thus, experts not in this category were automatically excluded.

At the same time, snowball sampling technique was employed taking into account the views, information, and suggestions from the earlier key informants interviewed on who other individuals perceived to have information and knowledge on the policy implementation of preschool education programme (Thompson, 2012). This technique was applied particularly in selecting preschool teachers who are the actual implementers on the ground. A total of five preschool teachers were selected from five out of 14 primary schools that run preschool programmes in Putrajaya: one from each school. The selection of the preschool teachers focused on MoE preschool teachers with at least a year experience of teaching, particularly in preschool setting. Teachers with less than a year of preschool teaching experience were excluded from the selection process.

For the demand side, parents who sent their children to preschool programme offered by MoE were selected as the sample for this study. The same purposive and snowball sampling technique utilised in choosing the key informants from teacher's category was also employed in selecting the key informants among parents. Parents

were selected based on recommendations by either preschool teachers or prior interviewed informants. Five parents (with priority given to mothers rather than fathers, taking into consideration their involvement and attachment in the decision making related to children's preschool education) were selected from the same five schools where the teachers were being selected. Parents' prior experience in sending their children to preschool is not part of the selection criteria. Thus, parents with zero or single experience in sending children to *prasekolah*, MoE were also included in this study.

The sample size for this study was carefully determined to ensure sufficient depth and diversity of data while maintaining practical feasibility. A purposive sampling approach was employed, selecting participants who had relevant expertise or experience related to the research focus. The sample included policymakers, policy implementers, and policy receivers, with representation from key stakeholder groups such as government officials, preschool experts, preschool teachers, and parents. The final sample size was based on the principle of data saturation (Saunders et al., 2017), ensuring that enough participants were included to capture a wide range of perspectives and insights without redundancy. This approach balanced the need for comprehensive input with the constraints of time and resources, ensuring that the findings would be both rich and manageable for analysis.

The role of MoE as the gatekeeper in identifying the key informants for the study deserves due credits. The gatekeeper did not only identify informants from the policymaker and policy implementer categories involving MOE officials, but also academicians in the policymaker category and preschool teachers in the policy implementer category. MoE however, did not play a direct role in suggesting informants from the policy receiver category. Figure 3.1 summarises the sampling procedure involved in selecting the key informants under each category.

NO.	SCHOOL NAME	NO. OF PRESCHOOL CLASSES
1	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 5(1)	2
2	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 8(1)	3
3	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 8(2)	4
4	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 9(1)	2
5	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 9 (2)	4
6	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 11(1)	3
7	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 11(2)	3
8	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 11(3)	4
9	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 14(1)	3
10	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 16(1)	3
11	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 16(2)	3
12	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 17(1)	2
13	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 18(1)	4
14	SK PUTRAJAYA PRESINT 18(2)	2

Total key informants – 16

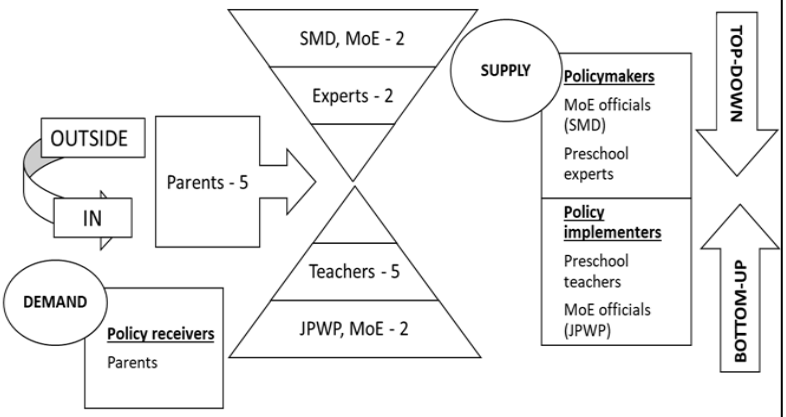


Figure 3.1 Sampling Procedure

3.9 Prior to Data Collection

Several steps have been taken prior to the commencement of data collection phase. It is crucial to have the procedure in place prior to collecting data to ensure the smoothness of the data collection process.

3.9.1 Interview Protocol and Interview Guide

The process started with drafting the interview protocol and interview guide. Both the interview protocol and guide were initially drafted in English. Following approval from the supervisors, both the protocol and guide were translated into Bahasa Melayu.

The study used the same set of protocol across the three categories of stakeholder. The interview protocol involved eleven steps, right from the initiation stage until the final part of thanking the key informants. Those eleven steps in the interview protocol are outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Steps in the Interview Protocol

Steps	Description
1.	Initiation stage of interview
2.	Invite key informants to ask questions, should they have any
3.	Give assurance to the key informants on the anonymity and confidentiality

Steps	Description
4.	Seek key informants' consent to take notes and record conversation
5.	Commence the introductory protocol
6.	Ice breaking session by getting background information of the key informants
7.	Proceed asking questions on the interview guide
8.	Begin probing
9.	Request for supporting documents
10.	Debriefing
11.	Thanking the key informants

As for the interview guide, there are three separate sets of interview guide for each of the stakeholder category: policymaker, policy implementer, and policy receiver. The interview guide for policymaker was further segregated to government officials and preschool experts. While the interview guide for policy implementer was further divided to government officials and preschool teachers. No further division was imposed on the interview guide for policy receiver though. The first and the final part of the interview guide in answering the first and final research questions, however, were the same across the three sets of the interview guide. Only the middle part of the interview guide for answering the first part of the second research question contains questionnaires that appeal to the specific category of stakeholder. The interview guide was structured into four parts, starting with the initial part that consist of questions regarding the background information of the key informants, followed by the remaining three parts that comprise of relevant questions asked to the key informants in answering each of the research questions of the study. Those four structure of questions in the interview guide are outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2
Steps in the Interview Guide

Steps	Description
1.	Background information
2.	Relevant questions in answering Research Question 1 What structural quality elements influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?
3.	Relevant questions in answering Research Question 2 a) How do stakeholders experience and interpret challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?

Steps	Description
	b) To what extent do these implementation challenges constitute barriers to achieving standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia?
4.	Relevant questions in answering Research Question 3 How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework for ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools?

Both documents (the interview protocol and the interview guide) underwent experts checked on the method and content aspects. Summary of experts involved are presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3
Summary of Experts Involved

No.	Expert check	Name	Institution
1.	Method aspect	Expert A	Faculty of Information Management, UiTM Puncak Perdana Campus
2.	Content aspect	Expert B	Manufacturing Industry, Science, and Technology Division, Ministry of Economy (KE)

The method check was performed by Expert A of UiTM, while content check was done by Expert B from KE. Expert A is a senior professor in the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM Puncak Perdana Campus. She has been very active in assisting graduate students with qualitative method of research. Meanwhile, Expert B is a senior officer in KE with more than 20 years' experience in education field. She has been serving several education-related divisions in KE prior to her current posting as Deputy Director (Science & Technology) in the Division of Manufacturing Industry, Science, and Technology. She is regarded as a point of reference when it comes to issues relating to education sector by fellow KE colleagues. Input and feedback relating to method aspects from Expert A of UiTM is in Appendix 2, while response from Expert B of KE regarding content aspects is in Appendix 3. The interview protocol and interview guide used during the interview sessions are in Appendices 4 and 5, respectively.

3.9.2 Ethical Issues

This research employed in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. Thus, it involves interpersonal interaction and produces information about human action. There are three main areas of ethical issues that should be addressed in planning a research, namely informed consent, confidentiality, and protection from harm (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to avoid ethical harm in this research, three ethical questions from Cohen et al. (2007) 'Research Methods in Education' were considered throughout the research process, that are:

a) has the informed consent of the interviewees been gained?
b) have confidentiality, anonymity, non-identifiability, and non-traceability been guaranteed? And
c) what has been done to ensure that the interview is conducted in an appropriate, non-stressful, and non-threatening manner?

The interview protocol that guided the research outlines all the three elements mentioned above. In agreement with good research practice, total confidentiality was also maintained during the research and subsequently (Cohen et al., 2007).

Conventional face-to-face interview sessions were difficult to arrange due to restrictions during COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, researcher opted for text messages and telephone conversations, from which later initiated a contact prior to online interview session. During the initial session, the researcher discussed the rationale of the research and explained the contents of the informed consent form (refer to Appendix 6) to the informants. The purpose was to make the key informants fully aware of the voluntary nature of their involvement in the research, apart from to explain the nature of the study, data generation processes and how findings would be used, and how the confidentiality of their responses would be preserved. The form was passed to the key informants either via WhatsApp or email during the initial contact prior to online interview sessions so that they were able to reflect on it before signing and return it back to the researcher. They were also given a copy of the consent form for their own reference.

3.9.3 Obtaining MoE's Approval

Reflecting on the initial groundwork experience, the step involved obtaining approval from MoE as the gatekeeper through online submission in Educational Research Application System (eRAS). Online application was submitted in September 2021, and approval was obtained in October 2021. A copy of the ethical approval from REC, UiTM together with the interview protocol and guide as well as research proposal were uploaded in eRAS during the online submission. The approved data collection period was for six months, from 10th November 2020 until 7th May 2021. The approval letter from eRAS is in Appendix 7.

3.10 Data Collection

Data collection process is one of the most important processes in any study. Qualitative studies often use various forms of data including documents, archival records, interviews, observations, and physical artefacts, which are usually time consuming (Yin, 2014). In this study, data collection involved two means, that were interview as the primary data, as well as auto-photography/photovoice and document review as the secondary data.

3.10.1 In-depth Semi-structured Interview

This study is designed to be a qualitative interview study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to explore the standard structural quality required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives apart from investigating the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality for federal funded preschools in Malaysia. This qualitative case study is an approach that facilitates the issue exploration within specific context using a variety of data sources. This is to ensure that the issue is not explored through a single lens, but rather through multiple of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the issues to be revealed and understood. Interviewing is the best method for obtaining a clearer picture (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014) of the stakeholders' perspectives regarding policy implementation of structural quality in Malaysian public preschools.

The first group of key informants contacted for this study was the government officials. The initially identified informant under the policymaker category involved officers from the Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD, MoE) as the division in charge of macro policymaking in MoE. However, the researcher was being directed by EPRD, MoE to the School Management Division (SMD, MoE), the division in charge of operational policymaking of preschool programme. Specifically, the researcher was being directed to the Preschool Unit under SMD, MoE. The response email from EPRD, MoE redirecting the researcher to SMD, MoE is in Appendix 8. As highlighted in the earlier section, JPWP, MoE was identified as the key informants under the policy implementer category. Therefore, the participating key informants concerning government official involved officers from SMD, MoE (instead of EPRD, MoE) and JPWP, MoE.

Both divisions (SMD, MoE and JPWP, MoE) were subsequently contacted through emails to explain on the objectives of the study and to request for nominated officers to be interviewed. The approval letter from REC, UiTM and eRAS, MoE were also attached to the email sent. Sample of application email to conduct research sent to SMD, MoE is in Appendix 9. After a week sending the email, the researcher made phone calls to confirm participation and appointment dates and times for the interview session. It was the most difficult hurdle for the researcher to get hold of the person in charge as during that time, Malaysia underwent the period of Movement Control Order (MCO). That was when majority sectors were closed, and everybody officially worked from home. Despite the difficulties faced, the researcher managed to get appointment dates set, and the key informants' preference methods of interview were confirmed. Finally, five key informants, three from SMD, MoE and two from JPWP, MoE agreed to participate in the interviews. Each interview session ranged between one to two hours to complete.

The second group of key informants involved preschool experts, one from UPSI and the other from the National Child Development Research Center (NCDRC), UPSI. The experts were suggested by officers in EPRD, MoE. Interview sessions with both key informants were conducted online. Each interview session lasted between one to two hours.

The third group interviewed in this study was the preschool teachers, who represent the actual implementers on the ground. Several of the teachers were suggested by the government officials (either SMD, MoE or JPWP, MoE), while the remaining

few were referred to by the earlier interviewed informants (fellow preschool teacher colleagues). They were contacted through phone calls and finally, six teachers agreed to be interviewed. Though initially the approval letter to conduct research from JPWP, MoE only allowed for an online interview due to restrictions during MCO period (refer to Appendix 10), a couple of preschool teachers agreed to be interviewed physically. The appointment dates were then set, with two of the key informants agreed to be interviewed conventionally face-to-face, while the remaining four preferred to be interviewed online. It took between one to two hours per interview session.

Lastly, the final group participating in this study involved parents of children enrolled in *prasekolah*. This group is important because they are the proxies, the decision makers who select the preschool types for their children. In order to contact them, the researcher requested names and contact numbers of parents from the preschool teachers or the prior interviewed informants. They were then contacted through phone calls to request for participation in the interview. Once the parents stated their consent to be interviewed, the interview dates were then established. Five parents confirmed their participation, and the interviews were all conducted online at their respective residences. Each interview session took between forty minutes to one hour to complete.

As with the common practice of interview procedure, the researcher started by welcoming the informants, introducing the purpose of the interview, and explaining on what was expected from them. All informants were given a copy of the interview protocol and interview guide explaining the purpose of the study. They were also requested to sign the consent form which stated their consent to be interviewed and have their interviews recorded.

In summary, the interview sessions were conducted based on the availability, convenience, and agreement with the key informants. In total, five key informants preferred the interview to be conducted in a conventional face-to-face manner during their free time at their own identified settings. While the remaining 13 informants requested for the interview to be held online due to concerns and worries on COVID-19 pandemic. The background details of the key informants are further explained in Chapter Four.

The researcher is satisfied with the data collected from a total of 18 informants because it had reached the data saturation level, whereby no more new themes emerged from the data (Saunders et al., 2017). Therefore, the researcher is confident that data

collection process has reached the saturation point at the eighteenth informant based on the discovery of the saturation point. As suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1998), the number of informants is not an issue in any qualitative research, as reaching a point of saturation is more important where additional data no longer adds to new explanations.

3.10.2 Autophotography/ PhotoVoice

Applying photo analysis is a valid and useful method for collecting data. It was first introduced by anthropologist John Collier (1967). Photo analysis reinforces the qualitative analysis of this study. Presenting photos makes it possible to explain the written text and mirror the informants' responses regarding one issue or subject (Schwartz, 1989).

This research employed auto-photography/photovoice technique. Auto-photography involved asking participants to take photos of their environment and use them as actual data (Noland, 2006). It captured the world through the participant's eyes with subsequent knowledge production. Meanwhile, a similar method, photovoice involved getting community members to take photographs of their situations and concerns so they can identify, represent, and enhance their community through the specific photographs they have chosen (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice method is similar to auto-photography, as both techniques are a collaboration between participants and researchers and allow others to see the world through the participants' eyes. According to Harper (2002), through photos, a deeper understanding of one issue or matter is obtained as the saying goes 'a picture is worth a thousand words'.

In this study, several photos of preschools' contextual matters such as school surroundings, classes, and facilities were analysed. Utilising the auto-photography/photovoice technique added the element of 'check and balance' upon confirming on the issues raised by the informants during their interview sessions. Should the evidence are not supported by photos, it would be difficult to capture or understand clearly of what have been explained during the interviews. Therefore, through photo analysis, better evidence can be provided.

The photos were requested by the researcher after the interviews were conducted and willingly shared by some of the teachers and parents. The researcher believed issues about the structural quality of preschools mentioned by the informants such as spaces, class location, safety, and environment of classroom as well as teaching and learning

facilities would be more clearly explained with photos showing of what was really occurring on the ground. Based on the observations made on a couple of preschools that were able to be visited (despite the strict adherence to MCO during the lockdown period), the researcher chose few of the relevant photos of preschools that reflected the issues raised by the informants.

3.10.3 Document Review

For document review, there are several examples of documents that can be referred to, including minutes of meetings, logbooks, official policy statements, letters and circulars, as well as journals and research articles that are useful in providing an understanding of the case or context studied. Patton (2002) states that the analysis of documents could consist of quotations or parts of extracts from organisations, programme records, memorandums, correspondence, official publications and reports, personal diaries, and open-ended feedback on surveys or questionnaires.

In this study, documents assessed for research purposes were mainly the government policy documents which would be able to provide timely directives regarding preschool education programme in Malaysia. Policy documents chart the policy target and direction for individual countries. However, the highlight of preschool quality issues in this form of documents have been minimally assessed. Seven policy documents on education quality in Malaysia, consisting of four macro policy documents and three preschool specific documents were examined. The four macro policy documents examined were (1) the Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV), (2) the 11th Malaysia Plan, (3) the 12th Malaysia Plan, and (4) the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB). As for the three preschool specific policy documents, the selected ones were (1) National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC) or *Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan*, (2) National Standard Preschool Quality (NSPQ) or *Standard Kualiti Prasekolah Kebangsaan*, and (3) Guideline on Preschool Management or *Garis Panduan Pengurusan Prasekolah*.

There were two separate sets of inclusion criteria applied for the macro policy documents and preschool specific documents. The inclusion criteria that guided the selection process in the macro policy documents were quality education, quality ECCE, quality childcare, and quality preschool. Meanwhile, several inclusion criteria involved in preschool specific documents were in Bahasa Melayu as the examined documents

were in that language. Structural quality (*kualiti struktur*) and process quality (*kualiti proses*) were later broken down into details. The operationalised definition of each keyword used for this research is illustrated in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4
The Operationalised Definitions of the Keywords

No.	Keyword	Explanation
1.	Quality education	Quality education in general
2.	Quality ECCE	Covers specifically on the quality of early childhood care and education
3.	Quality childcare	Focuses on the quality of childcare only
4.	Quality preschool	Exclusively concentrates on the quality of preschool. Preschool quality is categorised into two: structural and process quality
5.	Structural quality (kualiti strukur) - Teachers (guru) - Student management assistant (Pembantu pengurusan murid) - Administrator (pentadbir) - Class area (ruang kelas) - Surrounding (persekitaran) - Furniture (perabot) - Equipment (peralatan/ kelengkapan)	Refers to the factors that could be regulated or controlled by policies set by the relevant government agencies, such as teachers and staff, school area and surrounding as well as furniture and equipment
6.	Process quality (kualiti proses) - Teaching and learning material (bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran) - Curriculum (kurikulum) - Interaction (interaksi)	Directly shapes the educational experiences of children while in schools. It also refers to the interactive activities that children experience in classrooms such as management of learning materials based on curriculum as well as in-class interactions

3.11 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of closing the gap between the original text and the interpretative text (Wolcott, 1994). The type of analysis engaged in depends on the type of case study. As in any other qualitative study, the data collection and analysis occur concurrently. In this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview and photo analysis part, while content analysis was utilised when it comes to document review. The NVivo software version 13 was employed to assist the data management.

3.11.1 Thematic Analysis

The data analysis for the interview part was carried out using thematic analysis which involved a few steps, which were (1) transcribing while familiarising with the data, (2) generating codes and emerging themes, which covers the process of constructing, reviewing, and defining potential themes, and (3) writing up reports (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Thematic analysis was employed when analysing the data from the interview session. The analysis for all the research questions was conducted collectively, except for the first part of the second research question whereby the analysis was conducted separately for each of the stakeholder category due to the nature of the questionnaires that appeal to the specific category of stakeholder. Thus, the discussions on the findings for all research questions were combined for all the stakeholders except for the first part of the second research question which was divided into three categories: policymakers (top-downers), policy implementers (bottom-uppers), and policy receivers (outside-inners).

3.11.1.1 Transcription

According to Cavana et al. (2001), analysing qualitative data is essential to understand the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the researcher managed to conduct 18 interview sessions. With consent from the informants, each of the interview session was recorded using Sony MP3 audio recorder. Additionally, for each of the conventional face-to-face interview sessions conducted, back up recording was done using handphone, while online interview recordings were backed up using google meet recording. Bryman (2012) mentions that tape recording helps to correct the natural limitations of memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews, although transcription is time-consuming.

The first task for the interview analysis was transcribing the voice recordings into textual formation. The production of a written record of the interview is part of the organisation and management of the data (Arksey & Knight, 1999). In order to understand each informant's unique view, audio-recorded interviews were listened thoroughly before transcription began, as this would provide an opportunity for greater analysis. Notes were concurrently and regularly written throughout the data analysis

process, which would support capturing the analytical thoughts about interview data and developing tentative ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2013). After each interview, notes were written to help conceptualising the theory and literature, as well as drawing the connections, similarities, and differences present within specific responses given by the key informants. The interviews were transcribed in detail to avoid unreliability (Wellington, 2000).

All the 18 interviews were transcribed. Thematic analysis was being employed to assist in organising the large amount of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first stage was getting familiarise with the data. During the transcription process, note-keeping on initial thoughts on the data helped to make sense of the data and identify the key issues and themes. Wolcott (1994) mentions that a closer look and relook of the interview was made afterwards in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the content. Therefore, during this phase, data transcription was done, followed by reading and re-reading the data. Some initial ideas were also noted down from the data.

Bryman (2012) suggests transcribing the interviews early to alert the researcher on the emerging themes and allow them to be referred to in a more direct way in later interviews. Therefore, the transcription of each interview in this research was done immediately after interviewing session to allow for any missing information be immediately followed up. The typing process was also done concurrently while listening to the recording. According to Thomas (2006), this process of multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data allows researchers to segregate on what is more important and less important in the data. The transcription process was done entirely by the researcher. Being a novice researcher, it took some time to get hold of the transcribing process. It took the researcher approximately a couple of weeks to complete one script. However, the researcher managed to pick up on the transcribing pace as the process flows. The total scripts took the researcher more than three months to be completely transcribed. As the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu, the researcher then translated the scripts into English. By translating at the beginning of the analysis process, the researcher saved some time when writing the report.

3.11.1.2 Data Coding and Emerging Themes

In the second stage, to begin with the coding process, data was later analysed using NVivo13, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, CAQDAS as

Yin (2014) terms it. With the research questions in mind, thematic coding was done in which all the information from each interview was classified into main categories (primary nodes). Then, the main categories were classified into sub-categories (sub-nodes). Coding is a categorising strategy in qualitative research that highlights similarities and differences to define categories and themes within the collected data (Yin, 2014). This iterative process allows the researcher to compare and contrast the common themes identified from the answers given by the informants, both from the supply and demand perspectives.

The third stage involved searching for themes. During this process, codes were collated into potential themes, and all data that was relevant to each potential theme was gathered. This process involved coding any interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire data set. All the information was coded for description and themes that were later used in the discussion on research findings. The thematic approach was implemented by grouping the factors in appropriate themes to organise data systematically and meaningfully. According to Glesne (2011), the thematic approach is the most frequently used technique in organising data by generating a typology concepts, giving them names or using 'native' labels and discussing them one by one in detail. Through NVivo, related comments were highlighted and placed in the suitable sub-categories. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) believe that this process of organisation allowed for convenient handling of the data which also provided easy identification and comparisons for different patterns.

The fourth stage consisted of reviewing themes where all themes were checked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Here, a project map of the analysis was generated. The next stage involved defining and naming the themes where the ongoing analysis was done to refine each of the specific theme to generate clear definitions and name of each theme. Finally, the sixth stage focused on writing the report where the selections of compelling extracts relating to the research questions and literature review were matched to produce the report of the analysis.

As highlighted earlier, there were 3 stakeholders involved in the interview sessions, namely policymakers (top-downers), policy implementers (bottom-uppers), and policy receivers (outside-inners). The analyses for all research questions were done collectively for all the stakeholder categories. The exception only occurred in analyses for the first part of research question 2 which were conducted separately for each

stakeholder category due to the nature of the interview questions that were uniquely tailored for each of the category.

3.11.2 Photo Analysis

Photos shared by the key informants were also analysed using thematic technique. The photo analysis process incorporated Collier and Collier (1986), Noland (2006), and Thomas's (2006) recommendations, as outlined in six steps, namely (1) gathering photos to analyse, (2) organising photos, (3) observing photos, (4) analysing photo involving structured, detailed, and interpretive analysis, (5) creating themes, and (6) writing up findings.

The initial stage of photo analysis involved gathering all the relevant photos from the key informants. After each of the interview session, the researcher contacted the informants to request for the photos promised during the interview sessions. Next, all the gathered photos were organised according to the group of key informants. Photos were numbered and organised into tables. Following that, the process of observing the photos was undertaken. When observing the photos, the researcher tried to look for the elements that were highlighted by the informants during the interview sessions. Apart from looking for the obvious elements highlighted by the informants, the researcher also tried to look deep into the latent part of the photos which involved some interpretive analysis. Later, a similar thematic analysis process employed for in-depth interview was repeated for the parts involving creating themes for the photos analysed. Finally, a written report was produced for the analysis.

3.11.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis was conducted to analyse the documents reviewed. It is a process of identifying, coding, and categorising the primary patterns in the data (Cavana et al., 2001). According to Lasswell, Lerner and Pool (1952), cited in Neuendorf (2002), content analysis is a technique that aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time. It is a useful technique for discovering and describing the focus of individual, group, or social attention (Weber, 1990). Furthermore, this technique makes it possible to examine the trends and patterns in documents (Stemler, 2001).

In this study context, content analysis refers to a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful materials) to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). It is a method used to describe written, verbal, or graphic communications, and later develop a qualitative description from a quantitative one. Specifically, the main goal was to discover the underlying meaning of data by quantifying words.

The data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, whereby the NVivo software version 13 was employed to assist the data management. Thematic analysis involved few steps (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis began with searching for occurrences of the identified keywords. The find function of the PDF documents was utilised to search for the occurrences of keywords. To verify the number of occurrence of keywords, the text search function in NVivo 13 was also employed. Keyword frequency counted for each identified term was later calculated. Counting was used to identify patterns in the data and to contextualise the codes. The occurrence of keywords indicates how often the keywords were mentioned across the policy documents examined. Data occurrence provides insight into the significance of specific keywords. Therefore, the higher the occurrence of the keywords, the higher the level of interest in or discussion of those keywords across the documents.

Later, the analysis of patterns led to an interpretation of the contextual meaning of specific terms or content. An open coding process was employed to identify the relevance and meaning of related keywords. Such a process allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data through extensive reading and re-reading of the documents. This process was followed by coding text relating to the keywords by highlighting visible or underlying phrases or segments of data. It was later reviewed and refined to represent ideas and patterns of meaning. At the final stage of coding, the main themes and their sub-themes were formed to represent the main ideas and contextual meanings of the data.

3.12 Validity and Reliability

Although the terms validity (trustworthiness) and reliability (credibility) are concepts used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, the idea is most often used in all kinds of studies. Validity and reliability are treated separately in quantitative studies, but these terms are not viewed separately in qualitative research. Instead,

terminologies that encompass both, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, are used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity and reliability are conceptualised as trustworthiness and credibility in the constructivist paradigm (Golafshani, 2003).

This study employed a few methods to ensure validity and reliability of the study. Firstly, triangulation, defined as a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell, 2013), is employed in this study to answer the validity and reliability needs. A trademark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, or called triangulation, a strategy that also enhances data credibility (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014). Potential data sources may include, but are not limited to documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artefacts, direct observations, and participant observation. In this study, data triangulation involved photo analysis from the photos shared by the key informants and documents reviewed. Case study research is unique as compared to other qualitative approaches since researchers can collect and integrate multiple data sources rather than handling them individually, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the issue studied. Each data source is a piece of a 'puzzle', with each piece contributing to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon. This merging adds strength to the findings to promote a greater understanding of the case.

Additionally, the member checking, also referred to as participant validation, which involves a process of checking, verifying, and interpreting the data by the key informants (Creswell, 2012) was employed to ensure the credibility of the research. This member checking process commenced as soon as the researcher finished generating themes for each research question. The key informants were contacted via WhatsApp's and email, whereby they were sent a copy of the transcripts prior to making appointments to personally talk to them based on their preferred date and time. All the individual sessions with the key informants were conducted online as they became comfortable with it after the limitations imposed during the MCO period. During the session, the researcher acquired responses from the key informants on whether the researcher's interpretation was accurate based on the narration of their individual interview session. The key informants confirmed the interpretations made by the researcher as per the written transcripts.

When carrying out this activity through Google Meet, the researcher started by reiterating the research questions, followed by reading the research findings to the key informants. The process later involved the researcher repeating the gist of the informants' conversation based on excerpts from the statements during the interview and finally explaining the interpretation made by the researcher. This whole process aims to obtain informants' confirmation, correct factual errors, offer informants the opportunity to add more information, provide an overview, and check the adequacy of the analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). Appendix 11 summarises Member Checks that contain comments and responses from the key informants.

Thirdly, in dealing with the reliability issue, this study involved only a single interviewer with a set of interview protocols. Reliability, in this context, refers to the consistency and dependability of the interview process, ensuring that the data collected is stable, coherent, and reproducible under similar conditions. In doing so, the interview protocol outlines the process involved, right from the very beginning where the interview was conducted until the documentation procedure is completed. While interviewer biases are difficult to be completely eliminated, adherence to a structured protocol and regular self-reflection can help minimise their impact (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Apart from that, the interview guide underwent expert checking both by the method and content experts, as highlighted in the earlier section of this chapter. Expert checks, often referred to as expert validation, involved having external experts in the field review the research design, methodology, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings to ensure the rigor, accuracy, and soundness of the research (Patton, 2002). Expert checks are a vital tool for improving the validity and reliability of research. They contribute to validity by ensuring that the research design, methodology, and data collection methods accurately measure what they intend to measure and that conclusions are drawn based on sound theoretical principles.

All these elements ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. It is through this association that validity and reliability are achieved in qualitative research by eliminating bias and increasing researchers' truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon (Denzin, 1978).

3.13 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has discussed on how the research was going to be conducted. A constructivist stance forms the basis for this study. As constructivists are more likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods, a qualitative method is adopted by using a single case study approach. In-depth semi-structured interviews, document review, and auto-photography/photovoice were employed as means for collecting data. Though the population of this study consisted of three federal agencies providing the public preschool programme (MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN), MoE was selected as the sample of the study due to its roles as the lead agency and the main reference point regarding preschool programmes in Malaysia. 18 key informants participated in this research, consisting of two groups of public preschool stakeholders: (1) the supply side comprising of government officials, preschool experts, and preschool teachers; and (2) the demand side involving parents, who send their children to preschool programmes offered by MoE. This study employed a purposive sampling technique, together with a snowball sampling technique. Data was analysed using both thematic and content analysis.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and elaborates on the research findings. Section 4.2 and 4.3 detail out the key informants' profile, followed by deliberations on photos analysed in section 4.4 and discussions on documents reviewed in section 4.5. Findings of research objective 1 to research objective 3 of the study are presented in the next section of 4.6. Findings under each of the research objective are presented in the form of NVIVO project maps prior to discussing them thoroughly. This chapter finally concludes with a summary chapter in the final section of 4.7.

4.2 Description of the Key Informants

The number of key informants involved in this study was 18, consisting of triparty public preschool stakeholders. The two groups of the stakeholders were from the supply side comprising of (1) five top-downers or policymakers (government officials and preschool experts) and (2) eight bottom-uppers or policy implementers (government officials and preschool teachers). While the remaining one was from the demand side involving five outside-inners or policy receivers (parents who sent their children to preschool programme offered by MoE and acted as proxies to their children).

Majority (83.3%) of the key informants were females, with only 16.7% were males. Three males and two females represented the key informants from policymaker category. While the key informants from policy implementer and policy receiver categories were all females. Figure 4.1 summarises the gender information of the key informants.

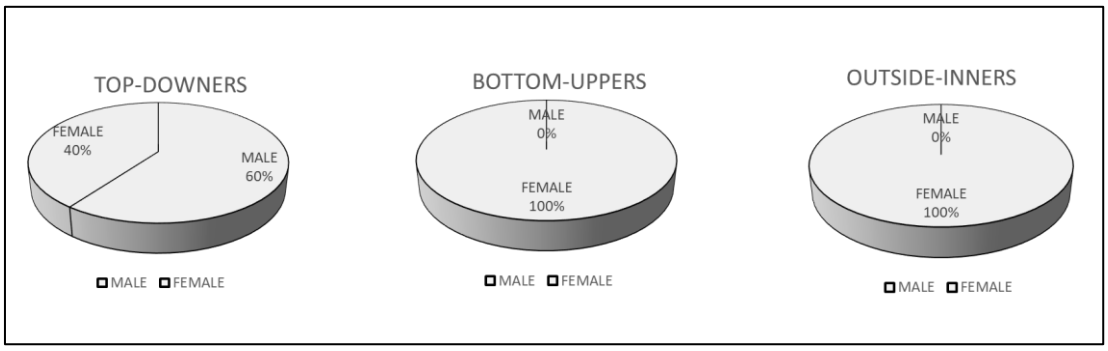


Figure 4.1 Gender Information of the Key Informants

All three SMD, MoE officers (policymakers) interviewed have fairly solid preschool background as they were all opted to be preschool teachers and previously were also teaching preschools. Contrastingly, none of the two key informants from JPWP, MoE (policy implementers) have preschool background prior to overseeing the preschool desk. All six preschool teachers interviewed opted to teach preschool, with majority having experience teaching the primary school, leaving only a minority of 33% with zero experience teaching primary school. This minority group consisted of a couple of preschool teachers who graduated with ECCE degree and posted as preschool teachers at the start of their careers. Figure 4.2 details out the information of key informants from the supply side.

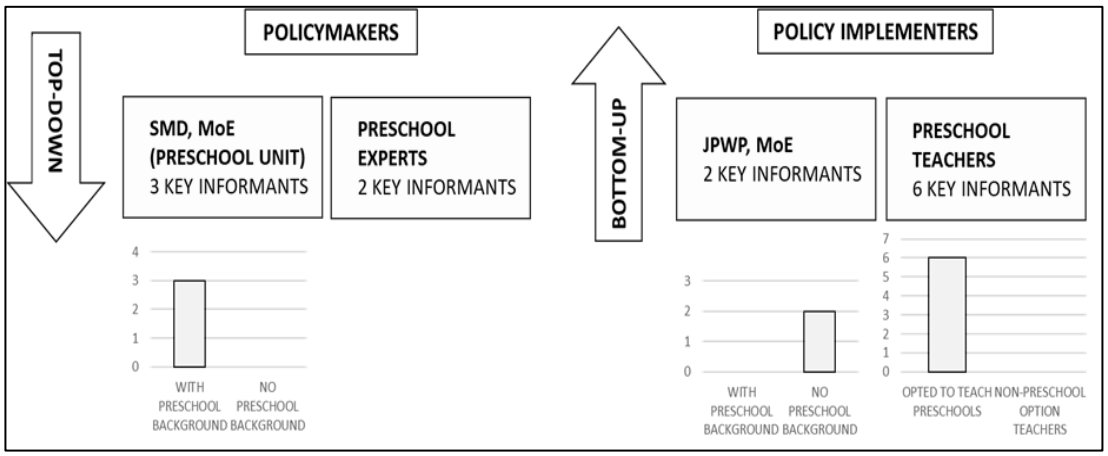


Figure 4.2 Information of Key Informants from the Supply Side

Three out of five mothers interviewed were career women, while the remaining two were full time housewives, though they consider themselves to be self-employed with one being a home-based tailor, while the other occasionally takes orders for *kuih raya*. All five interviewed mothers shared their first-time experience with *prasekolah* programme, with one exception, a mother who has had prior experience with *prasekolah* MoE. Figure 4.3 shows the details of key informants from the demand side.

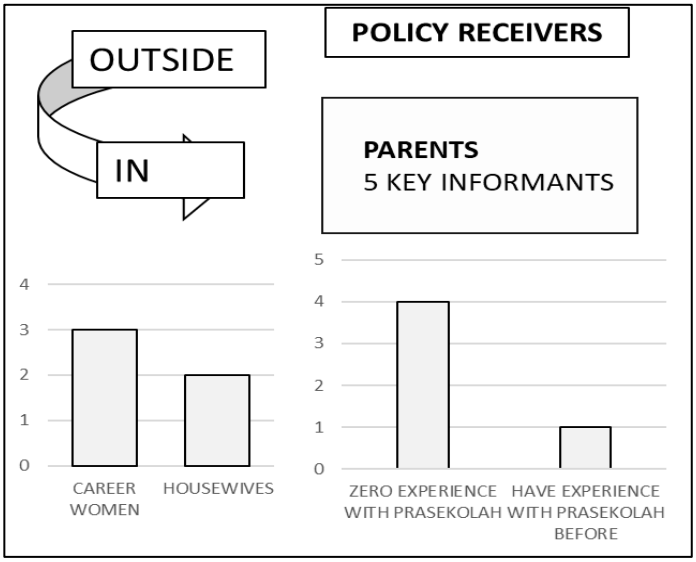


Figure 4.3 Information of Key Informants from the Demand Side

4.3 Individual Key Informants' Profile

As highlighted in the earlier section, during the data collection phase, the researcher interviewed five groups of key informants. Two groups were from each the top-downer (policymaker) and bottom-upper (policy implementer) categories, while the remaining one was from the outside-inner (policy receiver) group. From the top-downer or policymaker category, the researcher managed to interview three officers from SMD, MoE and two preschool experts; one from UPSI while the other was from NCDRC, UPSI. For the bottom-upper or policy implementer group, two officers from JPWP, MoE and six preschool teachers, who are the actual actors on the ground, were successfully interviewed. The final group interviewed were the outside-inner or policy receiver category, which involved parents who sent their children to *prasekolah* in Putrajaya. As highlighted in the preceding chapters, this study utilised both the conventional in-person interview and online interview methods due to limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic. A summary for each group of the key informants with interview details is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Key Informants with Interview Details

No.	Key informant	Interview date	Interview method
A.	Top-downers (policymakers)		
	SMD, MoE		
1.	Mr. R	25th March 2021	Face-to-face interview
2.	Dr. M		
3.	Mr. K		
	Preschool experts		
1.	Dr. F	9th March 2021	Online interview
2.	Associate Prof. Dr. H	7th April 2021	
B.	Bottom-uppers (policy implementers)		
	JPWP, MoE		
1.	Datin R	16th February 2021	Online interview
2.	Miss M	23rd February 2021	
	Preschool teachers		
1.	Teacher Ha	22nd March 2021	Face-to-face interview
2.	Teacher S	5th April 2021	Online interview
3.	Teacher N		
4.	Teacher Hi	12th April 2021	Face-to-face interview
5.	Teacher M	18th April 2021	Online interview
6.	Teacher K	19th June 2021	
C.	Outside-inners (policy receivers)		
	Parents		
1.	Mrs. L	21st February 2021	Online interview
2.	Mrs. S	15th April 2021	
3.	Mrs. A	15th April 2021	
4.	Mrs. E	23rd May 2021	
5.	Mrs. U	5th June 2021	

4.3.1 Top-down or Policymaker Perspective

The first group of key informants interviewed under the top-downer (policymaker) category comprised of three officers from SMD, MoE, who were:

a) Mr. R – He is the 'right-hand' man in SMD, MoE. Few key informants interviewed regard him as a very experienced officer in SMD, MOE as he has more than 6 years of experience working in that division. He has a combination of 20 years' experience at school, district, and state level.
b) Dr. M – She was previously a preschool teacher with various postings/attachments prior to joining SMD, MoE. She was involved in developing preschool curriculum right from the very beginning where bulk curriculum was first implemented. She is among the first batch who obtained preschool teaching certificate from teaching college when preschool programme was first introduced in 1991. She has a handful of 27 years' experience in preschool field.
c) Mr. K – He is a young and ambitious officer. He is a remarkable preschool teacher who won an excellent preschool teacher award prior to joining SMD, MoE. He strongly believes in teachers' capability and creativity over ICT gadgets.

Next, the second group interviewed under the same category consisted of two preschool experts, who were:

a) Dr. F – She 'grew' along with UPSI and NCDRC. She was involved in the initial establishment of taska PERMATA as well as planning and developing the preschool incubator project in UPSI apart from involvement in setting up NCDRC. She has a vast experience in both public and private ECCE, particularly in the area of early childhood care or taska. Her area of expertise is preschool management and leadership.
b) Associate Professor Dr. H – He obtained both his bachelor's and master's degree from Universiti Putra Malaysia before earning his PhD in education from Universiti Sains Malaysia. He also had the privilege to serve as a preschool teacher during his years with UPM. He is involved in several

studies on preschool education and currently conducting research under MoE's grant to evaluate Malaysia's readiness in making preschool a compulsory education.

4.3.2 Bottom-up or Policy Implementer Perspective

The two JPWP officers interviewed under the bottom-upper (policy implementer) category were:

a) Datin R – She was previously an Islamic secondary school teacher. She has zero preschool background prior to holding the current post. As of the interview date, she has been holding the current post of handling preschool management for a year.
b) Miss M – She was previously an English primary school teacher. She had the experience of growing up in the UK preschool setting. She was previously the desk officer for preschool management prior to Datin R's appointment to the post. She is currently the desk officer for preschool curriculum.

The next group interviewed under this same category was the preschool teachers or the actual implementers on the ground. The interviewed preschool teachers comprised of:

a) Teacher Ha –She obtained her diploma from teaching college in 2004 and started her career as a teacher in 2005. She was posted to SKPP 18(1) since 2015 with prior postings in several primary schools and preschools. She furthers her bachelor's degree while she is in service. She has 16 total years of teaching experience, with experience teaching primary schools in between teaching preschools.
b) Teacher S – She is a *Kursus Perguruan Lepasan Ijazah* (KPLI) holder. Her first posting was in Perak, teaching primary school before being posted to Putrajaya in 2006. She has 13 years of teaching experience with majority of nine years' experience teaching preschools.

c) Teacher N – She is an UPSI graduate in ECCE. She started her career as a preschool teacher in 2011 with first posting in Perak. She opted to be a preschool teacher and has no experience teaching primary schools.
d) Teacher Hi – She holds a diploma from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and a degree from Open University Malaysia (OUM). She is the only interviewed teacher who has experienced the hardship of setting up preschool classes from scratch. She has a total of 15 years' experience in teaching field. She has experienced teaching the primary schools as well as preschools prior to being posted to SKPP 14(1) in 2018.
e) Teacher M – She is among the first batch who obtained preschool teaching certificate from teaching college when preschool programme was first introduced in 1991. She furthers her bachelor's degree while she is in service. She has an extensive of combined 28 years teaching experience in both preschools and primary schools.
f) Teacher K – She is a KPLI holder from Bangi teaching college. She started her teaching career in 2008 with her first posting in SKPP 16(1), Putrajaya until now. She has no experience teaching primary school's children.

4.3.3 Outside-in or Policy Receiver Perspective

The final group interviewed involved the outside-inners (policy receivers) category or parents who sent their children to *prasekolah*. The interviewed parents include:

a) Mrs. L – She is a research officer in Malaysia Palm Oil Board (MPOB), Bangi. She is a single mother with three children. Her son is her last child who went to preschool. But it was her only experience with *prasekolah* MoE. Prior to sending her son to *prasekolah* MoE, the boy went to a private preschool in Bangi.
b) Mrs. S – She is a mother of four, a full-time housewife who occasionally takes orders for *kuih raya.* The twin boys were her third experience sending children to *prasekolah* MoE. Two of her older children went to the same preschool as their twin brothers.

c) Mrs. A – She is a special need primary school teacher. She is attached to the same school complex as her only son's *prasekolah*. She has zero experience with *prasekolah* MoE until her son went to one.
d) Mrs. E – She is a lab assistant in a secondary school in Putrajaya. She works in the same school complex as her daughter's preschool. A mother of two; it was her first child entering preschool and first-time experience with *prasekolah* MoE.
e) Mrs. U – She is a home-based tailor and a mother of two. She sent her first daughter to private preschool prior to enrolling her into *prasekolah* MoE. It was her first experience sending a child to *prasekolah* MoE.

4.4 Photos Analysed

Upon concluding each of the interview session, the researcher then politely requested the key informant to share the relevant photos showing of what were mentioned during the interview. The key informants were asked to provide photos based on what were discussed and were willingly shared by them. Photos used in the data analysis were mainly obtained from the key informants. Some of the photos, however, were from researcher's own observation when the researcher had the opportunity to visit a couple of preschools to confirm on the situation as per the shared information during the interview sessions. In total, photos obtained for the data analysis was 48. More than half of the total photos, that was 27, were shared by the key informants (mainly by the preschool teachers who are the actual implementers on the ground), with the remaining 21 photos came from the researcher's own observations at sites.

Issues about the structural quality of preschools mentioned by the informants such as spaces, class location, safety, and environment of classroom as well as teaching and learning facilities were more precisely explained and emphasised with photos showing of what was really happening on the ground. Based on the observations made on a couple of preschools that were able to be visited (despite the strict adherence to MCO during the lockdown period), the researcher chose several of the relevant photos that reflected the issues raised by the key informants.

4.5 Documents Reviewed

A selection of seven policy documents related to quality of education in Malaysia, ranging from macro perspective right to specific documents highlighting on specific elements of preschool quality, were identified based on a literature search. These were later confirmed by the Ministry of Economy (KE) and Ministry of Education (MoE) officials as well as preschool experts and preschool teachers in Malaysia. Four macro policy documents were examined to gain insight into how these documents focus on the topics of preschool quality. Meanwhile, three preschool specific documents were scrutinised to examine how the issue of structural quality elements have been elaborated and discussed in these documents.

4.5.1 Macro Policy Documents

As highlighted in the earlier chapter, the four macro policy documents examined were (1) the Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV), (2) the 11th Malaysia Plan, (3) the 12th Malaysia Plan, and (4) the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB).

The SPV, a macro-based blueprint of the country's 10-year visions (Ministry of Economic Affairs Malaysia, 2019), formed the basis for the education quality settings in this study. The 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan, a comprehensive outline of five-year macro development plan comprising of policies and strategies for the country (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 2015 & 2021), were also selected as the guiding documents on the overall quality of education in Malaysia. The fourth policy document examined in this research was the MEB, a broad target document for education sector in Malaysia, ranging from basic preschool programme to post-secondary education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

It is found that quality education, in general, was mentioned repetitively in all four macro policy documents, namely SPV, 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan as well as MEB. Five mentions of quality education were found in SPV, 18 mentions in the 11th Malaysia Plan, 40 mentions in the 12th Malaysia Plan, and 38 mentions in MEB.

However, there were fewer mentions on the specific quality of ECCE, childcare, and preschool education than education in general across four macro policy documents examined, except MEB. Four mentions of ECCE were found in the 11th Malaysia Plan and increased to seven in the 12th Malaysia Plan, with the most mentions of 13 found in

MEB. As for the quality of childcare, all the macro policy documents did mention about it, with the most mentions of 13 found in the 11th Malaysia Plan, followed by 11 mentions in MEB, six in the 12th Malaysia Plan, and two mentions in SPV. A total of 16 mentions of quality preschool were found in 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan each, and the most 122 mentions were found in MEB. No specific mention of quality ECCE was found in SPV though; it only touched on the quality of education in general. SPV also did not mention anything about the quality of preschool programme.

Majority of the quality preschool mentions (79%) were found in MEB. Of the total quality mentioned in the 11th Malaysia Plan, only 31% was related to the quality of preschool. While the 12th Malaysia Plan reported a slightly lower percentage of preschool quality mentions, that is 23% of the total of 69 quality mentions. Details of the keyword mentions found in the macro policy documents are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Analysis of the Four Macro Policy Documents Based on Keyword

No.	Keyword	Shared Prosperity Vision	11th Malaysia Plan	12th Malaysia Plan	Malaysia Education Blueprint
1.	Quality education	5 mentions	18 mentions	40 mentions	38 mentions
2.	Quality ECCE	-	4 mentions	7 mentions	13 mentions
3.	Quality childcare	2 mentions	13 mentions	6 mentions	11 mentions
4.	Quality preschool	-	16 mentions	16 mentions	122 mentions

4.5.2 Preschool Specific Documents

As for the three preschool specific policy documents, the selected ones were (1) National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC) or *Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan*; (2) National Standard Preschool Quality (NSPQ) or *Standard Kualiti Prasekolah Kebangsaan*; and (3) Guideline on Preschool Management or *Garis Panduan Pengurusan Prasekolah*. Unlike the macro policy documents that were in English, all these preschool specific documents were in Bahasa Melayu.

NSPC establishes that all preschools regardless of their types are required to adhere to NSPC (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). It is a tool to unify and standardise preschool programmes run by various providers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). NSPQ, another focused policy document on preschool programme, is

a self-assessment tool designed to measure both the structural as well as process quality of preschool programme (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). Similar to NSPC, NSPQ is also imposed for compliance by all the preschool providers (Kong, 2022; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). The third policy document, Guideline on Preschool Management, is a very specific guideline on preschool management and is applicable only to preschool programmes under MoE known as *prasekolah* (Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). This document is more of a guideline on preschool administration rather than a policy document per se (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018).

Similar to the case of preschool programme as compared to education in general, structural quality was found to be less mentioned than process quality in all three preschool specific documents examined, namely NSPC, NSPQ, and Guideline on Preschool Management.

At the first glance, process quality had a higher number of mentions as compared to structural quality even though the keywords employed were fewer. Teaching and learning material (*bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran*) represented the largest mentions across the three preschool specific documents examined (219 mentions in NSPC, 76 mentions in NSPQ, and 97 mentions in Guideline on Preschool Management) followed by curriculum (*kurikulum*) (44 mentions in NSPC, 19 mentions in NSPQ, and 31 mentions in Guideline on Preschool Management), and interaction (*interaksi*) (22 mentions in NSPC, 13 mentions in NSPQ, and two mentions in Guideline on Preschool Management). Teaching and learning material (*bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran*) accounted for 42% of the total 935 keywords mentioned across the three preschool specific documents examined. Despite the highest mentions of teaching and learning material (*bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran*), the process quality aspect in NSPC was explicitly focused on curriculum element.

As for structural quality, the highest mentioned keywords were teacher (*guru*) (47 mentions in NSPC, 128 mentions in NSPQ, and 41 mentions in Guideline on Preschool Management), followed by class area (*ruang kelas)* (23 mentions in NSPC, 26 mentions in NSPQ, and 19 mentions in Guideline on Preschool Management), and equipment (*peralatan*) (seven mentions in NSPC, 21 mentions in NSPQ, and 26 mentions in Guideline on Preschool Management). The least mentioned keyword was another translation of equipment (*kelengkapan*), where only a single mention was found in both NSPC and NSPQ, and twice mentioned in Guideline on Preschool Management.

None of the student management assistant (*pembantu pengurusan murid*) keywords was found in NSPC, while none of the administrator (*pentadbir*) keyword was found in NSPQ.

Explaining further on the structural quality, the teacher (*guru*) keyword (60%) was majorly found mentioned in NSPQ. The keyword teacher (*guru*) also made up more than half (52%) of the total 412 mentions under the structural quality keyword category. Nearly half of the mentions (48%) on equipment (*peralatan*) were found in the Guideline on Preschool Management, while about 38% of mentions on class area (*ruang kelas*) were found in NSPQ. Details of the keyword mentions found in the preschool specific documents are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
Analysis of the Three Preschool Specific Documents Based on Keyword

No.	Keyword category	Keyword	National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC)	National Standard Preschool Quality (NSPQ)	Guideline on Preschool Management
1.	Structural quality (*kualiti strukur*)	Teachers (*guru*)	47 mentions	128 mentions	41 mentions
		Student management assistant (p*embantu pengurusan murid*)	-	2 mentions	14 mentions
		Administrator (*pentadbir*)	2 mentions	-	12 mentions
		Class area (*ruang kelas*)	23 mentions	26 mentions	19 mentions
		Surrounding (*persekitaran*)	25 mentions	7 mentions	2 mentions
		Furniture (*perabot*)	2 mentions	3 mentions	Single mention
		Equipment (*peralatan*)	7 mentions	21 mentions	26 mentions
		Equipment (*kelengkapan*)	Single mention	Single mention	2 mentions
2.	Process quality (*kualiti proses*)	Teaching and learning material (*bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran*)	219 mentions	76 mentions	97 mentions
		Curriculum (*kurikulum*)	44 mentions	19 mentions	31 mentions

No.	Keyword category	Keyword	National Standard Preschool Curriculum (NSPC)	National Standard Preschool Quality (NSPQ)	Guideline on Preschool Management
		Interaction (*interaksi*)	22 mentions	13 mentions	2 mentions

4.6 The Findings of Study

Findings of research objective 1 to research objective 3 of the study are presented in the next three sub sections of 4.6.1 through 4.6.3. As highlighted in the earlier introduction part, findings under each of the research objective are presented in the form of NVIVO project maps prior to discussing them thoroughly.

4.6.1 Research Objective 1 – To Explore the Structural Quality Elements that Influence and Shape Policy Implementation in Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools based on Stakeholders' Perspectives

Analysis of data revealed three main themes for research objective 1, the structural quality elements that influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded preschools from the triparty stakeholders' perspectives, covering human factors, conducive environment factors, and other supporting factors.

Based on the interviews with the key informants and photos shared by them as well as the documents reviewed, human factors top the list of the structural quality elements required for public preschool programme in Malaysia. Human factors consist of two sub-themes: preschool teachers and teacher assistants.

The second emerging theme from the analysis was conducive environment factors. There were five sub-themes that fell under the conducive environment factors, namely infrastructure or facilities, furniture or equipment, number of children per class, teacher: student ratio, and class environment and surroundings.

The final emerging theme involved other supporting factors, without which the structural quality elements deemed incomplete. Two sub-themes fell under the main theme of other supporting factors: digital support, and health and nutrition.

A summary of the emerging themes and sub-themes from answering the first research question, that is the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools, is illustrated in Figure 4.4.

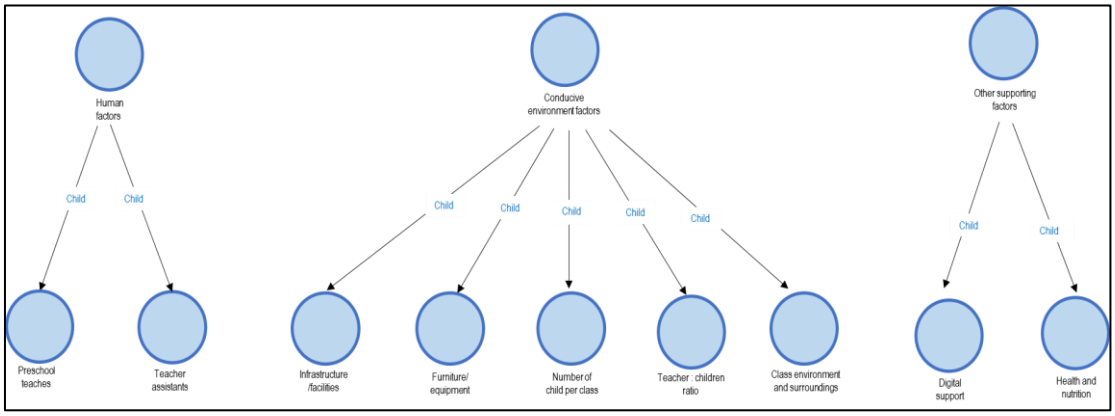


Figure 4.4 Main Themes and Sub-themes for Structural Quality Elements Required for Preschool Programme

4.6.1.1 Human Factors

When asked about what forms the basis for structural quality in any preschool programme, all 18 key informants unanimously agreed on the human factors as the main theme with preschool teachers' sub-theme at top of the list. The entire sample collectively viewed preschool teachers as the primary requirement for any preschool programme. As highlighted by top-downers:

> *"I believe the most important one is the qualified teachers. Without teachers, no class can be conducted. It's like a plane without a pilot. You can't fly a plane without a pilot. Similarly, no class can be conducted without a teacher." (Mr K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"To run any types of class, we need teachers. It's obvious that it is the basic requirement." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

Their views were supported by key informants from the bottom-upper category:

> *"Teachers come first before any other things. We need teachers to set up the class, to run the class, to do everything. Without teachers, no class can be conducted." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"No teacher, no class. Teachers are the main characters in running preschool classes. It's a known fact." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

Mrs U, a mother of two, from the outside-inner group, also stated her opinion clearly that teachers are vital in any preschool programme:

> *"The roles of a teacher are important. We as parents must acknowledge that." (Mrs U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)*

Her point was further reinstated by another mother, Mrs L, a mother of three:

> *"The importance of teachers cannot be denied, be it at preschool level or at higher levels." (Mrs L, research officer, policy receiver)*

The need for quality teachers was mentioned in three out of four macro policy documents and two out of three preschool specific documents. Skimming through the macro policy documents, no specific mention on quality of ECCE was spotted in SPV. It only touched on quality education in general. SPV also did not mention anything about the quality of the preschool programme. However, the need for quality teachers was mentioned in the other three macro policy documents examined, which were the 11th Malaysia Plan, 12th Malaysia Plan, and MEB.

As for the preschool specific documents, NSPC, being a process-quality-based document in nature, had a very limited discussion on structural quality. It only touched on three structural quality aspects, but that did not include teachers. NSPC focuses primarily on the curriculum aspect, but it somehow neglects the teachers or actors who get the curriculum implemented. The NSPQ and the Guideline on Preschool Management, however, did highlight the need for quality teachers as one of the structural quality elements required for Malaysia preschool programmes.

Similarly, the importance of teachers' qualifications in preschool programmes was also highlighted by the key informants interviewed:

> *"Our teachers in prasekolah are all degree holders now." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policy maker)*

> *"Our preschool teachers, at least in Putrajaya, I know they are all opted to teach preschools with a minimum of degree qualifications and have ample experience in teaching field." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"We even have preschool teachers who are PhD holders, which public might not know." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

"It's not easy to be MoE's preschool teachers these days. They have to have at least a degree to become one." (Mrs S, housewife, policy receiver)

"Of course we need teachers with good qualifications. They are going to teach our children, the future generations." (Mrs U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

Next, most previous studies hardly highlighted the importance of teacher assistants as the structural requirements in any preschool programme. However, in this study, the majority of the key informants agreed on the support and handiness of teacher assistants in running a preschool programme as the second sub-theme under the human factors. This can be seen from a response by a preschool expert from the top-downer category:

"The roles of teacher assistants are important. To assist teachers, to cook and to help in running preschool classes." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

The same view was shared by a couple of preschool teachers, the actual implementers on the ground:

"To run a preschool class, we need both the preschool teacher as well as the teacher assistant. A teacher won't be able to run a class single-handedly." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"A teacher can't run a class alone. She needs to be supported by teacher assistants." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Among other responses from the key informants regarding the importance of teacher assistants include:

"We do need teacher assistants. If there is only one class with a teacher and no teacher assistant, we are not going to run that class." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"To open up preschool classes, we need both teachers and teacher assistants…" (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"To show the importance of their roles, paychecks for teacher assistants were upgraded from daily allowances to monthly salary." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"The roles of PPM (pembantu pengurusan murid or teacher assistant) are basically to assist the teachers in managing the children. Here, there are four teacher assistants, one for each class. We divide them into groups. Two will cook while the other two assist the children in the classroom. We need them to run a decent class." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Despite the emphasis by the key informants on the importance of teacher assistants, content analysis performed on macro policy documents found no specific mention of teacher assistants being one of the structural quality elements required for the Malaysia preschool programme. The same was found true when examining the process-quality-based document, NSPC. Nonetheless, it is interesting to find that both NSPQ and the Guidelines on Preschool Management did put emphasis on teacher assistants as one of the structural quality elements required for the Malaysia preschool programme.

4.6.1.2 Conducive Environment Factors

Primarily, the requirement of good infrastructure and facilities for a quality preschool was generally shared by most of the key informants and was identified as the first sub-theme under conducive environment factors. Among the responses from the key informants include:

"Next to a qualified teacher, we need a proper infrastructure to run a decent preschool class." (Mr R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"A preschool should have a conducive learning environment, which encompasses of separate learning, playing and dining area, proper toilets..." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)

"To run any preschool class, we first need to identify a proper area with a proper class size and proper infrastructure…" (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"It's a known fact that to run any education programme, we need to have good infrastructure and facilities." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"A preschool should have good facilities, such as a proper and separate learning, playing, and eating area, its own clean toilet…" (Mrs L, research officer, policy receiver)

To confirm on the points highlighted by the key informants, a few photos showing the conditions of the preschool class were shared by them. Below are some of the relevant photos shared. Figure 4.5 highlights the facilities of a good learning area, with proper-sized tables and chairs, as well as eye-level whiteboard. Meanwhile, Figure 4.6 clearly shows the proper infrastructure of an outside play area with suitable play mat and fencing.



Figure 4.5 Learning Area



Figure 4.6 Outside Play Area

Macro policy documents reviewed revealed no specific mention on quality of ECCE and preschool programme in SPV. It majorly focused on quality education in general. However, in the remaining three macro policy documents, namely 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan as well as MEB, the needs for physical infrastructure and facilities were specifically mentioned as the crucial structural quality elements required for preschool programme. Nevertheless, none was found mentioned in any of the four preschool specific documents examined.

In addition, the key informants also highlighted on the furniture and equipment aspects of the classroom as the second sub-theme. Specifically, they mentioned tables, chairs, and writing boards:

> *"When the government implemented teaching and learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic hit, parents were all busy setting a place for their children to have online classes at home. The first thing they bought besides a laptop was a white board because most houses have tables and chairs that can be easily converted into learning areas. That shows how important furniture is." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"I started a preschool class from scratch. At that time, the only furniture available were a long table, a few benches, and a blackboard. That is actually enough for a teacher to start running a basic preschool class." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

"Unlike primary schools, infrastructure and furniture in prasekolah are smaller to cater for preschool children's size. It is important for the children to feel comfortable while learning." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"A basic preschool class should have at least tables and chairs as well as writing boards." (Mrs A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

"I need to know that my daughter can learn comfortably with proper sized table and chair." (Mrs U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

This situation is being supported by photos shared by a few of the preschool teachers, as depicted below. Figure 4.7 shows the whiteboard that is hanged at eye level of preschool children in a preschool class. While Figure 4.8 illustrates the smaller size furniture in *prasekolah* to cater for preschool children's size.



Figure 4.7 Eye level Location of a Whiteboard in a Preschool Class



Figure 4.8 Smaller Furniture in *Prasekolah* to Cater for Preschool Children's Size

Of the total seven documents examined, NSPC was the only one mentioning on the need for equipment and furniture as the structural quality elements required, contrasting from what have been emphasised by the informants during the interview sessions. The remaining six documents were all silent on this.

Next, the number of children per class has been highlighted as one of the structural quality elements required for preschool programmes, making it the third sub-theme under conducive environment factors. MEB was the only document examined that highlighted the need for optimum class size, while six other documents mentioned nothing on this. This is further supported by the information gathered through interview sessions with the key informants who specifically emphasised on the maximum number of twenty-five children per class:

> *"It has been a while that class size is capped at 25 children pr class. I think that's the ideal number for a preschool class." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

> *"It is hard to control if the number of children exceed than 25 per class. You know dealing with preschool children is not the same as dealing with big children. We need the right number of children so that we can handle them properly." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

"The size of preschool classes are smaller as compared to the mainstream primary school classes. Therefore, any number exceeding 25 children per class will make the class crammed." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"The number of children in each class is the same throughout Malaysia, which is 25 children in a class. The difference is only on the size of the classroom." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"The preschool that my son went to was conducive because there was a cap of 25 children per class. And I believe it's just the right number for a preschool class." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

On top of that, all categories of key informants (the top-downers, bottom-uppers, and outside-inners) believed that the number of children per class is linked directly with children: teacher ratio, the fourth sub-theme under conducive environment factors. Thus, it was also highlighted as one of the important requirements for preschool structural quality.

"It's a known fact that a class of preschool has a teacher and a teacher assistant with a maximum of 25 children." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

"If there are four classes, there should be four teachers and four teacher assistants. Otherwise, we are not going to conduct that preschool class. Because there'll be 100 children there." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE policymaker)

"It should be one teacher, one teacher assistant, and a maximum of 25 children in a class." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"It is standard that each preschool class has a teacher and an assistant with 25 children. There are some isolated cases, whereby a class exceeds that 25 children limit. But an approval from the department is required for that." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"Each class has a teacher and an assistant with a maximum of 25 children…" (Mrs. E, lab assistant, policy receiver)

"What I know is each class has a teacher and an assistant with a maximum of 25 children. That has been the case since my eldest went to prasekolah here." (Mrs S, housewife, policy receiver)

From the total seven documents examined, NSPC was the only document that touched on area and layout for the learning area as the structural quality elements required for preschool programmes. All other documents reviewed were all silent on this. Figures 4.9 and 4.10 exhibit the arrangements in a couple of preschool classes, implying the importance of having the right number of students in a class to fit in with the size of the classroom.



Figure 4.9 View of a Preschool Class

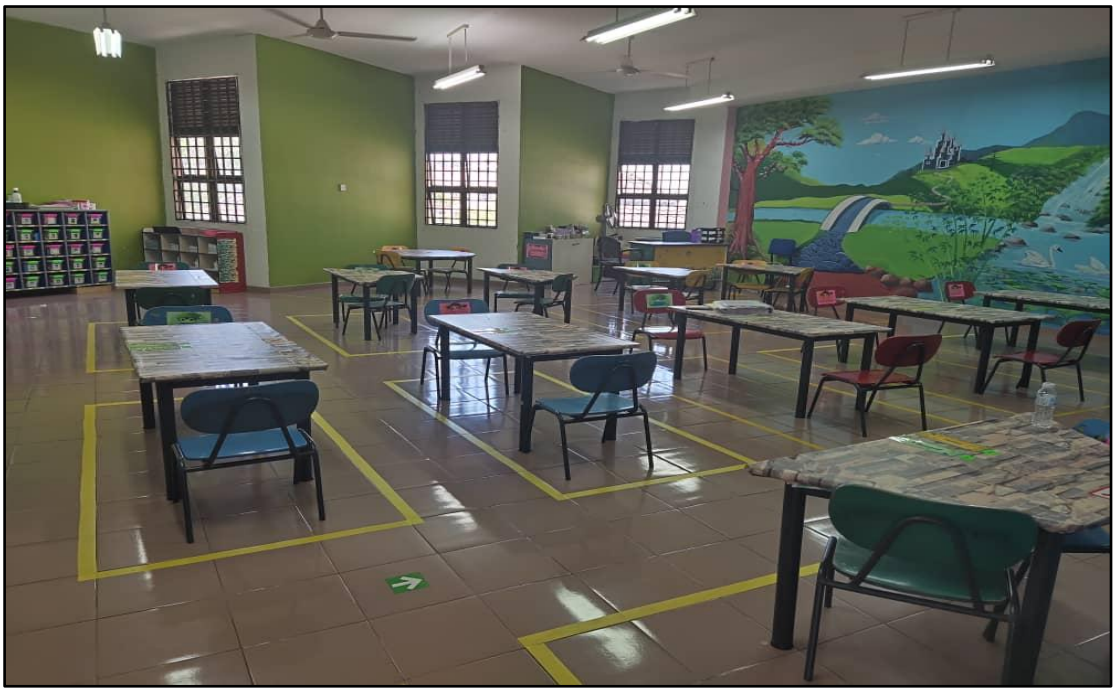


Figure 4.10 Another View of a Preschool Class

Finally, the class environment and surroundings have been identified as another essential structural quality elements by the key informants. In particular, they mentioned about the security, safety, and cleanliness aspects of the preschool areas. As highlighted by the top-downers:

> *"Apart from teachers, I think the internal and external environment factors are also important. We need conducive learning environment. Preschool class should be in an easily accessible area, yet secluded and safe." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

> *"Of course, it would be good if preschool classes can have its own building, like the private providers have. A proper and safe learning environment for children." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"Normally, we have fire drills at the beginning and sometime in the middle of the school session. This is important to alert the children on the surrounding of the school apart from being aware of the safety aspects of the school areas." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

Their views were being supported by key informants from both the bottom-upper and outside-inner categories:

> *"We need to assess the physical environment before we decide to open a new preschool class. Assess the safety and security aspects of the area prior to approval for any class opening." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"All teachers and assistants have been briefed about the emergency procedures should such crisis occur. And we also have a pamphlet on dealing with such situation." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Though we are located in the same primary school complex, but the preschool areas are being separated with a fence to ensure safety among the preschoolers." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"The location of the class in the basement area is a bit gloomy. A better class condition would be a plus point to attract parents to send their children there, apart from safety and cleanliness." (Mrs S, housewife, policy receiver)*

> *"As parent, I need to know that my child is in a safe environment." (Mrs L, research officer, policy receiver)*

Analysis on the reviewed documents found that all three preschool specific documents (NSPC, NSPQ, and the Guideline on Preschool Management) emphasised specifically on the safety issue of the preschool programme. But none was found mentioned on the aspects of environment and surroundings in any of the macro policy documents examined.

Below are some of the photos shared by the key informants to support on the /points of having a good class environment and surroundings, as raised during the interview sessions. Figure 4.11 reemphasises on the security aspect of a properly fenced preschool area highlighted by the key informants. Meanwhile, Figures 4.12 and 4.13 exhibit the location of preschool classes on the ground floor of primary schools, allowing for easy access apart from hindering a gloomy learning condition for the children.



Figure 4.11 A Fenced Entrance to Preschool Area



Figure 4.12 Preschool Classes Located at the Ground Floor of a Primary School



Figure 4.13 Another View of Preschool Classes Located at the Ground Floor of a Primary School

4.6.1.3 Other Supporting Factors

Apart from the two important structural quality elements required, this study found another emerging theme as important requirements for preschool programme,

that is other supporting factors, without which the structural quality elements deemed incomplete. During the interview sessions, a few key informants highlighted the significance of digital support in running preschool programme, particularly during the pandemic COVID-19 hit. Policymakers at SMD, MoE mentioned that:

> *"We can't deny the need for modern gadgets like computer, LCD, and the like, particularly during the COVID-19 hit, but teachers have to be creative too." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"Teaching practice has evolved nowadays. Teachers need to incorporate modern teaching techniques into traditional ways of teaching, otherwise you'll lose the interests of the children." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

Their views were being supported by policy implementers in JPWP, MoE and preschool teachers with sayings that:

> *"Time has changed…now we need the support of new technological gadgets to facilitate teaching and learning." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Wi-fi is a must. Otherwise, our teachers need to use their own data plan to teach." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Children will be bored if we just write on the board. The new emerging gadgets like LCD and the interactive learning are the 'in-thing' now, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Children are more interested with the interactive learning method. And they learn faster with this new technique too." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

Policy receivers tended to agree with all of them that digital support is another structural quality elements that should be present in preschool programme:

> *"Teaching should incorporate latest, modern, and interactive teaching methods." (Mrs A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)*

> *"We can't deny that COVID-19 has changed the way children learn. They rely more on gadgets to learn now than ever." (Mrs S, housewife, policy receiver)*

"The must-have items now include computers or laptops and printers. And don't forget the internet access. Without which our children will be left behind." (Mrs L, research officer, policy receiver)

To support their views on the need for digital support, few informants have shared several relevant photos. Figure 4.14 addresses the importance of digital support gadgets like a desktop and a printer, while Figure 4.15 shows the wi-fi networking device available at one of the preschools.

Content analysis performed on the documents reviewed found two out of four macro policy documents (11th Malaysia Plan and MEB) highlighted the digital infrastructure as vital to running a preschool programme. None was mentioned in SPV and in any of the four preschool specific documents examined though.

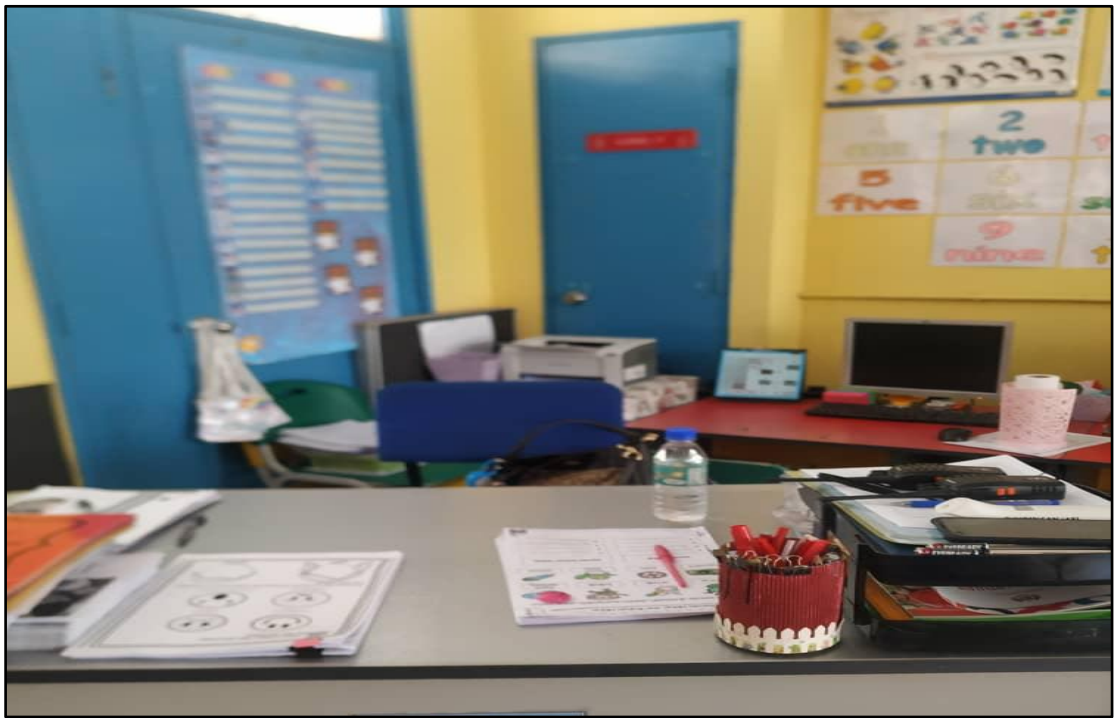


Figure 4.14 A Desktop and a Printer Observed at a Teacher's Working Area



Figure 4.15 Wi-fi Networking Device

In addition to digital support, the key informants also expressed the need for the preschool facilities to be compliant with health regulations. Among their responses cover the aspects of hygiene, vaccination, and good practices, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> *"Health aspect shouldn't be compromised. All of our assistants are made compulsory to get the typhoid vaccination as it is required by the Ministry of Health for all food handlers to be vaccinated." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"Health aspect is the utmost importance. During the pandemic we become extra cautious. Health isn't solely based on visible cleanliness but goes beyond that. That's why we practice social distancing, mask wearing and sanitisation." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Hygiene is very important. My son is taught about the importance of it in school. Plus, we do learn a lot from the COVID-19 pandemic." (Mrs A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)*

> *"I'm very particular when it comes to health aspect. I chose prasekolah because they pay special attention to hygiene issue." (Mrs L, research officer, policy receiver)*

Apart from that, they also emphasise on the need for a healthy and nutritious food in the preschool programme. Among their responses include:

> *"I'm also involved in developing the preschool menu with the Ministry of Health. The children need to eat nutritious food to become healthy. It is something that we provide in prasekolah." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"Here we provide food for the children. The assistants will take turn to cook and serve the food to children because small children don't go to canteen to get food during break, unlike the primary school children." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Similar to private preschools, we also provide healthy nutritious food to preschool children here." (Teacher K. preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"I prepare food for my son to bring to school. But they do provide food during break in school, which I think is good, especially for busy parents who aren't always able to bring their children food to school." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)*

Similar focus highlighted by the key informants was also found mentioned in two out of three preschool specific documents examined (NSPC and NSPQ), whereby both documents stressed on the importance of health and nutrition aspects in preschool programme. All other documents examined, however, were silent on this issue.

4.6.2 Research Objective 2 – To Investigate Stakeholders Experience and Interpretation towards Challenges Faced in Implementing the Standard Structural Quality among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools in an Effort to Promote a High-quality Public Preschool Programme and to Examine the Extent to Which these Challenges Act as Barriers to the Implementation of Standard Structural Quality

The second research objective of the study consists of two parts. The first was to investigate stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme. While the second was to examine the extent to which these challenges act as barriers to the

implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia.

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, the analysis for the first part of this second research objective was conducted separately for each of the stakeholder category due to the nature of the questionnaires that appeal to the specific category of stakeholder. Thus, unlike the discussions on other parts of the research objectives that was done collectively, the discussion on the findings for this specific part is divided into three stakeholders' categories: policymaker, policy implementer, and policy receiver. However, it is worth noting that there was some outlier responses recorded from other category of stakeholders though the interview guide did not 'lead' them to it.

4.6.2.1 Research Objective 2a - To Investigate Stakeholders Experience and Interpretation towards Challenges Faced in Implementing the Standard Structural Quality among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools in an Effort to Promote a High-quality Public Preschool Programme

The first part of the second research objective saw four main themes emerged for the policymaker category: planning and monitoring, governance, evaluation and accreditation, and leader identification. Two sub-themes fell under each of these identified main themes. The two sub-themes that fell under planning and monitoring were divisional objectives and unstructured ad hoc monitoring mechanisms. While knowledge and expertise were identified as the two sub-themes under governance. Meanwhile, emphasis on process quality rather than structural quality and self-assessment tool were the sub-themes that fell under evaluation and accreditation theme. Finally, the two sub-themes that emerged from the leader identification theme were no single leader and lack of coordination.

As for the policy implementer group, three main themes emerged from the data analysis: resources constraints, capacity and capability, and adaptive implementation. Subsequently, four sub-themes fell under the theme of resources constraints, and capacity and capability each, while two sub-themes fell under adaptive implementation. The four sub-themes that emerged from resources constraints cover financial, digital, facilities, and equipment constraints. Meanwhile, the four sub-themes identified under capacity and capability include empowerment, overburdened, double standard, and

disappointment. Lastly, the two sub-themes that fell under the adaptive implementation theme comprised of no one-size-fits-all, and situational and contextual based.

The four emerging themes under the policy receiver cluster were parents' perceptions, expectations, involvement, and responsibility. A project map illustrating the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the three categories of stakeholder when answering the first part of the second research question, that is the challenges in implementing a standard structural quality in Malaysian public preschools is presented in Appendix 12.

a. Policymaker (Top-down)

As highlighted earlier, the four identified themes that impose challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools from the perspective of policymaker category were planning and monitoring, governance, evaluation and accreditation, and leader identification. Figure 4.16 summarises the themes and sub-themes that emerged for the policymaker category.

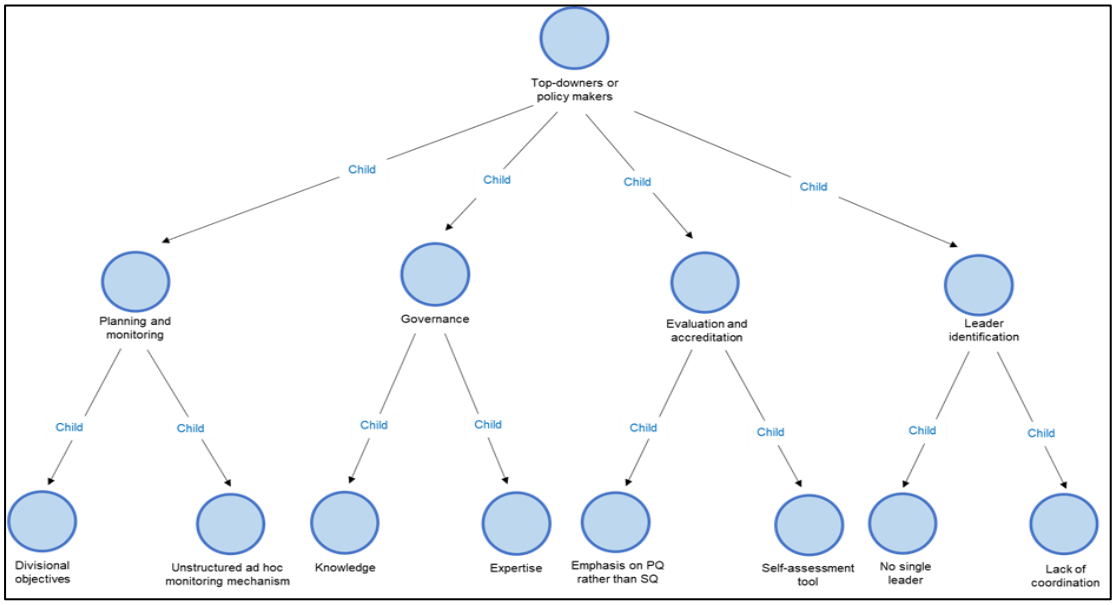


Figure 4.16 Main Themes and Sub-themes for Policymaker Category

i. Planning and Monitoring

Data analysis revealed the very first challenge involving the policymaker category concerned planning and monitoring. Planning and monitoring are grouped

together as they complement each other. Planning defines what to be achieved, thus it helps in identifying the goals clearly. Meanwhile monitoring involves obtaining feedback on the progress made and keep things on track while making sure the initial objectives are met. There were two sub-themes that fell under planning and monitoring. The first sub-theme concerned the divisional objectives. The objectives that were designed to be so rigidly divisional can hardly be generalised to fit into other division. Thus, such variation in divisional objectives posed challenges to the policymakers at the planning stage. As highlighted by the top-downers:

> *"Different demand at different division. At SMD, we need to increase enrolment, but in EPRD, there's a budget constraint." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"I think coordination at MoE needs to be strengthened; macro policy and operational divisions just go separate ways, meeting individual divisional objectives." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"I've been working with MoE for a long time. But I think coordination at MoE level needs to be strengthened. Each different division works in silos, but in actual fact, all divisions are working towards the same goals." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)*

> *"If the objectives of the divisions are too rigid, it can hardly be applied to fit into other divisions. So, planning process would result in distortion." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

Meanwhile, the second sub-theme that emerged from planning and monitoring theme was an unstructured ad hoc monitoring mechanism. The informants specifically highlighted the absence of a structured monitoring mechanism, rather monitoring was done on ad hoc basis. Ad hoc implementation perhaps can be detrimental than beneficial as it is executed promptly without proper planning. This can be seen from the responses given by the informants, whereby they highlighted:

> *"There is no specific plan in monitoring. We do it after attending meetings or when there are programmes that we need to attend, then we adjust in between the meeting schedule. Nothing structured." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

"Learning sector, management sector, they monitor separately based on their needs and schedule. May be because they monitor different aspects." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"We don't have specific schedule for monitoring. We delegate the power for monitoring to state education department, in this case, it's JPWP. It all depends on them to schedule for monitoring session and report back to us." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"I don't think they have specific schedule for monitoring. I see different divisions monitor for different specific reasons." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)

"Monitoring should be done periodically with specified plan. But what I observe, monitoring was done on ad hoc basis." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

Despite being highlighted as one of the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality in preschool programme by the key informants, content analysis performed on the documents reviewed found no discussion relating to issues of planning and monitoring in both the four macro and three preschool specific documents examined.

ii. Governance

The second emerging theme under the policymaker category is governance. Governance ensures a set of appropriate and transparent procedures are followed, of which both the governance and the people involved should be held accountable. Thus, one must govern with knowledge and expertise. Similar to the first theme, this second theme of governance was also broken into two sub-themes. The first sub-theme emerged from the data analysis involved knowledge. With knowledge wiser decisions are made, thus better governance is practiced. Among the responses from the top-downers include:

"It begins at the top. Top management should at least have knowledge on preschool field. Then only they know what to do." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)

"The top management should have at least minimal knowledge on preschool. Then only it will be given equal emphasis as any other levels of education." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

"Knowledge regarding the subject is important. Like all of us, we come from preschool background. So, when we are posted here, with our prior knowledge, we can basically manage the preschool unit." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

It is interesting to learn that responses on this particular sub-theme did come from policy implementers as well despite no leading questions was set for this stakeholder category in the interview guide. As highlighted by a bottom-upper:

"Sometimes the administrators, they are not coming from preschool background and have no knowledge about it." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"That's why preschool classes have always been sidelined. Because the leaders aren't coming from preschool backgrounds and have no knowledge about it." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Meanwhile, the second sub-theme under governance involved expertise. Being an expert is not purely having the right knowledge but rather having both ample knowledge and the precisely know-how expertise to conduct what is necessary relating to the relevant field. Responses on this particular sub-theme were recorded from both the policymakers and policy implementers despite the interview guide was only meant for the policymakers:

"We should get the experts in early childhood care and education to not only plan, but also to implement the preschool programmes." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)

"The monitoring was done by limited preschool background officers. They don't have the expertise in preschool field." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

"You don't have to look further. Take me as an example, I come from an Islamic teaching background and have zero knowledge and expertise regarding preschool. But I'm asked to be the desk officer for preschool programme. Do you think I would be able to do it?" (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

> *"The administrator needs to have basics about preschool. I'm talking about the knowledge and expertise here. Then only he can manage preschool programme effectively." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

Specifically, majority of the informants raised concerns on the need of having the right candidate with appropriate knowledge and expertise who in turn would be able to govern the preschool programme not only properly, but also effectively. The issue of governance was discussed exclusively in the Guideline on Preschool Management, whereby the document put emphasis on the need to strengthen the knowledge and expertise of the management in managing the various types of preschools in the country. However, no other documents examined, both the macro and preschool specific documents, highlighted the importance of this issue.

iii. Evaluation and Accreditation

The next emerging theme identified under the policymaker category was evaluation and accreditation and involved two sub-themes as well. Evaluation involves the act of assessing or judging the quality, while accreditation relates to acknowledgement or recognition. Both are important because failure of one element would lead to another; accreditation letdown perhaps originated from evaluation failure. The evaluation and accreditation highlighted by the key informants during the interview were purely based on self-level and self-view. None of the key informants talked about evaluation and accreditation at the national level perhaps could be due to lack of emphasis given to preschool programme that resulted in the absence of evaluation and accreditation at national level known by the key informants.

The first sub-theme under evaluation and accreditation concerned the self-assessment tool. Evaluation of preschool programme as shared by the key informants was essentially done at self-level. Hence, there might be arguments of the existence of potential bias, as teachers or administrators may unintentionally overlook areas that need improvement or focus too heavily on strengths, leading to an incomplete assessment. Additionally, self-evaluations may lack the objectivity and external perspectives that a third-party evaluation could provide, which could result in missed opportunities for growth. As highlighted by the top-downers:

"Undeniably NSPQ (SKPK) is a good tool, but it can hardly capture the truth as it is relying on self-evaluation by the teachers. People tend to not being objectives when they self-evaluate themselves." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"Teachers fill in the questionnaires. Then inspectorate team will evaluate. It's based solely on teachers' integrity to report on the right thing." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"Evaluation of preschool programme relies very much on NSPQ (SKPK), which is a self-valuation mechanism. As you know, self-valuation has its own biasness." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"NSPQ (SKPK) is good, but it has downsides to it since it is a self-assessment tool. People sometimes are not being honest when they self-report." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

"You can't expect people to report on the right things, especially when they do self-reporting. They would rather report on the nice things than the right ones. It's only human to do such thing." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)

The second sub-theme under evaluation and accreditation theme concerned emphasis of accreditation on the elements of process quality rather than structural quality. As highlighted by the key informants, the initial self-level evaluation has led to self-view on accreditation as well. Not only evaluation practiced in Malaysian public preschool programme was carried out on self-evaluation basis, but accreditation process was also inclined towards process quality rather than structural ones. The 'self-accreditation' highlighted by the informants was skewed towards process quality, leaving structural quality aspects being discounted. As highlighted by the informants in the interview sessions:

"Not only parents, but society also place a great deal on children's academic achievement, rather than the basic infrastructure needs." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)

"Academic achievement has always been the focus. Class conditions become second priority." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

"Of course, academic achievement is eminent. But we shouldn't be neglecting the infrastructure part because it all begins there." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

Interestingly, some of the policy implementers also shared the same views as the policymakers despite no leading questions were included in the interview guide:

> *"Parents rarely ask about the class condition. They do during the first week of school or so. After that, they are more interested to know whether their kids can read, write, and count. More towards academic achievement." (Teacher K. preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"They want value for money. When they send their children to preschool, they want their children to learn to read and write. They forgot to ask about the class conditions." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

Though some parents argued that preschool education should not be focusing too much on academic learning, majority however, are still overly concerned about making sure their children can read, write, and compute before entering primary schooling (Majzub, 2013; Puteh & Ali, 2013).

Content analysis conducted on the macro policy documents found 12th Malaysia Plan touched on enhancing quality assurance through training of the quality inspectorate team. Furthermore, MEB was another macro policy document that highlighted the issue of imposition of national quality standard as part of the challenges in implementing standard structural quality nationwide. Thus, MEB proposed the need for regular inspection and accreditation. Another two macro policy documents examined (11th Malaysia Plan and SPV), however, were silent on this.

As for the preschool specific documents, out of three documents examined, only two were found to have highlighted the issue of accreditation and enforcement. NSPQ highlighted the two types of indicators – objective and subjective indicators as part of the challenges in implementing standard structural quality. Though objective indicators are more of a direct assessment, subjective indicators, on the other hand, do require some observation before they can be filled-in and completed by preschool teachers. NSPQ later, affirmed the suggestion on the imposition of NSPQ in all preschool providers. Similar to NSPQ, the Guideline on Preschool Management too suggested the imposition of NSPQ, which would only be applicable to *prasekolah* programme under MoE as the document is meant for that particular category of preschool. This might be the case in Slovenia as highlighted by Marjanovič (2021) that needs a definition of national preschool quality standards at the legislative levels as well as the development of quality assessment procedures, both at self and external evaluation levels.

iv. Leader Identification

The issue of leader identification was highlighted as the final challenge in implementing a standard structural quality in Malaysian public preschools by the top-downers category. This leader identification theme consisted of two sub-themes as well. Leaders do not only guide and mentor but also coordinate. Leaders basically set the directions or targets to move forward. Thus, identifying an appropriate leader is important to set sail an organisation or even a specific task. The challenge highlighted among the policymaker category started with the failure of not having a single leader being identified to lead the preschool sector, as highlighted by the informants:

> *"Learning sector, management sector, they monitor separately. It's supposed to be done together. But there's no one leader or coordinator for it. I don't see it'll come into realisation though." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"Preschool issues are not being looked into holistically as it is being handled in a choppy manner, there is no one leader for it. Perhaps it would be better if preschool has its own division, instead of being under the jurisdiction of a school management division." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"Perhaps we should be looking at a possibility of having a single autonomous body overseeing preschool issues." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

> *"There's a rumour saying that the preschool should be on its own. I tend to agree with it as we need a true leader to lead the preschool sector so that it gets the equal emphasis as other levels of education." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)*

Absence of a leader would perhaps lead to coordination issue as leaders pave the way for better coordination not only internally, but also externally. Without a leader, it would be aimless. Coordination can hardly be formed among the involved parties without the guidance of a charismatic leader. Lack of coordination would perhaps result from not having a leader. Thus, the next identified sub-theme under leader identification was lack of coordination. This can be seen from responses by the top-downers:

> *"We, at SMD need to increase enrolment. So, we need to open more new classes. And at the same time, there is a limited budget for that. So, it's not*

parallel. It shows the weakness at the ministry level itself. It is as if we don't have a proper coordination mechanism." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"There are cases whereby there are a lot of requests to open new classes, but there's hardly any area to cater for that. Meanwhile, there are cases whereby there is plenty of area to build new classes, but no class application received from that area. Someone or a division should coordinate this." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"There are things that SMD becomes the middleman, sort of a postman. Just coordinate the inputs. We report separately, but to the same big boss. I believe there is lack of coordination among the divisions." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"Coordination issue exists everywhere, not only in MoE but also in other organisations as well." (Dr F, NCDRC, policymaker)

Of the total seven documents reviewed, 12th Malaysia Plan was the only document found to mention on the issue of overlapping functions among agencies, implying the absence of coordination as emphasised by the interviewed informants. Other remaining six documents were all silent on this. This coordination issue has been long debated that could certainly pose challenge and eventually lead to quality discrepancies.

b. Policy Implementer (Bottom-up)

As for the policy implementer category, the findings revealed three main themes that impose challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools, namely resource constraint, capacity and capability, and adaptive implementation. A summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged for the policy implementer category is illustrated in Figure 4.17.

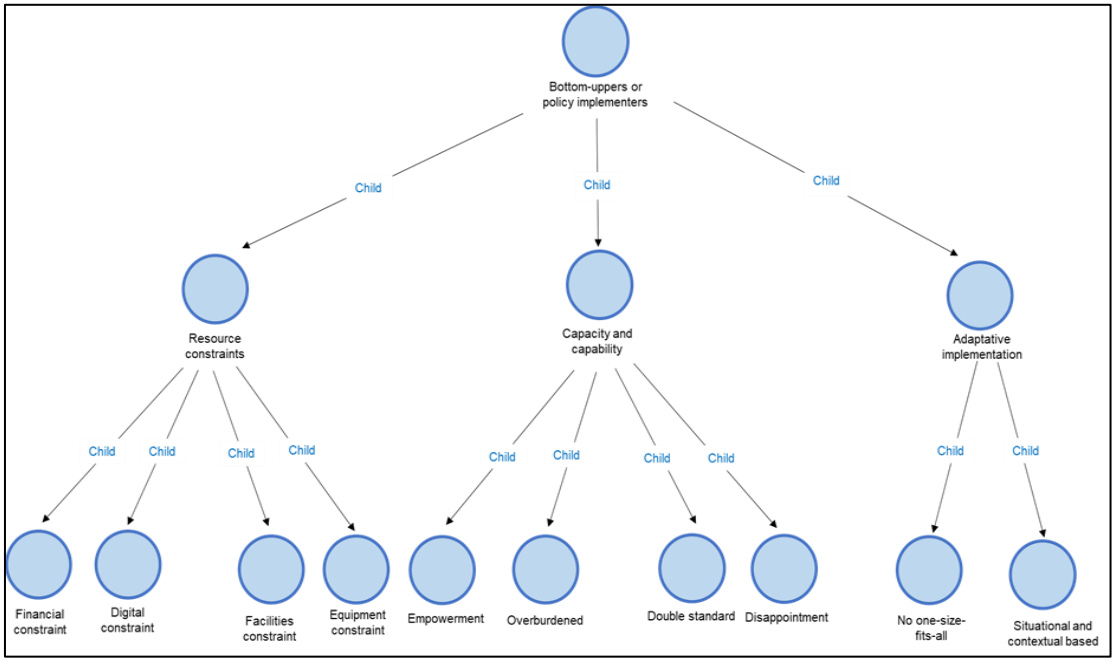


Figure 4.17 Main Themes and Sub-themes for Policy Implementer Category

i. Resource Constraint

Resource constraint defined as limitations or restrictions related to resources allocated, thus could disrupt, or impede the effectiveness of delivery. Resource constraints can be in a variety of forms. Based on data analysis, this first resource constraint theme consists of four sub-themes. The first identified sub-theme involved financial constraints. As highlighted by the key informants:

> *"The department did ask on the needs and requirements of the schools. But it will only be provided subject to budget availability." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Financial allocation varies by year. Sometimes what we plan to do cannot be carried out due to budget constraints." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"We have limited budget to be distributed to all preschools in Putrajaya." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

Despite the expectation that such issue would be highlighted purely by the policy implementers, ironically, the concern on financial constraint was also raised by majority of the key informants from the policymaker category:

"I think the biggest challenge would be the financial constraint. Without a proper budget, it is hard to cater for high set up cost, maintenance etc." (Associate Professor Dr. H, UPSI, policymaker)

"To follow closely on the specifications, it requires a big budget. We need a substantial amount of allocation to renovate and upgrade the current condition of the area." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"It is really a challenge to monitor because not all classes follow the outlined specifications. To follow the exact specification requires a big budget." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

To confirm on the points highlighted during the interview sessions, the key informants generously shared few photos emphasising on the discussed situations. Below are some of the relevant photos shared. Figures 4.18 and 4.19 reveal on the financial constraint faced by the preschools in performing the maintenance required for the play areas.

All other constraints discussed hereafter are not only related but more importantly originated from this very first financial constraint. Despite the importance and significance of financial constraint challenges highlighted by the key informants, MEB was the only documents examined that propose the need for strengthening the funding element. The remaining six documents were all silent on this issue.



Figure 4.18 Budget Required for Maintenance of the Play Area



Figure 4.19 Another View of Required Maintenance of a Preschool Play Area

The next identified sub-theme under resource constraints involved digital constraints. As highlighted by majority of the preschool teachers who are the actors on the ground, digital constraints now involved not only the conventional items like computers and printers, but more of the 'in-thing' gadgets as a result of online teaching method practiced during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the LCD and mobile data:

> *"The school has limited digital equipment. Laptop, printer, they are all mine. I didn't get any computer. I even use my own money to upgrade the school's computer." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Not all classes are being equipped with LCD. Like our school, we only have a single LCD unit that is being shared among three preschool classes." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"We need to use our own mobile data to conduct online learning. Otherwise, we'll just opt for a conventional writing-on-the-board teaching method." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Our class is located at the end of the building. We can hardly get access to the school's Wi-Fi. Most of the time we had to use our own data plan to access to the online teaching and learning materials. ((Teacher Hi, policy preschool teacher, implementer)*

Photos shared by the key informants do not require further explanation to it. In this case, there is truth in the saying that a picture worths a thousand words. Figure 4.20 records the evidence of a teacher's personal laptop and printer being used to supplement teaching and learning in a preschool classroom as a result of digital constraint faced.

In contrast with what have been highlighted by the informants, 11th Malaysia Plan was the only document examined that listed digital infrastructure as the challenging factors in implementing standard structural quality of preschool programme despite being highlighted as one of the requirements. The six remaining documents examined were, however silent on this.

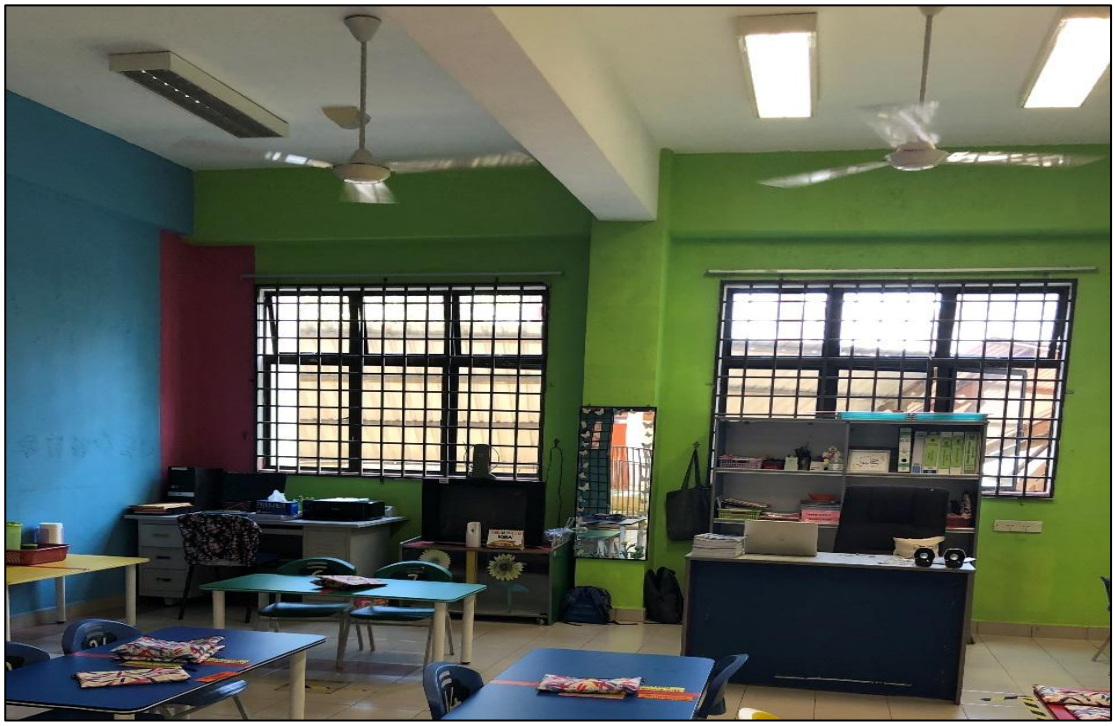


Figure 4.20 Teacher's Personal Laptop and Printer Were Used to Supplement Teaching and Learning

The third identified sub-theme under resource constraint involved facilities constraints, whereby most informants highlighted the issue of preschool classes that were not initially designed to be one:

> *"My current class isn't initially designed to be a preschool class. It's a renovated primary school class. Preschool class should have its own building, with proper learning area, play area, toilet." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Since our preschool is a renovated primary school area, we only have two single-unit toilets available for the children. They have to take turn to use them." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Initially there were four classes. But one has to be converted into a pantry. So, we only have three classes now." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"The opening of new preschool classes in staggered has resulted in unstandardised infrastructure and facilities." (Teacher Hi, policy preschool teacher, implementer)*

The situations discussed during the interview session were being surfaced through a photo shared by a preschool teacher as depicted below. Figure 4.21 shows the condition of an improper single-unit toilet size in one of the preschool classes.



Figure 4.21 An Improper Single-unit Toilet Size

In the 11th Malaysia Plan, the elements of physical infrastructure and facilities were listed as the challenging factors in implementing standard structural quality of preschool programme despite being highlighted as one of the requirements. The same concern was also highlighted in the 12th Malaysia Plan whereby it elaborated on the issue of facilities provision, where found lacking. The two other macro policy documents examined, however, were silent on this.

Meanwhile, the Guideline on Preschool Management was the only preschool specific document that deliberated on the issue of maintenance of infrastructure and facilities of preschool at length on top of procurement and management issues, leaving three other preschool specific documents silent on the issue.

The final identified sub-theme under resource constraints was equipment constraints. The researcher found a response regarding equipment constraints from a preschool teacher was quite intriguing, yet it was stating about a naked truth:

"For doctors and nurses, they are given syringe and needle. Policemen are given guns and pistols. But, we teachers, we are not given anything. On top of that, we use our own money to provide the necessary for the children." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

A few other bottom-upper informants were reported as saying:

"Equipment in each class is different depending on budget available for that particular year. Some are available in few of the classes, while others are not." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"As you can see, there are different set of equipment in each of the classroom. This class was the earlier set up classroom. That's why the equipment here is different than the other two classrooms that came later." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"When we talk about equipment, it covers the constraint of equipment for dining area as well." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

As parents, I don't expect a perfect equipment to be available. But at least, the school has the necessary equipment that can make the classroom functions." (Mrs. E, lab assistant, policy receiver)

Despite of what being emphasised by the key informants, none of the seven documents examined surfaced the arguments of equipment constraints. Statements made by the key informants were supported by some of the relevant photos shared by them. Figure 4.22 illustrates a preschool class having an outdated-no-longer-functioning television that was received during the opening of that particular preschool class.

These findings are consistent with previous research by Shaari et al., (2020) who found resource constraints mainly originated from financial constraints, which is the biggest challenge faced by Malaysian preschool programme. Typically, a considerable amount and extensive funding are needed to provide and maintain both the physical facilities and equipment of preschool classes.

To reiterate, content analysis performed on the documents reviewed found three out of four macro policy documents touched on the issue of resource constraints faced by the preschool sector. Specifically, MEB was the only document that proposed the need for strengthening the funding element. While 11th Malaysia Plan was the sole document that listed digital infrastructure as the issue that need to be looked into.

Together, 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan emphasised on the infrastructure and facilities constraints that needs policy attention. And finally, the Preschool Management Guideline was the one and only preschool document that deliberated on the issue of maintenance of preschool infrastructure and facilities. However, none of the documents touched on the aspect of equipment constraints though it was highlighted as one of the challenges faced by the policy implementers.



Figure 4.22 An Outdated No Longer Functioning Television, Provided at the Time of the Opening of the Preschool Class

ii. Capacity and Capability

The next challenge highlighted by the informants from the bottom upper category concerned capacity and capability. Capacity typically is related to finite resources, but perhaps is renewable under certain deliberate conditions. Capability on the other hand, refers to skills and knowledge required to complete certain particular tasks. Thus, in this context, the key informants being the empowered actor on the ground may have the capacity to face the challenges but lack certain capabilities to do so. Similar to the first emerging theme, this second theme was also broken into four sub-themes.

The first sub-theme empowerment was more related to capacity because as teachers, they may have the capacity to carry out roles as on-the-ground implementer, particularly when they were empowered to do so. The bottom-uppers when highlighting on the issue of empowerment were reported as saying:

> *"We are empowered to record our own asset and handle the purchasing of food on our own. But later all these need to be reported to the management." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"In Putrajaya, there's a written policy from JPWP that only children of Putrajaya residents are allowed to attend schools in Putrajaya to avoid overspilled of students in Putrajaya area. Schools are authorised to handle such situation given this written policy." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"There is a guideline on class setting requirements, but the class arrangements are under teacher's discretion. We are empowered to take charge of this. It depends on teacher's creativity to make the classroom looks interesting and lively." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

Interestingly, the same concern was also shared by one of the policymakers though no leading questions were included in the interview guide:

> *"SMD delegates the power to monitor to state level. In this case, it's JPWP. Only if there is specific case, whereby they can't handle it at state level, then only they refer the case back to us." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

However, perhaps due to some restrictions, it has somewhat limited their capability to perform duties on the ground. This is where the next identified sub-theme came in when it involved the issue of overburdened, as highlighted by many of the key informants:

> *"Teachers are overburdened with not only their core job scope of teaching, but also producing their own teaching and learning aids, dealing with filing, and other management tasks." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Teachers are expected to go beyond allocated working hours. They are expected to be early in school and stay back for school activities." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

"Teachers are expected to set up their own classes. I've to forego my semester break to set up a class before school session starts." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"We do not only teach, but we also need to provide for the students. It's a normal practice for teachers to spend money to cater for their classes' needs. Otherwise, they are not called teachers (giggle…)." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

The issue of overburdened preschool teachers was also being highlighted by both a top-downer and outside-inners. Coming from their angles of perspectives, they express concerns that the capability of these on-the-ground actors was further challenged when they are overburdened:

"I see preschool teachers are not only being over empowered, but also being overburdened." (Dr F, NCDRC, policymaker)

"It's not only preschool teachers, in fact, all teachers spend their own pocket money for their students. It's a burdensome for some of them." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

"I know teacher Hi had to use her own money to upgrade the class computer so that it can be used for teaching and learning in classroom." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)

To illustrate what has been highlighted by the key informants, Figure 4.23 shows the functional upgraded desktop as a result of 'forced' teacher's effort, implying overburdened preschool teaching profession.



Figure 4.23 A Functional Upgraded Desktop Resulting from a Teacher's Effort

The next sub-theme under capacity and capability involved double standard. Not only the preschool teachers were being 'capability-restricted' by the overburdened issue, but it would also perhaps result in a serious 'capability deficiency' to carry out the given tasks when they were not being treated fairly by the school community. As shared by a few of the preschool teachers:

> *"When they have events that they need us to participate, they will involve us. Otherwise, we are being side-lined from the schools' activities." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"There was one instance whereby they conducted a farewell event for the principal. Everyone was invited except us in prasekolah. Do you think it's fair? How pathetic!" (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"We can hardly get the primary school teachers to help us with our preschool programme. But when it comes to their programme, it is compulsory for us to join." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"The management also expects us to play active roles for the programmes under the primary school. But are they willing to do the same for us?" (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

A policymaker also expressed his concern on the same issue though no leading questions was set for this stakeholder's category in the interview guide:

> *"There are cases of double standard in some schools too. Preschool teachers are required to be part of the primary school activities, but none of the primary school teachers join any of the preschool events." (Assoc. Prof. H, UPSI, policymaker)*

The final identified sub-theme under capacity and capability concerned disappointment among the preschool teachers. The points highlighted by them were quite concerning, given that it was coming from on-the-ground actors, who are the ultimate structural quality elements required for Malaysian public preschool as identified in research objective 1.

> *"Suggestions and complaints from us teachers weren't being listened and attended to." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Some teachers don't perform not because they suck at teaching. But they are fed up for not being listened to." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Despite of what we feel, we still need to carry out our duties as teachers." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"It is as if teachers are robots. You charge them when they are out of battery. And when you switch them on, they need to be ready to serve the master again." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"It doesn't matter how teachers feel. What's important is for the school to achieve its KPI (key performance index)." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

In the 11th Malaysia Plan, emphasis on raising teachers' quality through capacity and capability building was listed as one of the challenging factors in implementing standard structural quality of preschool programme, despite being highlighted as one of the requirements. The 11th Malaysia Plan subsequently, suggested improving the quality of teachers through training. Similarly, 12th Malaysia Plan later touched on upgrading the quality of teachers as well. The minimum teachers' qualification was listed as part of the challenges in implementing standard structural quality nationwide in MEB and proposed the need for enhancing teachers' quality. This is in line with what was

highlighted by Smidt (2018) in the case of Austria that needs academic training for preschool teachers besides the need for ECCE research infrastructure establishment. His proposition was supported by Tan (2017) who emphasises on the need for uplifting teachers, centers, and preschool education programme in Singapore.

As for the preschool specific document, the Guideline on Preschool Management discussed several challenges. Amongst them were the selection criteria for teacher assistants and empowerment of preschool teachers to decide on students' eligibility to join *prasekolah*. This goes together with capacity and capability aspects discussed earlier. Should this challenge is not properly addressed, it perhaps would result in a more serious and critical situation, whereby it could affect not only the teachers' sincerity, but also our children, who are the actual end receiver. Capacity and capability should come together, they complement each other, not opposing.

iii. Adaptive Implementation

The final challenge involving the policy implementers was adaptive implementation that was further broken down into two sub-themes. Adaptive implementation refers to ability to adjust to new or changed circumstances. Adaptive allows us to be more flexible, open in finding diverse and best solutions to problems and challenges, apart from being able to work without boundaries. The first sub-theme under adaptive implementation involved no one-size-fits-all, as stated by the policy implementers:

> *"I think it'd be very hard to have only one standard for preschools. Even for primary schools, we have a few categories. Then only the teachers can adjust accordingly." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Rigidity limits creativity among teachers. A standard is just a guideline. Being the actor on the ground, teachers need to adjust accordingly to fit in with the situation at sites." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"The least that can be done is divide and categorise the preschools based on their locations, rural or urban. Because rural preschools are definitely way different that the ones in urban areas." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

Interestingly, policymakers from the top-down category also shared the same concern on the issue though no leading questions for this stakeholder's group was set in the interview guide.

> *"It's not possible to have a one-size-fits-all preschool class. It should be tailor-made to each location. We should apply some flexibility to it." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"It's hard to have one standard that applies to all. Because each location varies according to context and situation." (Dr F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

Figure 4.24 proves the points stated by the key informants that there is no one-size-fits-all for the preschool, showing a standardised but unused equipment supplied to the preschool.

The next identified sub-theme under adaptive implementation concerned situational and contextual based. Among the responses from the key informants include:

> *"The opening of new classes in staggered has resulted in unstandardised infrastructure and facilities. Teachers have to adjust with what's available." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Equipment in each class is different depending on budget available for that particular year. We've to make do with whatever is available. It depends on each individual teacher on how to arrange for her class." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"Infrastructure differs based on location. So, adjustment has to be done at site. And teachers are expected to set up their own classroom and act accordingly given what's available." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

> *"Arrangements of class depends on teachers. Because we have to adjust and make do with whatever that are available." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*



Figure 4.24 Unused Equipments Supplied to One of the Preschools

Three out of four macro policy documents examined pointed out the challenge of adaptive implementation in a very specific aspect. For example, in line with what have been highlighted by the key informants, location variation was listed as one of the challenges in implementing standard structural quality in 11th Malaysia Plan, implying the need for adaptive implementation. Meanwhile, 12th Malaysia Plan highlighted the issue of accessibility and affordability of quality preschool that requires adaptive implementation approach. MEB, on the other hand, emphasised on the imposition of national quality standard, which is in contrast with the suggestion of adaptive implementation by the key informants.

As for the preschool specific documents, NSPQ emphasised two categories of indicators - objective and subjective indicators, as part of the challenges in putting standard structural quality into practice. While subjective indicators, do need some observation before preschool teachers can fill them out, objective indicators on the other hand, are more of a straightforward assessment. Subsequently, NSPQ confirmed the recommendation that all preschool providers be required to implement NSPQ, implying deviation from adaptive implementation as suggested by the informants. Two other preschool specific documents examined, NSPC and Guideline on Preschool Management, however, were silent on this issue.

c. Policy Receiver (Outside-in)

Data analysis identified four main themes that pose challenges to structural quality policy implementation in Malaysian public preschools from the policy receiver perspective. The four emerging themes were parents' perception, parents' expectation, parents' involvement, and parents' responsibility. Figure 4.25 presents the summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged for the policy receiver category.

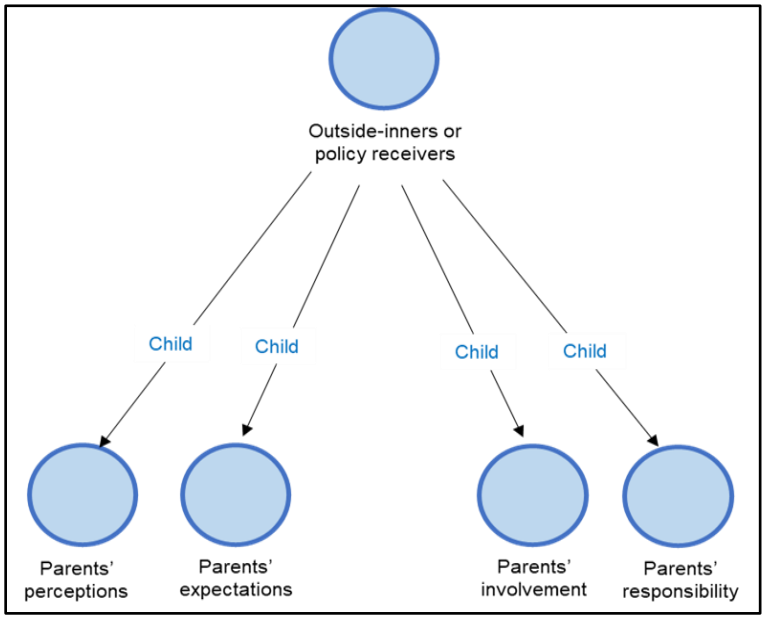


Figure 4.25 Main Themes and Sub-themes for Policy Receiver Category

i. Parents' Perception

Challenges faced by the outside-inners began with tackling parents' perception. Perception could sway to either positive or negative side. It could sometimes be undesirable particularly when it was wrongly regarded or interpreted as perception is usually shaped by individual experiences, interests, and how carefully is the information being processed. Interview sessions conducted revealed mixed responses from the key informants; some have negative perceptions, while others are positively inspired.

> *"Seeing how hard it was for teachers to conduct online classes during the pandemic hit, I believe has somewhat changed parents' perception towards preschool teachers." (Mrs. L, research officer, policy receiver)*

"During COVID-19, I believe teachers were among the agile ones who have to quickly respond to the needs of online teaching and learning expected by parents." (Mrs. U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

"Some parents think that preschool teachers are nannies. They might not know that preschool teachers now are all degree holders." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

"I once overheard a lady friend saying - You work as a preschool teacher? That's better than nothing, right? As if the role of a preschool teacher is not important." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)

"Some of my friends mock and make faces while saying O, cikgu prasekolah jeee… (O, just a preschool teacher…) (Mrs. E, lab assistant, policy receiver)

Concerns on the issue were also shared by a couple of policy implementers though no leading questions were included in the interview guide:

"I was among the first intake of MoE preschool teacher. Some of my batchmate once asked 'What do you all learn in preschool programme? Washing children's butts? Very pathetic." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"It's hard to change parents' perception. Once they have that thinking, they will most probably stick to it." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Content analysis performed on seven documents reviewed found no discussion relating to issues of parents' perception in both the macro and preschool specific documents examined despite being highlighted as one of the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality in preschool programme by the key informants.

ii. Parents' Expectation

Next, the challenge involving the policy receivers centred on meeting the set parents' expectation. Unlike perception, expectation connotes much stronger feelings as it involves strong belief for something to happen. Among the responses from the parents regarding this issue include:

"You know some parents are full of expectations, but they are ignorant of what's actually going on in school." (Mrs. E, lab assistant, policy receiver)

"Some parents expect their children to learn everything in school. They expect teachers to know each and every single development of their children, which is impossible." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

"Most parents have the mentality that when I send my children to preschool, I expect them to learn everything in school, when in fact the first learning experience should begin at home." (Mrs. U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

"Parents sometimes ignore the fact that teachers are also human. If we can't even look after four or five of our own, just imagine teachers taking care of 25 children of the same age at the same time." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)

Document analysis revealed that 12th Malaysia Plan listed accessibility and affordability as the challenging factors in implementing standard structural quality for preschool programme. It basically puts forward parents' expectations as highlighted by the informants during the interview sessions. Similarly, in meeting parents' expectation, the 11th Malaysia Plan suggested improving access of vulnerable groups to quality ECCE programme. Subsequently, 12th Malaysia Plan recommended the need for subsidising the poor to provide for affordable childcare education. This is in line with what was highlighted by Tan (2017) who emphasises on the need for enhancing the affordability and accessibility of preschool education in Singapore to cater for the expectation of the community.

iii. Parents' Involvement

Thirdly, the challenge highlighted by the outside-inners concerned gaining parents' involvement. Involvement is a step higher than expectation, as it involves participating or taking part in something. In this context, it concerned parents' involvement in their children's education. In the interviews, parents were quoted as saying:

"There's blessing in disguise with the pandemic COVID-19. Parents now are more alert and aware of the involvement needed in their children's education." (Mrs. U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

"The challenge is to get parents to be involved in their children's education. I'm a housewife. So, I can offer assistance to the teachers whenever they need it. After all, it's for my children's sake." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)

"Parents should be more involved in their children's education. We shouldn't be leaving everything to the teachers." (Mrs. L, research officer, policy receiver)

"I think parents should make a point to ask teachers whether they need any assistance with the class, show some involvement." (Mrs A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

Despite the expectation that the issue would be exclusively highlighted by the policy receivers, an outlier response was however recorded from a policy implementer:

"Parents rarely get involved, but they have a lot of expectations." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Parents are often regarded as the first teacher in educating their children despite the fact that many are not equipped with parenting knowledge to nurture children. To make it worse, parents these days are too occupied with their jobs and have little time to be involved with their children's education (Abdul Aziz et al., 2021).

Despite being highlighted as one of the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality in preschool programme by the key informants, analysis performed on seven documents reviewed found no discussion relating to issues of parents' involvement in any of the macro and preschool specific documents.

iv. Parents' Responsibility

The final challenge highlighted by the outside inners was parent's responsibility. Literally, responsibility means answerable or accountable. In this study context, however, it concerns more of parents' obligations towards their children's education. Parents, during the interview sessions, were reported as saying:

"Parents should be more responsible. They should not be leaving everything to teachers." (Mrs. E, lab assistant, policy receiver)

"I believe COVID-19 has taught parents to be more responsible for their children's education." (Mrs. U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

"I know some parents who are just being irresponsible. They don't even bother to pick up their children when school adjourned for the day. And yet they expect a lot from the teachers." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)

It is interesting to learn that responses on this particular theme did come from a policy implementer as well despite no leading questions was set for this stakeholder category in the interview guide. As highlighted by a bottom-upper:

"I can see the difference in children's achievement. Children with responsible parents who play active roles in children education have higher possibility to succeed. While children with ignorant parents tend to lose out." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Similar to parents' perception and involvement, analysis performed on both macro and preschool specific documents found no discussion relating to issues of parents' responsibility in any of the documents.

4.6.2.2 Research Objective 2b - To Examine the Extent to Which these Challenges Act as Barriers to the Implementation of Standard Structural Quality among Federal-funded Preschools in Malaysia

For the second part of research objective 2, that is to examine the extent to which these challenges act as barriers to the implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia, data analysis revealed three main themes: optimistic (a group who view it as only a challenge, but not a barrier), contingency plan (people who try to work within the obstacles), and complacent (individuals who admit that challenges somewhat impede the implementation of standard structural quality).

Measuring the extent of challenges becoming barriers in implementing a standard structural quality depend essentially on how one views the challenges. The first emerging theme, optimistic consisted of two sub-themes: ambitious and positive thinking. Meanwhile, the two sub-themes that fell under the main theme of contingency

plan were option and action plans. And the final theme emerged from the analysis was complacent, involving two sub-themes as well, namely feeling of content and acceptance.

Figure 4.26 highlights the emerging themes and sub-themes in answering the second part of the second research question, that is the extent to which the challenges becoming barriers in implementing a standard structural quality in Malaysian public preschools.

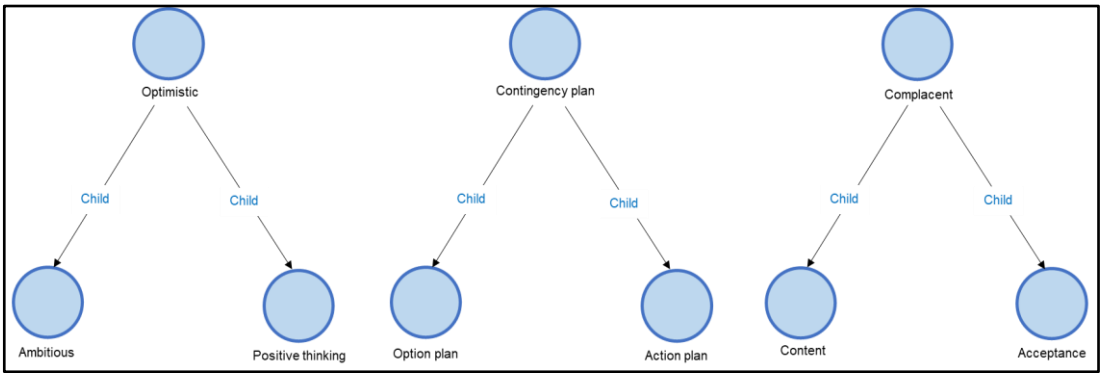


Figure 4.26 Main Themes and Sub-themes for Structural Quality Implementation of Preschool Programme

None of the documents examined elaborated further on the challenges faced by each group of the stakeholders. Specifically, the extent of challenges becoming barriers in implementing a standard a standard structural quality in Malaysian public preschools to any group of the stakeholders was not discussed in any of the seven documents reviewed. The documents only provide a macro view of the issue but did not dwell in depth. Thus, interview was the most appropriate instrument to dig deep on the issue.

a. Optimistic

For the first emerging theme, which is optimistic, majority of the key informants interviewed felt what were discussed as challenges remain as just merely challenges, but not necessarily form barriers in implementing a standard structural quality among the public preschools. Generally, they do view them as challenges, but not to any extent becoming barriers in achieving what it aspires for. This group of key informants can be categorised as optimists. Being optimistic made the informants see the positive sides of things and turn the challenges into something better. There are two sub-themes that fell under the optimistic theme: ambitious and positive thinking. The first sub-theme under

optimistic concerned ambitious, whereby ambitious individuals usually show strong determination to succeed. As highlighted by a couple of top-downers:

> *"Like it or not, we need to overcome it." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"We need to make it happen no matter what, for the sake of the children." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

Their views were supported by a couple of key informants from the bottom-upper category:

> *"We need to do what we need to do. We need to make it happen with whatever means we have." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)*

> *"When there's a will, there will definitely be a way." (Mrs. M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

Mrs. S, a mother of four, from the outside-inner group, also believed that challenges remain, but that definitely does not mean a full stop:

> *"Nothing can't be solved in this world." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)*

The second sub-theme under optimistic involved positive thinking. Positive thinkers often approach unpleasantness in a positive and productive way, thinking that the best has yet to happen. As highlighted by the top-downers:

> *"All stakeholders need to put aside the differences and start working together for our future generation. It's just a challenge, not a barrier." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"It's a challenge, but definitely not a hindrance." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

The same views were also shared by the bottom-uppers and outside-inner with sayings:

> *"I don't think the challenges would become barriers though. It depends on how you view it." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)*

"It all depends on your intention. If you are up to the challenge and make it work, it won't be a barrier to you." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"The challenge is to make everyone understand of what's going on. Then it wouldn't become barrier." (Mrs. U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

b. Contingency Plans

Next, is the group that believed challenges can be overcome by working within the obstacles. They believed that there are ways to work within the obstacles. This group fell under the second emerging theme, which is the contingency planners. Having a contingency plan simply means having 'fallback' plans should the initial plan fails. This second emerging theme consists of two sub-themes as well: option plan and action plan. For the first sub-theme of option plan, it simply means that we have rooms and rights to choose the best available selections there are to make things come to realisation. Among the responses from the key informants in this group include:

"We should come up with option plans, plan A and plan B to make it happen." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"I've seen teachers with multiple option plans to cater for her class needs." (Associate Professor Dr H. UPSI, policymaker)

"I trust my kids' teacher; she usually lay out at least a couple of plans to make things happen." (Mrs. S, housewife, policy receiver)

The next sub-theme under contingency plans concerned action plan. Action plan allows rooms to strategise the actions needed to achieve the initial set goals. Specifically, the key informants mentioned on the explicit actions undertaken on their part to encounter the challenges faced.

"We shouldn't be surrendering. What we can do is try to follow up with the department on whatever suggestions that have been put forward to them." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"Teachers have to be creative in obtaining support and sponsorship to get what they needed for their classes." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

"Since we don't have LCD for our class, what we can do is borrow it from another class or from the school." (Teacher S, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

c. Complacent

Despite the two 'positive' themes discussed above which turned challenges into something positive, the study found another emerging theme from the analysis, which can be categorised as undesirable or negative, that was complacent. This final group viewed challenges has somewhat impede the efforts in implementing the standard structural quality and formed some sort of barriers in making things happen. Being complacent could be harmful as this could lead to simply being satisfied with the current state, resulting in the absence of striving or trying harder. This could somewhat lead the key informants to succumb to the challenges and result in viewing it as the barriers to achieve the aspirations desired. There were two sub-themes that fell under complacent: content and acceptance. The first sub-theme concerned acceptance. Acceptance makes people acknowledge the fact of a situation and not trying to fix it for the better. Among their responses include:

"We used to have big budget for preschool programme. But now, we've to work with what's being given to us." (Mr R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"I guess we are used to the current condition. We make it work with whatever is available." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"We need to make sure children learn regardless of what the class condition is. So, we just make it happen with whatever is available." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

In addition, the second sub-theme under complacent concerned the feeling of content - satisfied with current situation that would result in a laid-back condition, as mentioned by the informants:

"Redha is the word. Take it as it is and take a day at a time…" (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"We just need to be patience, try to work within what's being given to us. Can't complain much." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"Other than that, we just need to be patience. Work within what's available. And be happy about it." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

Both sub-themes are related but have distinct concepts. Acceptance is when reality is being recognised, while feeling content is reached when one is satisfied with the reality. In summary, acceptance is the recognition of reality, while contentment is a feeling of happiness or satisfaction with that reality. One can accept something without feeling content, but contentment typically involves acceptance of one's circumstances. In short, an individual reached the highest complacent state when one reached the level of content.

4.6.3 Research Objective 3 - To Develop a Framework for Ensuring Standardisation of Structural Quality among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools based on Stakeholders' Perspectives

The final research objective of the study was to develop a framework in ensuring standardisation of structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives. Apart from all the emerging themes discussed above, there were three additional emerging themes that would perhaps answer this third research question. Thus, translated the triparty stakeholders' perspectives into a standard structural quality framework for Malaysian public preschools, and concurrently, make up the suggested framework for the study. Based on the analysis, the three themes emerged were minimum standard with contextual approach, collective support, and shared responsibility. Figure 4.27 illustrates those emerging themes from answering the final research question.

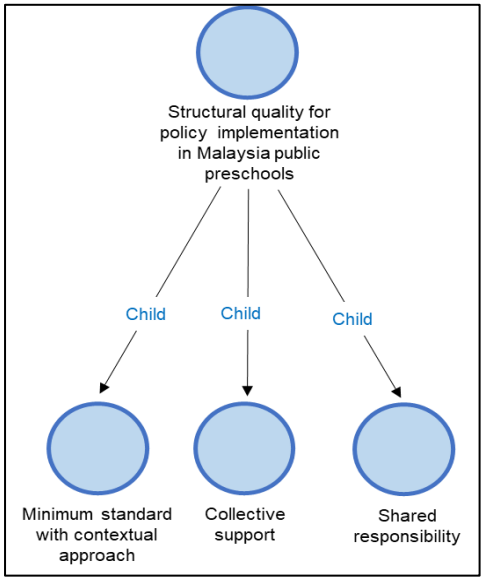


Figure 4.27 Main Themes and Sub-themes for Structural Quality Framework in Ensuring Standardisation of Structural Quality Among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools Based on Stakeholders' Perspectives

4.6.3.1 Minimum Standard with Contextual Approach

The key emerging theme from the analysis was minimum standard with contextual approach. The term minimum standard is often used to describe the least permissible or perhaps adequate or basic standard. Meanwhile contextual approach simply means an approach depending on or relating to the circumstances or situations. As highlighted by majority of the policymakers:

> *"Let's not be too ambitious. Minimum standard is a good start. Utilise the local strengths and site conditions to design preschool classes. It has to be based on situation and context." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policymaker)*

> *"The closest that we can have is by categorising preschool classes into a few types that can be implemented according to local needs. Better start small. Set the minimum standard that's achievable." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)*

> *"We can't have a one-size-fits-all preschool class. It's not possible. It should be tailor-made to its location. Though setting a minimum standard does help." (Associate Professor H, UPSI, policymaker)*

Their views were supported by a key informant from the bottom-upper category saying that a minimum standard with a contextual approach is the appropriate way to go:

"Every class has to be designed according to its locality needs. There's a saying 'ukur baju di badan sendiri', meaning that do things within own capacity." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

Some statements made by the key informants in the earlier section of this chapter reaffirmed this contextual approach theme. They include:

"I think it'd be very hard to have only one standard for preschools. Even for primary schools, we have a few categories. Then only the teachers can adjust accordingly." (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"The least that can be done is divide and categorise the preschools based on their locations, rural or urban. Because rural preschools are definitely way different that the ones in urban areas." (Teacher N, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"It's not possible to have a one-size-fits-all preschool class. It should be tailor-made to each location. We should apply some flexibility to it." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"The opening of new classes in staggered has resulted in unstandardised infrastructure and facilities. Teachers have to adjust with what's available." (Teacher Ha, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"Equipment in each class is different depending on budget available for that particular year. We've to make do with whatever is available. It depends on each individual teacher on how to arrange for her class." (Teacher M, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"Infrastructure differs based on location. So, adjustment has to be done at site. And teachers are expected to set up their own classroom and act accordingly given what's available." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

4.6.3.2 Collective Support

The second emerging theme involved collective support. Collective support defined as group support, whereby each stakeholder can both affect and contribute to the success or failure of a plan. It is imperative to avoid disagreement among the stakeholders to keep the collective support intact. Among the key informants' responses include:

"All stakeholders should play their parts. Then only we can get better preschool conditions." (Mr. K, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"The support should come from all the stakeholders involved." (Dr. F, NCDRC, policy implementer)

"It takes a village to raise a child, which literally means that supports are needed from all for our future generations. (Miss M, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"Teachers can't do it alone. They need to be supported by parents and all relevant stakeholders." (Teacher K, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"All stakeholders should work together. It's for the sake of our future generation." (Mrs. A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

Statement made by one of the key informants in the earlier section of this chapter reaffirmed this collective support theme.

"All stakeholders need to put aside the differences and start working together for our future generation. It's just a challenge, not a barrier." (Mr. R, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

Findings from this study were aligned with those of a previous study conducted by Rahmatullah et al. (2021) on the need for collaboration with other agencies by utilising the existing community resources and expertise, implying collective support needed from all the relevant stakeholders.

4.6.3.3 Shared Responsibility

The final emerging theme from data analysis involved shared responsibility. Shared responsibility can be described as a group coming together in support of something and collectively be accountable for it. All categories of key informants (top-downers, bottom- uppers, and outside-inners) believe that it is important to have shared responsibility as it promotes a sense of belonging to the group.

"It's not a single party responsibility. It takes a village to raise a child. All stakeholders should work together to build a nation." (Dr. M, SMD, MoE, policymaker)

"There's a saying in Malay – ringan sama dijinjing, berat sama dipikul. Implying that responsibility should be shared among all the stakeholders." (Datin R, JPWP, MoE, policy implementer)

"Like here in Putrajaya, even the member of Parliament plays an active role in sponsoring the needs of prasekolah." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

"Parents should be the ones who contribute more. After all, it's our children's education that we are talking about." (Mrs. U, home-based tailor, policy receiver)

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the triparty stakeholders need each other's collective support and shared responsibility apart from their own unique individual roles to achieve the aspiration of a high-quality preschool programme. A common but differentiated responsibility becomes the essence of achieving the quality of preschool that we desired for. The most important thing what Malaysia preschool programme need is not a rigid standard of structural quality, but rather a minimum standard with contextual or situational based approach.

Finally, I would like to share a couple of interesting quotes that I compiled from the interview sessions though they were not part of the emerging themes of the study. There were truths in what have been said, which can be only uttered by the ones who experience it.

"There's always first time for everything. And preschool is the first encounter of a school setting for a child. We want good class conditions to attract children to be interested in going to school." (Mrs A, special need primary school teacher, policy receiver)

"Preschool teachers get to see new faces of children every year, unlike primary school teachers, who will repetitively see the same old children for six schooling years." (Teacher Hi, preschool teacher, policy implementer)

4.7 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has presented the findings of the study. Three themes emerged when answering the first research question of the structural quality elements required

in Malaysian public preschools based on triparty stakeholders' perspectives that were: (1) human factors, (2) conducive environment factors, and (3) other supporting factors.

The second research objective of the study was two pronged. The first was to investigate stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme. While the second was to examine the extent to which these challenges act as barriers to the implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia.

Data analysis for the first part of the second research question was done independently for each category of the stakeholders, unlike analysis on all other parts of the research questions that were done collectively. The analysis saw four emerging themes for the policymaker and policy receiver each, whereas only three emerging themes recorded for the policy implementer. Four emerging themes under policymaker perspectives involved (1) planning and monitoring, (2) governance, (3) evaluation and accreditation, and (4) leader identification. In addition, the three themes that emerged under policy implementer lens concerned (1) resource constraint, (2) capacity and capability, and (3) adaptive implementation. Finally, the four themes that fell under policy receiver views were (1) parents' perception, (2) parents' expectation, (3) parents' involvement, and (4) parents' responsibility. Meanwhile, the analysis of the second part of research question 2 recorded three emerging themes that described the extent of these challenges becoming barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality in Malaysian public preschools: (1) optimistic (a group that viewed it as a challenge, but not a barrier), (2) contingency plan (people who try to work within the obstacles), and (3) complacent (individuals that admit that challenges somewhat impede the implementation of standard structural quality).

The analysis for the final research question saw three emerging themes that could perhaps contribute to the standardisation of structural quality among public preschools, that were: (1) minimum standard with contextual approach, (2) collective support, and (3) shared responsibility. The triangulation process involving photo analysis and document review found similar emerging themes that supported the findings from interview sessions conducted.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSIONS ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter elaborates on the research findings presented in the earlier chapter, specifically it discusses the significance of the main findings presented in the previous chapter, integrates, and interprets the principal results of the inquiry from perspectives of literature and theoretical frameworks. The chapter starts out with discussions on theoretical anchoring the findings in section 5.2 followed by a thorough presentation on findings and discussions of research objective 1 to research objective 3 of the study in the next section of 5.3, mirroring what was presented in the preceding chapter with added synthesis for each of the research objective discussed. A summary chapter later concludes the discussions on the research findings in the final section of 5.4.

5.2 Theoretical Anchoring the Findings

Structural quality is viewed as an exosystem factor, an indirect one, through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979). Even though it lies distantly, it influences development outcomes of children through the various conditions laid down in the environment. Malaysia mostly sees the functions of their agencies of education into three: (1) the Ministry of Education, (2) KEMAS, and (3) JPNIN. The systemic disconnect is just a portrayal of how distal policy failures manifest themselves as proximal classroom deficiencies - violating Bronfenbrenner's principle of exosystem-microsystem reciprocity. The application of this theory provides credence to the present study in focusing on enabling learning environments of structural quality (such as infrastructure, furniture, class size, teacher-child ratios and surroundings) as being fundamental to process quality (Burchinal, 2018; Chen & Yang, 2024; Hanno et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2017; Næsby & Sperling, 2022; Slot et al., 2015, 2018; Zaslow et al., 2021).

The key findings may transcend on three interlocking frameworks that explain the complex structuring quality for implementation. A government system sees structural quality as an exosystem factor, indirect as in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological

Theory (1979). Although this is not the poor quality of exosystem provision, it posts on the development outcome of children through conditions around the different exosystems laid down in the environment. Distance given to policy decision (exosystem) longitudinally from the classroom (microsystem) would then shorten the functional distance and distorted processes at the microsystem level indeed. Such systemic split shows how exactly distal policy failures manifest as proximal classroom incapacity, thus violating Bronfenbrenner's foundational principle of exosystem-microsystem reciprocity.

Contrasting top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approach sheds more light on the breakdown of ecology between design and implementation. Based on top-down development, this approach reflected the central rigidity of operations within the MoE, where a lack of coordination and monitoring, and unclear leadership permits contradictory directives to prevail. Process quality (curriculum standards) may be underlined by the MoE but has limited financial backing into critical structural needs (Ahmad Muhid et al., 2025). For instance, classroom facilities, and the reverse may also hold true in another case, whereas the bottom-up perspective pertains to the actual reality of resource-constrained street-level bureaucrats. The teachers and administrators who are forced into adaptive implementations, often sub-optimal, such as the performative compliance where structural quality checks are primarily done on paper and not worthwhile investments to develop.

Katz's model (1995) offers an ontological perspective on how to analytically understand the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding these systemic ruptures, which have critically undermined responsiveness in policy. The teachers' bottom-up perspective is that very starkly great picture of their daily reality of coping on the ground in contrast to the top-down perspective of researchers motivated by international evidence. The outside-in perspective of parents then brings forth equity where some parents may demand digital tools on par with those of private providers, while others may consider safe buildings and proper equipment as the most significant need. Lacking a structured feedback mechanism for integrating this outside-in expectation, policies are largely unresponsive to conditions on the ground. Thus, the application of this integrated theoretical framework adds further weight to the current investigation. The problem is framed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Theory; the policy implementation theories explain the failure of implementation interpretation among the three different stakeholders; and Katz's model lays bare the human impacts of that failure. These three

frameworks thus create a very strong architecture for interpreting why structural quality standard-setting is so elusive in Malaysia, going beyond mere resource arguments to deeper issues of coordination, perspective, and coherence among policies.

The findings essentially transgressively reflect three interlocking frameworks of top-down and bottom-up implementation approach, and outside-in of policy receivers' perspectives in explaining the multifaceted structural quality implementation. Policy implementation theories have shown the disconnect between designing and executing the models whereby the top-down approach (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981) points to the centralisation of certain challenges, including the inadequacy of monitoring mechanisms in place; whereas the bottom-up perspective explains the stress level of street-level implementers in terms of constraints of resources and bureaucratic overload (Lipsky, 1980; Muhammet & Duygu, 2020). Finally, Katz's model (1995) proposes stakeholder ontogenetic views, including the historically neglected outside-in parental expectations and inside-out teacher realities (which is similar to bottom-up policy implementation approach), thereby exposing critical disconnects in policy responsiveness. The above three frameworks, when put together, give a fairly robust architecture that can be employed to interpret why the standard-setting of structural quality has proven elusive, in spite of policy commitment.

5.3 Discussions on the Research Findings

Discussions on the research findings for research objective 1 to research objective 3 of the study are presented in the next three sub sections of 5.3.1 through 5.3.3. Similar to the presentation in the previous chapter, discussions on the research findings under each of the research objective follow the same exact sequence of what were presented in Chapter 4 with additional synthesis for every research objective discussed.

5.3.1 Research Objective 1 – To Explore the Structural Quality Elements That Influence and Shape Policy Implementation in Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools based on Stakeholders' Perspectives

The first research objective of the study was to explore the structural quality elements that influence and shape policy implementation in Malaysian federally funded

preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives. In early childhood education, structural quality refers to the tangible aspects of the learning environment that support pedagogical processes and child development. While process quality is often discussed, structural quality is equally vital, but often left being deliberated. Based on documents reviewed, interviews conducted, and photos examined, the analysis revealed three main themes: human factors, conducive environment factors, and other supporting factors.

5.3.1.1 Human Factors

Findings from the instruments employed for the study revealed that human factors top the list of the structural quality elements required for public preschool programme in Malaysia. Human factors are concerned with understanding and managing the capabilities and limitations of people. These factors are important because they aid in making work more efficient, effective, and safe. Human factors are critical components of structural quality in preschool programmes, as they directly influence the quality of the educational environment, children's learning experiences, and overall developmental outcomes. These human elements are fundamental to the success of any early childhood education programme and are often the most impactful aspect of a child's educational experience. Based on the analysis revealed in the earlier chapter, human factors consist of two sub-themes: preschool teachers and teacher assistants.

Though various structural features contribute to the effectiveness of preschool programmes, human factors involving teachers remain the most influential element. Teachers play a pivotal role in education, serving as the backbone of the entire learning process. Equivalently, preschool teachers are the cornerstone of a high-quality preschool programme, as they directly influence the learning and development of young children (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2018). They are fundamental structural elements in preschool education, influencing children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2018; Ag-Ahmad et al., 2022). Preschool teachers play a central role in implementing the curriculum and facilitating meaningful learning experiences (Bentley et al., 2025; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023).

Unlike in higher levels of education, preschool teaching goes beyond academic instruction; it includes nurturing emotional security, developing social skills, and guiding behaviour (Embacher & Smidt, 2023). Preschool teachers are responsible for

translating early learning standards into effective daily practices. Their ability to create engaging, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate activities determines the success of the curriculum (Bentley et al., 2025; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023). Additionally, preschool teachers must manage diverse classroom needs, support children with special educational needs, and maintain a safe, stimulating learning environment (Kheng & Rusli, 2025). Their presence ensures structure, routine, and consistency, all of which are essential for young children's sense of security and readiness to learn (Zaslow et al., 2021). Qualified preschool teachers play a critical role in promoting equity by recognising and responding to the cultural, linguistic, and developmental diversity of children (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2018; Ag-Ahmad et al., 2022). When teachers are trained in inclusive practices and cultural competence, they can reduce disparities in learning outcomes and create a more just educational environment (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2018). Programmes with better-educated teachers tend to produce stronger developmental outcomes for children (Bentley et al., 2025; Embacher & Smidt, 2023; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Herut & Setlhako, 2024).

The expertise and skills of teachers determine the effectiveness of the curriculum, the quality of the learning environment, and the emotional and social well-being of the children (Anagnou et al., 2024). A highly qualified teacher is not only knowledgeable in child development but also skilled at creating engaging, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that support children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2018; Ag-Ahmad et al., 2022). Teachers are responsible for shaping the educational foundation that children will build upon throughout their lives, making their roles in ensuring structural quality in preschool programmes absolutely essential (Bentley et al., 2025; Embacher & Smidt, 2023; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Herut & Setlhako, 2024).

The interactions between teachers and children are fundamental to a preschool's success. High-quality teachers know how to engage children in meaningful ways, asking questions, guiding exploration, and providing opportunities for critical thinking and problem-solving (Phang et al., 2021). They foster a sense of curiosity and a love of learning in their students, helping to establish a positive attitude towards education that can last a lifetime. Additionally, teachers create a safe, nurturing environment where children feel valued, supported, and confident (Shuib et al., 2025). This emotional

security is key for young children to explore, take risks, and develop the resilience they need as they grow and learn.

A teacher's ability to assess and respond to each child's individual needs is another critical component of structural quality. Preschool classrooms are filled with children at different developmental stages, with unique strengths and challenges. Effective teachers are adept at recognising these differences and adapting their teaching methods accordingly, whether by differentiating instruction, modifying activities, or providing additional support to children who need it (Smidt & Embacher, 2020). This individualised approach ensures that all children are given the tools they need to succeed and reach their full potential (Masnan et al., 2021). Without skilled teachers who understand the nuances of early childhood development, the overall quality of the programme would be compromised.

Teachers also serve as role models, guiding children in social-emotional development, conflict resolution, and behaviour management. They create a classroom culture where respect, empathy, and cooperation are valued, and they actively teach children how to navigate their emotions and interact with their peers in positive ways. These social skills are as crucial as academic skills in preschool, as they lay the foundation for healthy relationships and emotional intelligence. A teacher's ability to build this kind of environment is one of the most important factors in creating a preschool programme that fosters long-term success.

Furthermore, teachers contribute to the larger structure of the preschool programme by collaborating with parents and the community. By fostering strong partnerships with families, teachers ensure that home and school environments are aligned, and that children's needs are being met consistently. Teachers also contribute to the professional community, sharing their expertise with colleagues and engaging in ongoing professional development to stay current with best practices and emerging research in early childhood education. This commitment to continuous improvement helps maintain and elevate the structural quality of the preschool programme over time.

Majority of the stakeholders in this study conquer on the need for quality preschool teachers in the preschool settings. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Bentley et al. (2025), Embacher and Smidt (2023), Guerrero and Camargo-Abello (2023) and Herut and Setlhako (2024), which found the importance of highly educated and trained teachers to higher quality care. This study also reiterated the findings by Hattie (2015) whereby teachers are primarily responsible for providing

high-quality experiences to children, defined in terms of responsive, warm, and stimulating interactions (Schleicher, 2019), and of suitable and planned instructions (Phang et al., 2021). In the case of Malaysia, this issue was highlighted by Ahmad et al. (2022) and Foong et al., (2021), who stressed the need to reflect and improve teachers' quality, apart from the need for higher preschool management. Even until today, the shortage of quality preschool teachers is still one of the main concerns in Malaysia (Ngadni & Sammy, 2025).

Equally important is the involvement of teacher assistants; but was not highlighted in many of the prior studies. Teacher assistants play a crucial supporting role in maintaining and enhancing the structural quality of preschool programmes. Their presence in the classroom not only helps to create a more manageable learning environment but also allows for a more personalised and effective educational experience for each child (Cassim & Moen, 2020). With the support from teacher assistants, teachers are able to work closely with children who may need additional learning help, ensuring that no child falls behind (Muhammet & Duygu, 2020). This individualised attention is particularly important in preschool, where early childhood development is at a critical stage, and children benefit greatly from additional guidance and support. Teacher assistants help ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential (Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023).

In addition to providing direct support to children, teacher assistants help ease the workload of the teachers, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks such as lesson planning, group instruction, and assessment (Mowrey & Farran, 2021). Teacher assistants are often responsible for helping with transitions and ensuring that all activities are running smoothly. This partnership between teachers and assistants creates a more organised and efficient classroom where both can concentrate on their respective roles and responsibilities (Phang et al., 2021). By sharing the workload, teacher assistants contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness of the preschool programme.

Beyond supporting academic learning, teacher assistants help foster the social and emotional development of children. They are often the ones who work closely with children to model appropriate social interactions, encourage cooperation, and guide children in resolving conflicts (Shuib et al., 2025). Their involvement in promoting positive peer relationships and emotional regulation ensures that children not only develop academically but also build the social skills necessary for success in school and

life. Teacher assistants play a vital role in creating a positive, caring, and supportive classroom atmosphere where children feel safe to express themselves and build relationships with others.

Furthermore, teacher assistants often serve as valuable resources for teachers, contributing fresh perspectives and insights into the development of the children they work with (Cassim & Moen, 2020). Their close interactions with children can provide teachers with important feedback regarding students' progress, needs, and areas where additional support might be required. This collaboration strengthens the overall quality of the preschool programme by fostering open communication and teamwork among staff. Teacher assistants bring a level of flexibility and adaptability to the classroom, ensuring that each child's learning experience is maximised and that the programme remains responsive to the evolving needs of the children (Mowrey & Farran, 2021). In the case of Malaysian public preschool programme, teacher assistants are the ones who prepare food for the children apart from the regular assisting roles. Without them, preschool programme might perhaps result in becoming handicapped. In this light, this study exposes an important omission in Katz's (1995) stakeholders' ontology: the teacher assistants. If Katz gives precedence to researchers (top-down), teachers (inside-out), parents (outside-in), and children (bottom-up), then teacher assistants become indispensable 'hidden actors' acting to mediate structural quality in Malaysia. Findings reveal the two faces of teacher assistants: supporting individualised pedagogy while preparing food on a daily basis. Such a burden is context-specific and extraneous to OECD frameworks. Their multitasking stabilises classroom ecosystems, in effect extending Katz's model to recognise teacher assistants as critical stakeholders in a resource-poor situation.

The importance of teachers in education cannot be overstated. They are central to delivering quality education, supporting student development, and building a just and productive society. Their expertise, interactions with children, and ability to create a supportive and engaging learning environment are crucial for ensuring that children receive the best possible start to their education. Teachers not only shape the academic and social-emotional development of young children but also serve as key figures in fostering a community of collaboration and continuous growth that sustains the quality of the programme for years to come.

To support the roles of preschool teachers, teacher assistants with their unique ability to provide individualised support and assist with classroom management

enhances the overall educational experience for both children and teachers. By supporting teachers and working directly with children, teacher assistants help create a more effective, nurturing, and responsive classroom where every child can succeed. Their contributions are vital to ensuring that preschool programmes meet the highest standards of quality and provide the best possible foundation for young learners.

While teachers are the fundamental requirement for structural quality in a preschool programme, teacher assistants are necessary to the structural quality of preschool programmes. Both teachers and teacher assistants are foundational to the structural quality of any preschool programme. They create the environment that allows children to learn, grow, and develop, making their roles indispensable.

5.3.1.2 Conducive Environment Factors

The second theme emerged from the analysis concerned the need for conducive environment factors. Environment factors refer to the conditions where human live in or work at, whereby it can indirectly affect an individual's situations and conditions. Conducive environment factors do impact human livelihoods, health, and well-being. Similarly, these factors are vital elements of the structural quality elements required for preschool programmes, as they directly affect the learning experiences, emotional well-being, and overall development of young children. A conducive environment in the context of early childhood education encompasses not only the physical surroundings but also the social and emotional climate within which children learn and grow. The environment in which children learn plays a pivotal role in shaping their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Creating an environment that is stimulating, safe, welcoming, and supportive is essential for fostering optimal development during these critical early years. There are several key components that contribute to a conducive environment in preschool programmes found in this study. Based on the analysis, there were five sub-themes that fell under the conducive environment factors, namely infrastructure or facilities, furniture or equipment, number of children per class, teacher: student ratio, and class environment and surroundings. The following elaborates on these five critical sub-themes that constitute to this pillar of structural quality.

Firstly, infrastructure and facilities are not mere adjuncts in preschool settings but essential elements that support and enhance educational practices. The infrastructure that goes together directly with the buildings and permanent attachments

that hold preschool endeavour and programmes with classrooms, specific toilets, and playgrounds-specific things. Of course, in active pedagogy, the proper infrastructure should provide opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and exploration and not only setting (Nik Azhari et al., 2015, Tonge et al., 2016). Well-maintained, safe, and stimulating facilities are prerequisites visions towards developmental activities. Well-designed environments can positively influence children's engagement, behaviour, and overall learning outcomes (Shaari et al., 2020). Apart from being a crucial aspect of a conducive preschool setting, proper infrastructure offers numerous benefits for young children, including opportunities for physical exercise, social interaction, and exploration of nature (Kaçan & Karayol, 2021; Tonge et al., 2016). Well-maintained facilities that are safe, engaging, and stimulating provide children with the chance to develop gross motor skills, engage in imaginative play, and connect with the natural world. A balance of both indoor and outdoor learning facilities is also important to support children's physical and emotional well-being, as well as their intellectual development (Razak et al., 2019; Tonge et al., 2016).

Infrastructure and facilities are integral to the structural framework of preschool programmes. Well-designed, safe, and resource-rich environments support children's development and enhance learning outcomes (Abdullah & Mamat, 2023). Adequate sanitation facilities are fundamental to children's health and well-being. The availability of clean water, functional toilets, and hygienic conditions in preschool settings reduces the risk of illnesses and supports children's overall health. Inadequate sanitation can lead to health issues that disrupt learning and development, underscoring the importance of investing in proper facilities. Disparities in infrastructure quality often reflect broader socioeconomic inequalities (Abdul Mutalib, 2022). Preschools in affluent areas tend to have better facilities due to higher funding, whereas those in underprivileged regions may lack basic amenities. These disparities can affect the quality of education and developmental opportunities available to children, highlighting the need for equitable investment in preschool infrastructure (Lim & Bahauddin, 2019). Addressing disparities in infrastructure quality is essential to ensure that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education. Operationalising the difference in the exosystem proposed by Bronfenbrenner is basically policy decisions at a distance in terms of allocation of funding for microsystems and the kind of deprivation that disrupts the very learning that NSPC are trying to achieve. Policymakers and educators must

prioritise investments in preschool facilities to foster environments that promote optimal development and learning.

Next, adding to the infrastructure and facilities is the furniture and equipment, the vital structural elements that influence children's safety, comfort, independence, and engagement in learning. This sub-theme includes the movable objects inside the preschool environment, such as child-sized tables and chairs, rest mats, storage spaces, bookshelves, and learning kits. Furniture and equipment in preschool programmes are more than physical objects; they directly impact how children interact with their environment, access learning materials, and participate in daily activities.

Children in the preschool years' experience rapid growth in motor and cognitive skills. Appropriately sized furniture such as child-sized chairs, tables, and storage units allows them to move, sit, and reach independently, promoting autonomy and fine motor development (Aras & Olgan, 2016). Furthermore, developmentally suitable equipment, such as manipulatives, blocks, and sensory materials, supports exploration and problem-solving skills. Research suggests that environments rich in diverse and stimulating materials are associated with improved cognitive outcomes and greater engagement in learning activities (OECD, 2020). Well-structured furniture layouts and accessible storage systems support effective classroom management. Clearly defined learning centers, organised through the strategic placement of shelves and tables, help children transition between activities and understand classroom routines. This structure reduces chaos, supports positive behaviour, and fosters self-regulation (Phuah et al., 2025). Moreover, appropriate equipment helps teachers implement the curriculum more efficiently, allowing smoother daily operations. Furniture and equipment must not only be adaptable to various teaching styles and activities but also must adhere to safety standards to prevent injuries and ensure children's well-being (Li et al., 2025; Phuah et al., 2025). Rounded edges, non-toxic materials, and stable structures are essential in minimising risks. Studies have highlighted that poor-quality or oversized furniture can lead to accidents or discomfort, detracting from children's ability to focus and engage (Aras & Olgan, 2016). Thus, investing in ergonomically designed, durable furnishings contribute to a safe and supportive learning environment.

Furniture and equipment are essential structural components that shape children's experiences in preschool programmes. From fostering independence and safety to enabling inclusive and engaging learning, their role is multifaceted. High-quality, age-appropriate, and adaptable furniture and equipment should be integral to

the design and evaluation of early childhood environments. Good kinds of furniture provide proper ergonomic support, and this independence allows the organisation of separate centers for learning space (Li et al., 2025). Still, the absence of child-scaled furniture was a common challenge primarily in rural places. Children were often spotted trying to use chairs intended for grown-ups or trying to sit on the floor without comforting adventure but disallowing engagement among the children. Another issue was the absence of spaces for proper storage making the classroom itself other than what the NSPC envisions an organised and accessible learning environment. Equipment provision such as manipulatives, art supplies, and books was also inconsistent. Some of the preschools had a variety of materials, while others reported using teacher-made tools due to insufficient and erratic funding for replenishments. Above reflects a top-down policy failure in budgeting for consumable resources, making bottom-up implementers improvise all the time. Policymakers, educators, and administrators thus, must prioritise investment in these areas to promote high-quality early learning experiences for all children.

Additionally, class size and teacher-to-student ratio are two other identified critical structural elements in preschool education, influencing the quality of interactions, individualised attention, and developmental outcomes for young children. Class size and teacher-to-student ratio, which usually come as a package, play pivotal roles in shaping children's learning experiences. These factors determine the extent to which educators can provide individualised attention, manage classroom dynamics effectively, and implement developmentally appropriate practices. Recent studies and policy analyses continue to affirm the critical importance of maintaining optimal class sizes and favourable teacher-child ratios to ensure high-quality preschool education. By prioritising optimal ratios and adequate staffing, early childhood education systems can provide supportive, responsive, and high-quality learning environments that promote children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Research consistently demonstrates that smaller class sizes and lower teacher-to-student ratios are associated with improved developmental outcomes. For instance, a meta-analysis by Bowne et al. (2017) found that very low child–teacher ratios (7.5:1 or lower) and small class sizes (15 or fewer) were linked to positive cognitive and achievement outcomes, particularly for children at the lower end of the distribution. Similarly, the OECD (2024) reports that lower child-staff ratios facilitate responsive and individualised interactions, enhancing children's learning and development.

Excessive class sizes can lead to increased teacher workload, stress, and burnout, negatively affecting instructional quality. The OECD (2024) notes that while smaller classes allow teachers to focus more on individual student needs, countries face trade-offs when deciding student-teacher ratios, balancing between recruiting more teachers and investing in other educational elements. Moreover, the OECD (2023) highlights that lower child-staff ratios are particularly important for high-quality interactions, emphasising the need for adequate staffing in early childhood settings. Smaller class sizes and favourable teacher-child ratios contribute to a secure emotional environment, fostering positive teacher-child relationships and peer interactions. The OECD (2024) suggests that responsive and individualised interactions are crucial for children's social and emotional development, particularly in their earliest years. Additionally, the OECD (2023) reports that lower child-staff ratios can reduce the amount of time spent addressing disruptions, allowing more time for meaningful interactions and relationship-building.

To enhance preschool quality, policymakers should perhaps prioritise establishing and maintaining optimal class sizes and teacher-to-student ratios. The OECD (2024) indicates that many countries have improved staff-child ratios in recent years, reflecting both demographic trends and policies aimed at increasing the number of teachers. However, disparities do persist, and further efforts are needed to ensure equitable access to quality early childhood education. Hence, implementing evidence-based policies that support adequate staffing and resource allocation is essential for achieving high-quality preschool outcomes.

Finally, the environment and surroundings of preschool classrooms do play crucial role in shaping young children’s learning experiences and developmental outcomes. It addresses atmospheric considerations as related to classrooms and their locations: lighting, ventilation, acoustics, cleanliness, and external safety. Such classrooms are peaceful, clean, well-lit, and well-ventilated: conducive toward health, concentration, and well-being. As a core structural component of early childhood education programmes, the class environment including layout, lighting, acoustics, and accessibility directly influences children's engagement, safety, and well-being. The environment can either facilitate or hinder children's active participation, concentration, and social interactions, thereby impacting the efficacy of early childhood education programmes.

Classroom layout and design significantly affect children's ability to focus, interact, and engage in learning activities. Classrooms with ample natural light, proper ventilation, and organised layouts contribute to improved concentration and academic performance. An engaging and well-organised classroom environment promotes autonomy and exploration, essential for early cognitive and social development. According to Maxwell et al. (2021), environments that offer distinct learning centers, accessible materials, and ample space for movement encourage children's self-directed play and collaborative learning. These environments support diverse learning styles and help children develop executive functions such as attention control and problem-solving.

Ensuring a safe learning environment is paramount in preschool settings. Structural features such as secure entry points, emergency exits, and childproofed interiors protect children from potential hazards. Access to safe and stimulating outdoor environments is also crucial for physical development and social interaction. Outdoor play areas with natural elements such as trees, grass, and open spaces promote physical coordination, social skills, and problem-solving abilities in young children (Tonge et al., 2016). These spaces provide opportunities for children to engage in active play, which is vital for their holistic development.

Conducive environmental factors serve as unbending inputs on which structural quality is ultimately founded. This belief aligns with the OECD's (2006) iron triangle, as it finds that physical infrastructure, group size, and ratios are the basic regulatable aspects of quality. Some data have been validated by mentioning such differences in these factors, especially between urban and rural settings, as expressed in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013). Nonetheless, in the Malaysian context, these represent quality prerequisites that are yet to be universally available, thereby specifying a critical difference between international benchmarks and the local realities.

5.3.1.3 Other Supporting Factors

Additional to the two essential structural quality elements highlighted earlier, this research identified a third emerging theme that indicates an essential component of preschool programmes. Other supporting factors are further divided into two subthemes: digital support, and health and nutrition. Digital support, and health and nutrition aspects play an increasingly important role in shaping the quality of preschool

programmes. As technology becomes more integrated into daily life and education, preschool programmes must consider how to incorporate digital tools in ways that enhance learning while maintaining a focus on health and well-being.

Digital technologies have become integral to modern education systems, including in early childhood education. Digital support encompassing hardware, software, and teacher digital literacy plays a critical role in enhancing learning experiences, fostering engagement, and preparing children for a technology-rich society. In contemporary preschool education, digital support is increasingly recognised as an essential structural element that complements traditional learning environments. Digital tools can facilitate individualised learning, support diverse learning styles, and promote early literacy and numeracy skills (Jackson et al., 2021; Radzi et al., 2025). Technological equipment such as tablets or interactive boards, when used appropriately, can also enhance early literacy and numeracy (Radzi et al., 2025). As digital technologies become pervasive in everyday life, integrating these tools in preschool settings ensures children develop foundational digital competencies while enhancing overall educational quality. Digital tools can enhance learning experiences in preschool programmes by providing children with interactive, engaging, and personalised content. These tools can range from educational apps and websites to interactive whiteboards and tablets that allow children to explore new concepts through play and exploration (Hatzigianni et. al, 2023). When used effectively, digital technology can support the development of critical skills such as problem-solving, early literacy, and numeracy, while also fostering creativity and imagination through games, art apps, and storytelling platforms (Ze Li, 2024). Undeniably, digital support such as the usage of educational technology is very much needed, particularly post COVID-19.

Digital devices such as tablets, interactive whiteboards, and educational software offer interactive and multisensory experiences that can boost children's motivation and engagement (Hatzigianni et. al, 2023). Digital applications enable differentiated instruction by allowing teachers to tailor content to individual developmental levels and interests. Studies indicate that judicious use of technology in early childhood settings can support language development, problem-solving, and creativity when integrated with active adult guidance (Jackson et al., 2021; Ze Li, 2024).

Despite its benefits, integrating digital support in preschool programmes requires careful consideration of screen time limits, content quality, and equitable access to technology (Hatzigianni et al., 2023; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Thus,

it is important to integrate digital tools in a way that is developmentally appropriate. Excessive or inappropriate use of digital devices can detract from hands-on, social, and outdoor learning experiences crucial in early childhood. At the preschool level, screen time should be limited and carefully curated to ensure that it complements rather than replaces hands-on learning and social interaction. Excessive screen time can have negative consequences, such as hindering social development, impairing language acquisition, and leading to attention-related issues. Therefore, policies should guide balanced, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate technology use. Preschool programmes should establish clear guidelines for the appropriate use of technology, emphasising active, engaged learning and the importance of balancing screen time with physical activity, play, and face-to-face interactions with teachers and peers. Ensuring that digital tools are used purposefully and in moderation is key to maximising their potential benefits for young learners. Undeniably, digital support constitutes a vital structural requirement in modern preschool programmes, enriching learning environments and preparing children for a digital future. When implemented thoughtfully, supported by teacher training, and balanced with traditional pedagogies, digital tools can enhance engagement, inclusion, and individualised learning. Therefore, early childhood education stakeholders must prioritise digital infrastructure and professional development to harness the full potential of technology in preschools.

Early childhood is a sensitive period for growth and development, during which adequate health and nutrition are essential for maximising developmental potential (Black et al., 2021; Hahn & Barnett, 2024). Health and nutrition constitute another fundamental structural element in preschool programmes, directly impacting children's physical growth, cognitive development, and overall well-being (Ren, 2024). Ensuring access to proper nutrition and health services in early childhood settings fosters optimal learning conditions and supports developmental milestones (Hahn & Barnett, 2024; Ren, 2024). Preschool programmes, as formal early learning environments, have a responsibility to provide structural supports that safeguard children's health and nutritional needs. These supports include nutritious meals, health screenings, hygiene practices, and health education, which collectively contribute to enhanced learning readiness and participation.

Good nutrition supports brain development and physical growth, which are closely linked to children's ability to engage effectively in learning activities (Hahn & Barnett, 2024; Hudin et al., 2019). Malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies during

early childhood have been associated with delayed cognitive development, reduced attention spans, and lower academic achievement (Black et al., 2021; Hudin et al., 2019). Preschool programmes that integrate balanced meals and health monitoring can mitigate these risks and promote equitable developmental opportunities. Health and nutrition influence not only physical growth but also social-emotional development. Well-nourished children exhibit better mood regulation, social interactions, and resilience (Baker et al., 2021). Preschool environments that prioritise health and nutrition foster positive self-esteem and emotional stability, thereby enhancing children's readiness to learn and form constructive relationships.

Health and nutrition are critical structural components in preschool programmes that profoundly influence children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. By embedding robust health and nutrition supports into preschool settings, educators and policymakers can create conducive learning environments that promote equity and lifelong well-being. Sustained commitment to these structural requirements is essential for realising the full potential of early childhood education. Hence, policymakers and preschool administrators must prioritise health and nutrition in structural planning, including budgeting for nutritious food programmes, training staff on health promotion, and establishing partnerships with health services (WHO, 2022). Integrating comprehensive health and nutrition policies within preschool quality frameworks ensures holistic child development and aligns with Sustainable Development Goals focused on health and education.

Structural health requirements in preschools should also extend beyond nutrition to include access to health screenings, immunisations, and sanitation facilities. Regular health checks enable early identification and management of health issues, reducing absenteeism and supporting sustained engagement in learning (Shaw et al., 2023). Moreover, promoting good hygiene practices such as handwashing and clean environments prevents disease transmission and supports overall child well-being.

Digital access and nutrition security reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1979) chronosystem, changes over time that redefine structural necessities. Digital tools for learning continuity had become a necessity post COVID-19, whereas support in the form of nutrition programme has arisen to be a necessary requirement of the 21st century, both of which are quite often ignored in quality measures. Today, education continuity itineraries raised by the COVID-19 aftermath (Hatzigianni et al., 2023) and SDG 4 equity perspectives (UN, 2015) are macrosystem exactions that were absent

from the quality tool consideration before 2010, such as the ECERS-R. This changing scenario, of venturing into the terrain of structural elements, indicates that the development of stakeholder expectations continues to be fast-moving outside the present policy framework. In other words, this transformation lays bare how global crises and policy paradigms dynamically reshape local expectations of quality, demanding the frameworks to be better aligned and responsive.

5.3.1.4 Synthesis of Research Objective 1: The Hierarchical Postulation of Structural Quality Elements Required

It would be up to the agencies to score the school facilities according to these application guidelines. The applications are presented by a greater degree of priority characterisation and a more sophisticated application of the synthesis on the data. With no doubt, these requirements support the formation of a distinct interdependent hierarchy with a core of human involvements at the top, to basic physical and operational structures for facilitating these involvements (Tonge et al., 2016), and, finally, to a layer of variable situations allowing basic functionality to come into whole quality. Of course, this understanding is useful in considering policy directions and resource allocations to humanitarian consideration, built in a sequenced model instead of a judgment made by the scattergun approach.

At the very top are the human factors forming the core. Data categorically point to structural quality being most affected by qualified preschool teachers and equally undervalued teacher assistants. Such evidence supports a view that teacher capacity is the foremost among immediate determinants of programme effectiveness; hence, in a lower-order shelter, a highly qualified teacher may create a stimulating learning environment while a poorly qualified teacher may not make use of the facilities of a highly sophisticated one. Teachers are active agents able to convert all other structural inputs into meaningful developmental experiences for children. Coming back once again to the importance of teacher assistants does, therefore, affirm an even higher priority to this input. Teacher assistants do not merely assist; they stabilise the whole system absorbing systematic shocks by multitasking around child and teacher ratios, enabling wide absence of ancillary staff. Investments in human capital - the rigorous recruitment, market-remunerated salary, and continuous professional development - are

foundational to any investment, without which any returns on other investments are very much compromised.

Environmental factors occupy the second tier at this hierarchical level. These infrastructural and material factors group size and teacher-student ratio build the minimal physical-operational platform that allows the human factor to perform well. They are essentially the enablers. According to the OECD's iron triangle, these are the quality aspects that can be regulated and thus lay the prerequisite for positive processes. Safe, hygienic and resourced environment secures the well-being of the child while allowing the teacher to concentrate on pedagogy and not on crowd control or repairs. Such environments can hardly teach the child. In that, they are detrimental to learning. It is basic un-conduciveness which is an impediment to the teacher exercising that competently. The relationship is one of interdependence, i.e. the environment is animated by human factors; but the environment must be structurally sound and be resourced enough to sustain such life. Thus, the differences in these factors, previously documented, do not merely talk about the differences in facilities but about deep-seated inequities in the very platform of teaching and learning.

The third and widest tier consists of the other supporting factors: digital, health, and nutrition. These variables serve up the contextual strata itself and separate a technically functional preschool from one truly calibrated into 21st century realities and for holistic child development. Technically, a preschool may function without consistent/steady internet access or without formalised meal programmes. However, their absence, within the current context, increasingly signals a decline in quality. With the pandemic over, online tools moved from a 'plus' to a 'must' for educational continuity and digital literacy. The same standing applies to nutrition, now seen not merely as a welfare issue, it has in its right become an indispensable need for cognitive readiness and concentration. This tier presents, therefore, a more dynamic definition of structural quality on account of stakeholder expectations as revealed in the varying outside-in perspectives of parents. The extent of their impact depends entirely on the stability of the interventions set within the lower tier; resource-wise, it would be a gross misallocation to provide students with tablets in a classroom where the teacher is practically strangled by a high teacher:student ratio, and no reliable power supply available. Equally, the feeding programme loses its significance if the kids learn in an overcrowded unsafe environment.

This hierarchical model emphasises the importance of using a prominent lens for policymakers in Malaysia regarding the understanding that all structural quality elements are not equally urgent but sequential, as regards issues of standardisation and investment. It can best be illustrated in Figure 5.1. Of all policy imperatives, the first and most critical ones would concern securing the human core: standardisation of qualifications, development of clear career pathways for teachers, and formal recognition, training, and identity within the pay structure for teacher assistants for their invaluable and multipurpose roles. In parallel, there must be a non-negotiable minimum standard for conducive environment - that is, teacher-student ratios and basic safety and sanitation infrastructure enforced across agencies, with a focused effort to close the urban-rural divide. Only after such a foundation is stable will systematic scaling of supporting factors, like the digital infrastructure and comprehensive nutrition programmes be pursued, all with implementation tailored to local contexts and readiness. For instance, structural quality elements required in Malaysia's public preschools only vaguely resemble a list: they actually comprise of a pyramid. Because for the entire structure, that is for the upper layers of contemporary quality, to sustainably exist, they depend on the base - the qualified and supported educators.

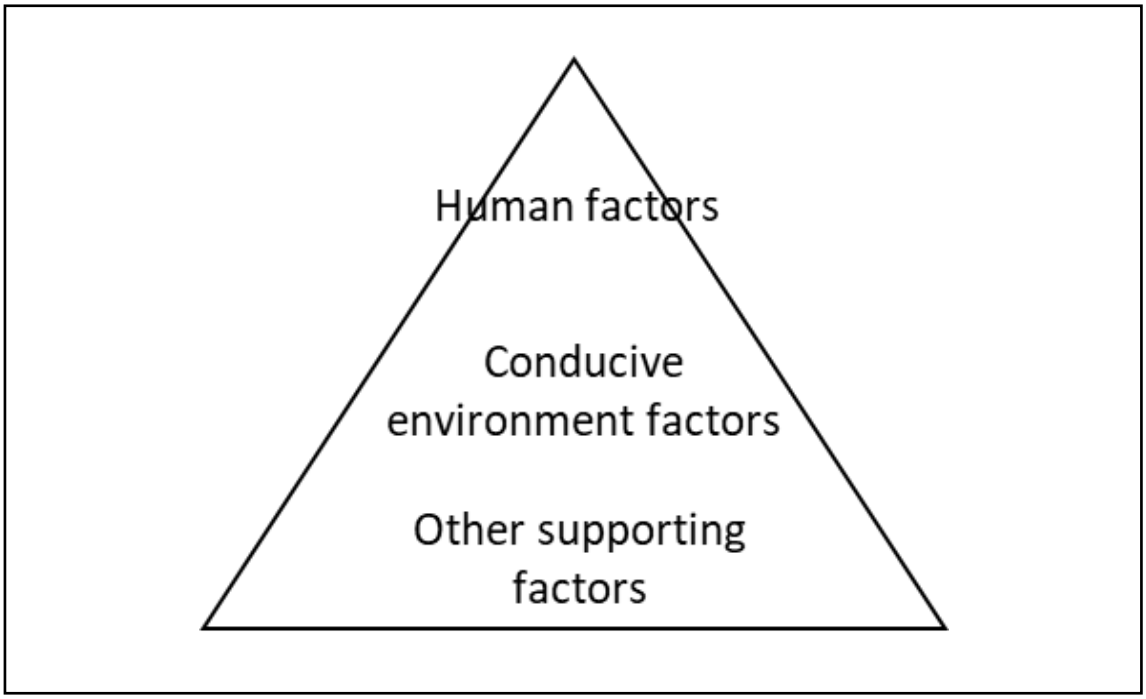


Figure 5.1 The Hierarchical Postulation of Structural Quality Elements Required

5.3.2 Research Objective 2 – To Investigate Stakeholders Experience and Interpretation towards Challenges Faced in Implementing the Standard Structural Quality among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools in an Effort to Promote a High-quality Public Preschool Programme and to Examine the Extent to which these Challenges Act as Barriers to the Implementation of Standard Structural Quality

As highlighted repeatedly throughout the earlier chapters, the second research objective of the study was two pronged. The first was to investigate stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme. While the second was to examine the extent to which these challenges act as barriers to the implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia.

As mentioned in the two earlier chapters, this chapter once again reiterates the emphasis on the second research objective, whereby the analysis for the first part of the research objective was done separately for each stakeholder category. This is in contrast with the analysis conducted for all other research objectives including the second part of this research objective that was done collectively for all groups of stakeholders.

5.3.2.1 Research Objective 2a - To Investigate Stakeholders Experience and Interpretation towards Challenges Faced in Implementing the Standard Structural Quality among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools inaAn Effort to Promote a High-quality Public Preschool Programme

For the first part of the research objective, analysis performed on the interview conducted, documents reviewed, and photos examined found four emerging themes for the policymaker and the policy receiver each, and three emerging themes for the policy implementer.

a. Policyaker (Top-down)

Implementing standard structural quality in preschool programmes presents a significant challenge for policymakers, as it involves balancing numerous factors,

including planning and monitoring, governance, evaluation and accreditation, and leader identification. Two sub-themes fell under each of these identified main themes. The two sub-themes that fell under planning and monitoring were divisional objectives and unstructured ad hoc monitoring mechanisms. While knowledge and expertise were identified as the two sub-themes under governance. Meanwhile, emphasis on process quality rather than structural quality and self-assessment tool were the sub-themes that fell under evaluation and accreditation theme. Finally, the two sub-themes that emerged from the leader identification theme were no single leader and lack of coordination.

i. Planning and Monitoring

Plans and oversight refer to the strategic formulation of a policy's objectives and the following institutional mechanisms established for checking compliance, progress, and outcomes. Effective implementation, therefore, depends on coherent planning and effective continuous monitoring. In the case of Malaysia's preschool system, silo planning does not only exist among the preschool agencies - MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN, but it in fact also prevails even within MoE - the lead agency and the main reference point regarding preschool education in Malaysia. Silo planning culminates in non-standardisation and conflicting grounds; monitoring purposes have now become divorced from planning and are often referred to as unstructured and ad hoc (Meloy et al., 2019). To that end, instead of being a continuous cycle of collecting data, feedback, and improvement, monitoring is considered to rely on intermittent inspections. This nonexistence of systematic monitoring has allowed huge discrepancies not only in policy intent but non-corrective ones to occur. Thus, the argument in favour of top-down implementation model (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981) states that with unclear and unverifiable goals as well as inconsistent oversight, the possibility for policy implementations to fail becomes probable. As Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) have it, the joint complexity of any implementation is referring to the high number of decision points where cooperation is required. In those lines, Malaysia has many joints of accountability breaking without a coordinated monitoring framework not only among MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN, but also among the stakeholders within MoE itself.

Absence of a unified plan that defines and measures perhaps would result in an empty shell to improve quality as a policy goal. Without checks, resources like trained teachers and adequate facilities might not reach classrooms on the ground.

ii. Governance

Governing means the entities, processes, and customs that define how power will be exercised, how decisions will be made, and how stakeholders will voice their opinions. This involves delegating authority and responsibility among different actors. Fragmented governance is the primary governance issue in Malaysia's ECCE scenario. The system disintegrates not only among different federal agencies, MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN - with overlapping functions, different reporting lines, and accountability structures, but also within MoE as the lead agency in preschool programme (Hamid et al., 2020; Kong, 2022; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). This creates a serious gap in knowledge and expertise sharing. Each agency develops its own training modules, procurement rules, and operational protocols, preventing possible pooled economies and consistent deployment that a uniform system can have. This fragmentation serves as a prototypical case of the policy implementation problem described by Matland (1995) when goals are ambiguous and conflict is high. Providing quality preschool as a goal is vague enough for each entity to have a different conception of it, and the other side of the goal divides into conflicting primary mandates to produce inherent conflict politically as well as administratively. The principles of Ostrom (1990) for managing common pool resources are violated because there are no clear boundaries, collective choice arrangements, or graduated sanctions for the common resource of national ECCE quality.

This fragmentation results in wastage of resources incurred owing to rendering inconsistent service delivery and even confusion among implementers and recipients. A teacher might vary in training and subject to different rules than its neighbouring teachers in another preschool, even while pursuing the same national curriculum in both kinds, translating into rather inequitable quality for children.

iii. Evaluation and Accreditation

The aim of evaluation is to assess and value a programme, while accreditation is the validation of a programme that is in accordance with predetermined standards. These two processes being at the center of quality assurance system. This study reveals a very big mismatch in Malaysia, namely, maximum stress relative to process quality evaluation, but not on structural quality. Thus, NSPC has elaborative guidelines for the

pedagogical process but does not back this up with a mandatory and standardised set of structural quality benchmarks (such as infrastructure, furniture, teacher : students ratios) that all agencies must comply with. Self-evaluation thus becomes the most important evaluation tool, which could be great for reflective practice but is very biased, lacking the rigor of an external and objective accreditation (Hamilton, 2014). A system of performative compliance is then created, whereby schools concentrate on what they can do to gain approval of curricular processes without going into or addressing the more fundamental structural conditions that would mean these processes could be really put in place. Over-reliance on such internal and easily gamified metrics could undermine accreditation and quality assurance, as Hamilton (2014) argues, by reducing it to a mere checklist. Brinkman et al. (2017) noted challenges in the Indonesia ECCE system, whereby a focus of process standards alone left out essential structural prerequisites that ensured the proper maintenance of quality.

This means that without any external certification that could be equally stringent across all providers, using common yardsticks for judgment both structural and process quality, it is high unlikely that home-grown minimum quality would ever be assured for all fronts. The consequences are amplified discrepancies among services, making quality an unfair issue much against those children whose programmes are run by the relatively less-resourced agencies.

iv. Leader Identification

Leader identification concerns the authority and accountability designations that are clear for the success of the policy initiatives. It implies a clear designation of ultimate responsibility for ensuring coordination, problem-solving, and results. One dominates the analysis: there is no single leader, and therefore, an incoherent picture emerges. Although MoE is the lead agency for education in name, it has no authority to impose standards or direct resources for preschools within KEMAS and JPNIN. This situation creates a vacuum of overall leadership for the implementation of ECCE policy. Similarly, no one division within MoE is taking a lead on preschool issue. Indeed, there is no one person or body endowed with the power to harmonise the objectives across ministries, align budgets, resolve disputes, and hold all three agencies mutually accountable for national outcomes. However, without such ‘policy champions’ or a relevant high-level steering committee, failure in this critical aspect of implementation

design is imminent and even ensured. Sabatier (2007) makes the point that there has to be a well-trained and sufficiently equipped implementing agency, as well as support from major constituencies. However, in this instance, the implementing agency is fragmented. The primary reason is that there is no coordinating leader, and collaborations among and within agencies is often ad hoc and voluntary; hence, buck-passing and diffused responsibility create a wreck. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013) itself pointed out that stronger inter-agency coordination is one of the challenges that had to be faced, something that still remains unresolved because of this vagueness regarding leadership.

Initiatives are consistently unattended, and systemic problems fester unhealed because no one single division within MoE nor single organisation among the preschool agencies has the authority or mandate to fix them. Such negotiation circumstances contribute even further to the stalemate in policy and hydrants against further advancement in the direction of equity.

b. Policy Implementer (Bottom-up)

The challenges faced by policy implementers in ensuring the standard structural quality for preschool programmes are multifaceted and stem from various dimensions: resource constraints, capacity and capability, and adaptive implementation. Consequently, four sub-themes fell under the theme of resources constraints, and capacity and capability each, while two sub-themes fell under adaptive implementation. Financial, digital, facility, and equipment constraints are the four sub-themes that emerged from the main theme of resources constraints. Meanwhile, empowerment, overburdened, double standard, and disappointment are the four sub-themes found under the main theme of capacity and capability. Finally, the adaptive implementation theme encompassed two sub-themes: no one-size-fits-all, and situational and contextual based.

i. Resource Constraints

Resource constraints are persistent deficiencies of financial, physical, and technological inputs essential for proper implementation of policy directives. These constraints stand in the way of the street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), hindering

quality provision. The data manifest a multi-dimensional resource crisis. Financial constraints appear to take precedence. For preschools in the rural setting of Malaysia, it restricts budgets of facility improvement, learning materials, and maintenance (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). This is directly leading to limitations in facilities and equipment, picture evidence pointing towards a decayed infrastructure and absence of simple furniture as well as educational kits which are breaches against OECD (2006) iron triangle structural quality. The digital challenge in the post COVID-19 era has become a key equity concern. The shift towards digital learning tools has focused on the deep digital divide, and most rural schools do not have access to constant internet, learning devices, and even electric power supply (Hatzigianni et al., 2023; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). This has forced implementers in these areas to totally abandon the use of digital pedagogy or as shown in the data has implemented personal sacrifice-classic bottom-up adaptation that has teachers using their personal laptops and data plan to teach. This contingency planning indicates a large commitment to a systemic failure to provide vital tools.

Resource constraints keep the implementer on the continuous improvisation so that he must carry on adapting new resources. These consume all his time, energy, and morale for tasks that are alien to the core mission of teaching and nurturing children.

ii. Capacity and Capability

Capacity relates to the availability of human resources, while capability refers to their skills, knowledge, and empowerment to perform their roles effectively. The research thus identifies a critical deficit in both. Another important finding is chronic teacher overburdening. Workload intensification (Farabi et al., 2025; Taha et al., 2020) due to high child-teacher ratios, extensive documentary requirements and non-teaching tasks such as meals-preparation contribute to the present unsustainable workload that results in much stress, burnout, and finally disappointment and bad morale, thus undermining professional efficacy (Mamat et al., 2022; Rahman & Ikhlas, 2022). Disempowerment deepens the burden. The frontline implementers usually feel left out from the policymaking process and are given instructions without any consideration of ground realities (Lipsky, 1980; Muhammet & Duygu, 2020; Taha et al., 2020). Such an impression leads to a perception of double standards which shows that policies are formulated by top administration that continues to distance itself from the realities

encountered in street-level implementation. So, the standards set were: ‘those who make the rules don't have to live by them’ which create resentment among people and demotivate them from efforts to achieve policy goals.

Well-intentioned as even such directives may be, they will fail if they lack the concomitant capacity (time, staffing) (Masnan et al., 2021; Sukri & Mahmud, 2022) and capability (training, empowerment) (Rahman & Ikhlas, 2022) to implement them. Teachers become discouraged in their careers and unmotivated, which in turn feeds into high turnover and loss of experienced teachers that further jeopardises quality.

iii. Adaptive Implementation

Adaptive implementation is a situation whereby street-level bureaucrats contrive in facing the gaps between law's expectations of behaviour on one account and the resource constraints on the other (Van Ravens et al., 2023). It essentially constitutes the bottom-up response to systemic failure. Some adaptations are categorised through data as being located anywhere between innovation and resignation. A key strategy is one that rejects the 'one-size-fits-all’ model. In an intuitive manner, implementers understand that standard national policies cannot be rigidly applied to different contexts, from the urban Putrajaya to rural Sabah. This concept is, in fact, in the spirit of the work in Indonesia by Brinkman et al. (2017) that further advocate for contextual adjustments to enhance accessibility while safeguarding core objectives. Thus, proper implementation is by nature context-based and situation-based. The framework proposed does, in fact, reinforce this finding by espousing a minimum standard with contextual approach. Ground implementers are already doing this. Adaptations, however, occurred on the fly and often out of necessity rather than by design. The findings that will be deliberated further in second part of research objective 2 include contingency planners showing resilience through workarounds often represent a quick fix that risks teacher burnout. By contrast, the second group of complacent tends to assume a form of resigned adaptation by giving legitimacy to shortcomings and merely complying with bureaucratic requirements in ritualistic fashion (Hamilton, 2014), perhaps undermining genuine outcomes in child development.

Adaptive implementation is a double-edged sword. It shows the incredible resourcefulness of frontline workers and, in so doing, shows a system that demands these workers sacrifice their well-being, honesty, and professionalism when the system

should be supporting them. These systems will feed back into creating inequities in the absence of systemic support by maintaining quality where the standards vary based on local brilliance rather than cutting across the board.

c. Policy Receiver (Outside-in)

Parents do face a range of challenges when it comes to the implementation of standard structural quality in preschool programmes, as they are the primary recipients of policies as proxies to their children who aim to improve early childhood education. The four emerging themes under the policy receiver cluster were parents' perceptions, expectations, involvement, and responsibility.

i. Parents' Perceptions

The beliefs of parents are indicative of their subjective understanding and perception about the quality, objectives, and worth of preschool. All of these talks would, of course, depend on the socioeconomic status of the parent and the location where they live and experience prior exposure with the education system. Data reveals quite interestingly, a tangible fault line through the perceptions according to socio-geographic lines. While wealthy parents tend to see preschool as necessary for an academic head start, their understanding is consistent with the human capital argument that premature investment will pay off in long-run educational dividends (Beatson et al., 2022; Demissie & Pearse, 2024). By contrast, low-income (B40) parents may use preschool mainly as a form of supervised custody, including the orientation of children regarding societal living, as minimal educational outcomes are inferred (Ismail et al., 2018).

Such difference means that the same policy objective in quality would mean very different way to different group of parents. For example, what a parent considers a 'good' preschool in an urban area includes digital device, while in a rural area, the defining features would refer to the inclusion of clean water, safe buildings, and a trusted teacher consistently in the settings. This parental yet different traditional frame of mind, if not understood by policymakers, end up with misaligned priorities and communication strategies. The results end with cobbled-together, one-size-fits-all policy that makes no attempt at addressing these different perceptions. Without targeted

engagement, the policies will evidently be rendered irrelevant or made foreign to the vast majority of parent communities, especially to the most marginalised who might never connect to or even see that policy has anything whatsoever to do with the most profound concerns or perceived needs within their own lives.

ii. Parents' Expectations

Expectations of parents are mostly hopes and demands of a preschool regarding what such schools should offer their child. These have become good indicators of social values, and the new definitions of quality that much outpace official policy. However, evidence-based research presents a very stark income gap in expectations that powerfully validate the SDG 4 mandate. In the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013), 52% of poor-quality preschools cater to B40 communities. Parents from rural Sabah or Sarawak expected minimal provisions such as clean water, functional sanitation, and safe buildings for their children, while urban middle-class parents envision advanced digital tools, such as tablets, interactive whiteboards, and foreign-language acquisition programmes compared with private sector offerings (Ministry of Education, 2013). As a result, it creates a paradox as to how universal benchmarks of 'quality' can obfuscate geographical and economic privilege. In effect, this warrants a stratified standards system that reconciles these macrosystem (national policy) expectations to be quite in tune with microsystem (local) realities. Parents now consider Wi-Fi and balanced meals 'strongly essential' infrastructure (Hatzigianni et al., 2023; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020), which brings drastic shifts in defining structural quality against the backdrop of global crises (COVID-19) and newly constructed policy paradigms (SDG 4), without hence meeting demands for measuring by existing frameworks like the ECERS-R.

A legitimacy deficit occurs when the expectations of the parent are consistently neglected in the policy design. When some of the major expectations of parents (whether minimal safety or digital literacy) are not met, they tend to lose faith in the public system and may opt for private alternatives or pull away from the education journey altogether.

iii. Parents' Involvement

Involvement by parents has different formal and informal means for parents to participate formally in the preschool community and learn together with their children. Appropriate mechanisms for involvement do matter, although serious implications arise from their limitation. Usually, existing structures of engagement are tokenistic or do not exist at all, hence forming no feedback loop where parental concerns become relevant for policy changes. That is where that exclusion-by-default fits into the formalised exclusion of the historical outside-in perspective identified by Katz in 1995. The literature concern emphasises home-school partnerships (OECD, 2006) without which the existing reality on the ground in Malaysia is often left without adequate structured channels (for example, digital platforms or regular parent-teacher conferences) to materialise. This is especially true for working parents or communities that may feel intimidated by the formal school environment. Teachers and administrators become deprived of vital insights about children's needs, while parents almost lack a voice within the ecosystem that exists for their children. In the absence of significant mechanisms for participation, better partnership channels are one-way information channels. Such absence hinders bottom-up innovation and continuous improvement and does not maximise parents as key partners in achieving educational outcomes.

iv. Parents' Responsibility

Parental roles have a more concentrated and potentially dysfunctional approach to supporting caregiving and nurturing. The spirit of parental responsibilities extends to provide a much broader definition. And parents are expected to transfer ways to allow their children into schools. All the structural dents poking peas-hole in the resolve of alienating parents from society with casts of reactionaries and orphans, the abuse of the highly rare collective method, are another birthright passed down by negotiated parents. The system ends up being dysfunctional since parents in that primacy are caught headfirst in the dark about blurred white lies on accountability. The above-mentioned issues are other tales to be shared by way of disenchantment, as Rahmatullah et al. (2021) ghosts languishing while the parents of these disadvantaged souls find themselves ill-equipped to know what really is that they must comply with or otherwise put a stop to. All those voids set up to its root for the unaccountability kill responsibility;

and as a result, parents must try it on the half-shells of their little ones and grasp that such acts will contribute to some good. In absence of the centralised voice beyond their precinct to agitate for the realisation of systemic concerns, rather structural failures will perpetuate.

5.3.2.2 Synthesis of Research Objective 2a: The Disconnect in the Policy Ecosystem

The distinct threefold analysis of challenges for policymakers, implementers, and parents exposes the fault lines that traverse the system. For policymakers, uncontrolled change in leadership styles and ad-hoc monitoring mechanisms add to what Emberling (2020) and Foong et al. (2021) called a centralised rigidity, making policy implementation challenging alongside disintegrated governance within MoE - characters that do not support coherent quality assurance. Such fragmentation also gives rise to instances where contradictory mandates are issued, such as emphasising process quality (curriculum standards) while neglecting essential preconditions of structural quality (classroom facilities) - and this mismatch is what remains of the Indonesian ECCE system as seen by Brinkman et al. (2017).

Then, on the other hand, there was another quirk where policy implementers - teachers and administrators, felt their decent functioning languished more (Sabanci et al., 2018); given the limited budgets, upgrading facilities suffered; technology use was foreboding under conditions of digital inequalities. Even though it was an urgent post COVID-19 need, another cause for workload intensification remained chronic short-staffing (Liu & Reczek, 2021; Muhammet & Duygu, 2020); emerging yet another challenge was performative compliance (Masnan et al., 2021), whereby structural quality measures were, in effect, reduced to mere tick box processes rather than being routed to a real investment into enhancing developmental outcomes for children.

Differing perceptions among the parents, the actors receiving the policy, further complicated implementation (Sabanci et al., 2018). Some parents, for instance, wanted facilities that mimic those of private providers (Tee et al.,2018), while poorly serviced communities required basic structural quality such as clean water and safe buildings, thus highlighting the equity gaps raised in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013). Equally concerning is that mechanisms for parental involvement are limited, culminating in a weakened feedback loop that keeps concerns from being incorporated in policy amendments.

A primary realisation that follows from the above analysis of the challenges faced by the policymakers, the implementers, and the parents as the receivers is that these issues are in no sense isolated. They interlink manifestations of a thoroughly dysfunctional policy ecosystem. They self-perpetuate into a vicious cycle of systemic failure wherein the output of one stakeholder group feeds into the constraints of another, so locking the entire system into a low-quality equilibrium. The hopelessness of singular interventions against the background of these constant failures is aptly put into show along with the massive system-based approach which alone offers any hope of engaging in real reform.

The Malaysian public preschool landscape is identified to be a tripartite split between MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN, each of which has different sets of goals, objectives, and individual core services (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ahmad Nazir et al., 2022; Ghani et al., 2025; Kong, 2022; Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The finding that there is no single leader with the authority to harmonise objectives adds to the fragmentation in a policy environment made in-built ambiguous and conflicted. The gap, which fails to provide overall accountability, is due to the inability of the MoE, as nominal-lead agency to impose standards on KEMAS and JPNIN. It also adds that non-negotiable and unstructured ad hoc monitoring mechanisms refer to policy initiatives developed in silos without any coherent direction in terms of a common vision for structural quality.

This top fragmentation leads directly to the implementer's challenge of contradictory directives and resource constraints. Street-level bureaucrats - teachers and administrators - are recipients of those disjointed policies. With no single source of authority to report to, they face unclear leadership along with a lack of coordination, appearing as financial constraints or facility and equipment constraints. The failure of the policy to standardise major structural elements such as teacher-student ratios is accompanied by stark inequities. According to the data, the result of overload is aptly described as an overburdened workforce with individuals compelled into adaptive implementation or contingency planning. The teachers would be prepared to become experts in performative compliance who concentrate on paperwork to satisfy uncoordinated monitoring from several stakeholders. Or, they could be heroic innovators with their personal laptops and data plans, bridging the society's digital divide. As Lipsky (1980) theorised, absent a coherent policy, street-level bureaucrats do become de-facto policymakers, but on this occasion their discretion is a symptom of systemic neglect rather than empowerment.

The results of these struggles at the frontlines cascading into the parent's challenge of unmet expectations and profound confusion. Parents, as the outside-insiders to the system, are on the receiving end of the outcomes of this fractured system. Huge discrepancies in preschool experiences due to resource constraints yield large divergences in what are often misaligned sets of parents' perceptions and expectations. T20 parents, fed primarily through better-resourced preschools, can demand digital tools that akin to private providers. Meanwhile, B40 parents whose children attend underserved preschools are left with the wishful thinking for basic structural quality. This inequity directly arises because of the inequitable resource allocation drawn from the fragmentation of governance. The confusion is compounded further since parents must navigate a policy system where standards and services differ per operating location creating a diffuse and confused sense of parental responsibility. In addition, the findings indicate there are limited mechanisms for parental involvement, thus meaning that there are not even structured channels for aggregating and effectively communicating this confusion and dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, this disconnect creates an important feedback loop ultimately feeding back into the incoherence of pressuring policymakers to change. Since parents' experiences and grievances are so fragmented and localised, they cannot congeal into a united strong lobby for systemic reform or change. The tokenistic involvement mechanisms prevent the formation of a consolidated, outside-in perspective that could demand accountability. Thus, policymakers receive mixed and diluted signals allowing them to perceive the status quo as a unique set of isolated manageable problems of less importance rather than the crisis it really is, systemic in nature. Without a unified and thus angry constituency for unstructured ad hoc monitoring keeping the real human costs on the table, there is little political momentum to do the hard work of merging existing silos and naming one accountable leader. Thus, the cycle is now complete and self-reinforcing: fragmented policymaker’s governance begets policy implementer’s overload, which begets confused parents as the policy receivers, which in turn fails to generate the coherent pressure needed to fix the initial fragmentation, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

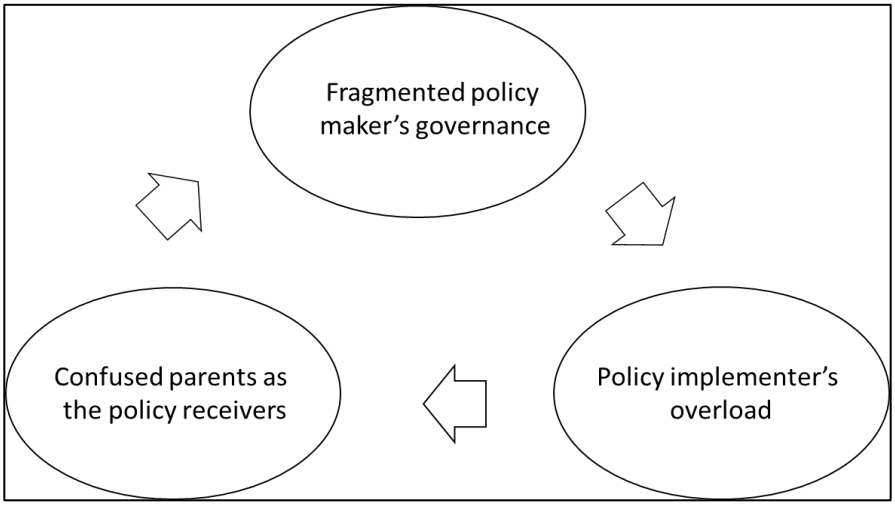


Figure 5.2 The Cycle of Malaysia Preschool Policy Ecosystem

This synthesised model, visualised as a vicious cycle, moves the analysis beyond a simple list of challenges. Even more than an acceptance merely of the terms of its failure as regards adequate amounts of funding, standard structural quality is actually more profound, namely, failure of a policy implementation chain itself. The challenges are relational and symbiotic. Hence, any meaningful intervention, such as the framework proposed in third research objective, needs to be designed to dismantle this cycle simultaneously at different points, for example, by creating clear leadership to end fragmentation, empowering implementers by providing them with coherent resources, and institutionalising the parent voice in order to create accountable feedback to convert it from a vicious cycle of failure to a virtuous cycle of improvement.

5.3.2.3 Research Objective 2b - To Examine the Extent to which these Challenges Act as Barriers to the Implementation of Standard Structural Quality among Federal-funded Preschools in Malaysia

As highlighted in the earlier chapters, this second part of research objective was relying solely on key informants' responses as none of the documents examined discussed on the extent to which the challenges becoming barriers in implementing a standard structural quality for preschool programme. However, findings on this part of research objective were supported by photos shared by the key informants.

Data analysis conducted for the second part of research objective 2 revealed three main themes: optimistic (a group that viewed it as a challenge, but not a barrier), contingency plan (people who try to work within the obstacles), and complacent

(individuals that admits that challenges somewhat impede the implementation of standard structural quality).

a. Optimistic

There are applied optimistic proponents who would typically redefine barriers in terms of structural openings. Such a group is characterised by high clarity of policy goals and very low conflict conditions concerning policy actors' ideal outcomes. They are neither blind exercise of optimism but rather proactive forms of agency rationalising and utilising the social capital for resource deficiency compensation. Such resonates into positive deviance in public administration, where people invent uncommon methods to solve problems despite share constraints (Pascale et al., 2010). As note in the findings, these implementers engage in the activities about sharing of resources within schools, putting up with local community to secure space, supplies, even things like that. This is clear but with a purpose of its own – to educate children, but very much an enabling community network such that the implementer would face fewer conflicts.

Very much laudable yet this method does not provide sustainability because it relies upon personal goodwill and very hard work by single individual implementers. It provides localised benchmarks of success which mystify systemic failings and tends to further entrench belief about policymakers having a lesser incentive to revisit the need for broader systemic investment.

b. Contingency Plan

Contingency planners are the implementers who engineer ad-hoc solutions to circumvent resource constraints and bureaucratic overload. This group operates among highly ambiguous situations where the policy directive is vague or somehow devoid of guidance on how to achieve it using available resources (Matland,1995). Typical behaviour of Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucrats, they become quasi-policymakers in developing routines and simplifications to deal with demands considered impossible to meet. The findings pointed to workarounds such as a teacher's use of personal laptops and data plans to deliver digital lessons or sharing resources across classrooms and schools in response to digital financial constraints identified in the analysis. These further highlights the long-standing teacher workload intensification (Sulaiman et al.,

2015) and shows the necessity of adaptive implementation from situational and contextual factors (Van Ravens et al., 2023) because the system generally lacks a legitimate coherent one-size-fits-all solution.

While contingency planning is a survival mechanism, it bears high risks of implementer burnout; it creates a low disparate quality driven by local ingenuity instead of equitable policy. The system that demands its workforce's sacrifice rather than supporting them shall be considered its pathology.

c. Complacent

The complacent are the implementers who have normalised systemic deficiencies, who evidence signs of resignation, defeatism, or ritualistic compliance, wherein the group operates under conditions of high conflict in which policy goals, like high-quality education, are in direct and obvious contradiction to the available resources, like high student:teacher ratios, unsafe facilities, causing psychological withdrawal (Matland, 1995). This aligns with the concept of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972), where exposure to negative events beyond control for some time leads to the belief that outcomes are independent of one's actions. It also manifests as performative compliance (Hamilton, 2014), where implementers rather engage with bureaucratic documentation requirements for achieving substantive programme goals. The end result is morale loss and retreat into minimum effort, where maintaining order becomes the lion's share of the task and which contradicts the NSPC's vision that stresses individualised, stimulating interaction. This is the overburdened workload state with little or no empowerment discussed under capacity and capability constraints. It's a rational response to an irrational system, with effort seeming to improve the situation with particular frugality.

Complacency now offers very serious threats to quality in terms of stagnation and entrenchment at very low standards. It means a break in the implementation chain link, where policy intentions are completely detached from classroom practice, hence there is what the OECD (2006) describes as a state where minimum compliance supplants commitment to quality.

5.3.2.4 Synthesis of Research Objective 2b – The Ambiguity and Conflict in Standardising Structural Quality of Preschools

Barrier spectrum analysis classified stakeholders into three categories according to their adaptive approaches to structural constraints: (1) optimists - recasting challenges as opportunities for improvement; (2) contingency planners - certain schools made workarounds such as sharing resources within schools; and (3) the complacent - being normalised with deficiencies. While these indicate that most implementers have adaptive capacity, they still need systemic support to turn their makeshift solutions into sustainable practices.

Optimists demonstrate resilient behaviour in proactively and constantly framing obstacles as opportunities for adjustment and change. Next, are the contingency planners, engaging in pragmatic, locally adapted workarounds that included sharing resource materials between schools or working with their personal materials to bridge the gap where support was absent. In contrast, the complacent tended to dwell within these resigned acceptance states labelling deficiencies as normal due to the subconsciously eliminated standardisation from perceptive stimuli to which they have been exposed for so long. Although this distribution illustrates a remarkable capacity for adaptation and problem-solving on the ground, especially by the contingency planners, it equally underscores the need to embrace and transform these ad hoc solution spaces into strong, sustainable, and equitable practices backed by a finely-honed sense of normalcy to curb the threats from normalisation of inadequacy.

Implementation challenges for federally funded preschools in Malaysia can be helpfully interpreted through Matland's (1995) policy implementation matrix, which argues that implementation result depends on the level of ambiguity and conflict present in the policy goals. The additional dimension considered by this framework is that of diagnosis, identifying how certain fundamental characteristics of policy design reliably shape frontline behaviour within an exceedingly complicated, federated system like that of Malaysia.

To begin with, implementers known as optimists fits into the low ambiguity-low conflict quadrant of Matland (1995). In this scenario, the goals of the policies are known, and with the collaboration and support of the local community, the collaborative adaptation atmosphere is highly favourable. This is clearly illustrated by the creativeness of teachers by bringing the Member of Parliament on board in sponsoring

the needs of their preschool. The very clear goal for the education of children is clear-cut in that there appears to be consensus among the communities with very little dissent. Any type of implementers is physically empowered to be part of the fresh, daring solution - the only one that is said to be genuinely rooted in the community. The momentum stands as an intervention to calibrate the real local environment with a constructive interplay between policy and community involvement, this bottom-up innovation could finally unfold.

Next, under Matland (1995), the implementers would be placed in contingencies of high ambiguity - contingency planers. In achieving clarity regarding the stated objective of the policy intent (such as integrate digital learning or ensure quality education), they are faced with the other hand of great ambiguity regarding accomplished ones, mired with erroneous parameters, guidelines, or allocation of resources. In diminished environments of ambiguity, the street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) applied improvisation and personal initiative to avoid expectations of policies from reality as faced by them. For teachers conducting digital lessons through their devices, the ambiguity left them with options: momentary clarity on the goal applied high discretion on their part, and they became the policymakers implementing and co-designing unsustainable solutions to hold this service aloft.

Then, complacent, fall under Matland's (1995) category of high conflict, where one set of goals conflicts jarringly with another under realities of financial and capability constraints. Here, the clash between stated policy objectives of high-quality individualised education and severe viability deficits. These insurmountable constraints would suffocate agency, kill the morale for implementation, and sink the implementers into cynicism and ritualistic compliance (Hamilton, 2014) within which they replace actual attainment of educational outcomes by mere implementation of an assortment of rituals. Such systemically predictable response to a policy environment that mismatches goals with resources cannot be branded unilaterally as character failures.

The typology is not merely a categorisation of implementers; it reflects the good design of the very policies they are supposed to implement, which affect the implementers' behaviour. Thus, these extreme behaviours - from optimistic collaboration to resigned compliance - are a direct function of the degree of ambiguity and conflict engineered into Malaysia's preschool policy framework, as portrayed in Figure 5.3. This means that standardising structural quality will require first changing

the distorted implementer behaviour and then the policy design generating it - high in ambiguity and conflict.

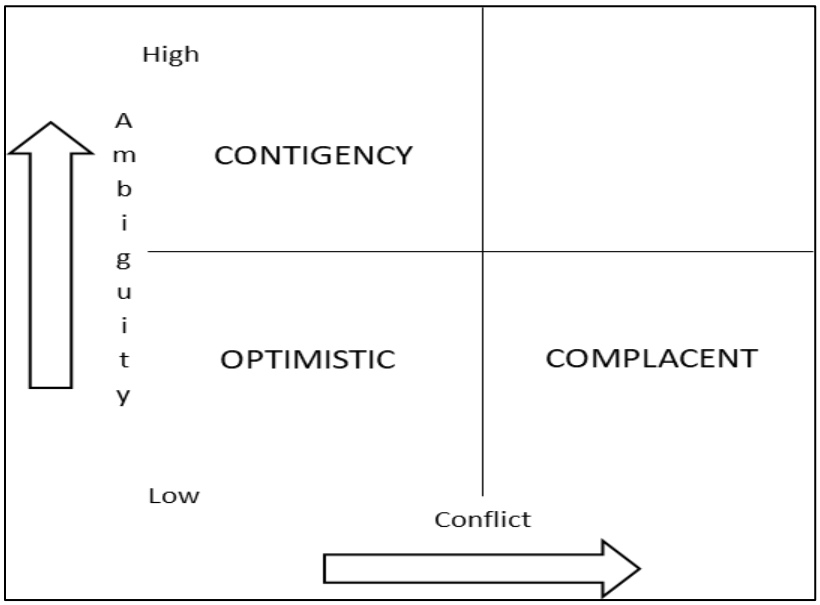


Figure 5.3 The Ambiguity and Conflict in Standardising Structural Quality of Preschools

5.3.3 Research Objective 3 – To Develop a Framework for Ensuring Standardisation of Structural Quality among Malaysian Federally Funded Preschools based on Stakeholders' Perspectives

The final research objective of the study was to develop a framework in ensuring standardisation of structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives. Based on the analysis, three themes emerged that would perhaps answer this third research question, which were minimum standard with contextual approach, collective support, and shared responsibility. These themes were essentially translated from the triparty stakeholders' perspectives which were later mapped into a standard structural quality framework for Malaysian public preschools, thus, make up the proposed framework for the study.

5.3.3.1 Minimum Standard with Contextual Approach

Establishing minimum standards is essential for guaranteeing a baseline of structural quality in preschool programmes. However, a purely prescriptive approach may fail to address the diverse socio-economic, cultural, and geographic contexts within

which preschools operate. Thus, it is important to integrate a contextual approach into the development and implementation of minimum standards in order to achieve equitable, effective, and sustainable quality assurance in early childhood education.

Minimum standards in preschool programmes define the essential structural requirements that safeguard children's wellbeing and learning environments (OECD, 2021). Research consistently links adherence to minimum structural standards such as adequate space, qualified staff, and proper nutrition with improved child outcomes (Burchinal, 2018). Minimum standards serve several functions: they do not only provide a clear framework for policymakers and practitioners, but also facilitate monitoring and evaluation, as well as protect children's rights to safe and enriching environments (Emberling, 2020). These standards are critical for standardising quality and promoting accountability. However, rigid application of uniform standards without consideration of local contexts risks either overburdening or inadequately supporting preschools in diverse settings (Gu, 2023). The imposition of uniform criteria may inadequately reflect the realities of resource-limited or culturally distinct communities. Thus, a contextualised approach is vital to balance standardisation with flexibility.

Meanwhile, a contextual approach acknowledges that preschool programmes operate within varied environments shaped by economic capacity, cultural norms, governance structures, and geographic factors (Urban et al., 2021). For instance, rural preschools may face challenges related to infrastructure and staffing that urban centers do not, while cultural values may influence expectations around pedagogy and parental involvement (Janta & Harte, 2023). By embedding flexibility in standards, policies can enable adaptation to local conditions without compromising core quality elements. This may include graduated requirements, context-specific indicators, or tiered implementation pathways (Brown et al., 2019). Such an approach fosters inclusivity, relevance, and ownership among stakeholders.

The key challenge lies in maintaining the integrity of minimum standards while allowing for contextual modifications. This balance can be achieved through several ways whereby core mandatory standards can be applied universally to ensure child safety and basic quality, while context-sensitive criteria can be rolled out to accommodate variability in implementation methods and resource allocation. In addition, participatory policy development involving local educators, families, and communities can be practiced reflecting lived realities (Gibbs & Côté, 2020). To

complement that, continuous monitoring mechanisms that assess both compliance and contextual appropriateness (OECD, 2021) can be implemented.

Policies incorporating contextualised minimum standards promote equity by recognising diverse needs and capacities (Meloy et al., 2019). They encourage innovation and localise problem-solving, which are essential for sustainable quality improvement. Furthermore, capacity-building efforts should accompany standards to support disadvantaged preschools in meeting the benchmarks (Neuman & Powers, 2020). While minimum standards are indispensable for safeguarding structural quality in preschool programmes, their effective implementation demands a contextual approach. Balancing standardisation with flexibility ensures that quality assurance mechanisms are both rigorous and responsive to diverse environments, ultimately advancing equitable access to quality early childhood education.

5.3.3.2 Collective Support

Next, achieving and sustaining standardised structural quality in preschool programmes necessitates collective support from multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, families, communities, and relevant institutions. Structural quality in preschool programmes encompassing adequate facilities, qualified staff, health and safety provisions, and appropriate learning materials is a foundational element for promoting positive developmental outcomes for children (OECD, 2021). However, ensuring that these standards are consistently met across diverse contexts requires collective support. The complex nature of early childhood education systems means that no single actor can guarantee quality independently; rather, a network of stakeholders working in partnership is essential (Urban et al., 2021).

Collective support embodies collaboration among all the triparty stakeholders covering policymakers who formulate policies, allocate resources, and enforce regulations; policy implementers who implement standards and advocate for quality improvements; and policy receivers who participate in decision-making and reinforce educational goals at home, apart from providing additional resources and contextual insights (Gibbs & Côté, 2020). This shared responsibility enhances accountability, resource mobilisation, and contextual responsiveness, thereby reinforcing structural quality (Neuman & Powers, 2020).

Several mechanisms underpin collective support, including intersectoral collaboration involving education, health, and social services to address holistic child needs (Davis et al., 2021) and professional learning communities that enable educators to share best practices and collectively address challenges (Janta & Harte, 2023). Parental engagement initiatives that build trust and foster active participation in preschool governance (Gibbs & Côté, 2020) are also necessary apart from community partnerships that expand infrastructural and material support beyond institutional budgets (Urban et al., 2021). These mechanisms facilitate the pooling of expertise, financial and human resources, and community capital essential for maintaining minimum standards.

Research highlights multiple benefits of collective support. They include, among others, improved resource allocation, thereby ensuring that preschools have necessary facilities and equipment (OECD, 2021) and enhanced policy implementation, as stakeholder buy-in leads to smoother adoption and enforcement of standards (Neuman & Powers, 2020). In addition, collective support increase adaptability, with diverse perspectives informing culturally and contextually appropriate modifications (Janta & Harte, 2023) and strengthen sustainability, as shared ownership reduces dependence on singular actors and promotes resilience (Urban et al., 2021).

Despite its advantages, fostering collective support can be challenged by several factors as discussed in the second research objective, whereby fragmented governance structures would lead to unclear roles and responsibilities (D'Amico et al., 2023) while power imbalances would result in marginalising certain stakeholders, particularly parents from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gibbs & Côté, 2020). Apart from that, communication barriers across sectors and community groups (Neuman & Powers, 2020) and limited capacity in resource-poor settings to engage actively (Urban et al., 2021) would also perhaps hamper collective support among all the stakeholders involved. Addressing these challenges requires intentional policy design and capacity-building efforts. Collective support is indispensable for ensuring standardised structural quality in preschool programmes. By fostering partnerships among governments, educators, families, and communities, early childhood education systems can mobilise the resources, expertise, and commitment necessary to uphold quality standards consistently. Policy frameworks should perhaps prioritise mechanisms that encourage collaboration, inclusivity, and shared accountability to create sustainable quality environments for young children.

5.3.3.3 Shared Responsibility

In addition, ensuring standardised structural quality in preschool programmes is a multifaceted endeavour requiring the distribution of responsibilities across various stakeholders. The concept of shared responsibilities among policymakers, policy implementers, and policy receivers emphasising its significance in fostering accountability, resource mobilisation, and quality assurance in early childhood education settings need to be emphasised.

Structural quality in preschool programmes including qualified personnel, adequate physical environments, and other new emerging supporting factors is essential for supporting children's developmental outcomes (OECD, 2021). Achieving and sustaining such quality, however, is not solely the domain of any single stakeholder. Instead, it demands shared responsibilities that distribute tasks, resources, and accountability among government bodies, preschool staff, families, and the wider community (Urban et al., 2021). This collaborative framework promotes holistic and sustainable quality standards.

Shared responsibility entails a deliberate and coordinated allocation of roles and duties where each stakeholder contributes to upholding structural quality standards. For example, while policymakers develop regulatory frameworks, allocate funding, and monitor compliance, the policy implementers involving preschool educators and administrators will implement standards, manage daily operations, and engage in professional development. Policy receivers covering parents and families as the end recipient, could perhaps support learning at home, participate in school governance, and advocate for quality improvements, while community organisations and partners at the larger context, could provide supplementary resources, advocacy, and contextual expertise (Gibbs & Côté, 2020). This division of responsibilities fosters accountability and leverages diverse capacities, enhancing overall programme effectiveness (Neuman & Powers, 2020).

Shared responsibilities contribute to accountability whereby clear delineation of duties ensures that each stakeholder is answerable for specific aspects of quality, reducing gaps and overlaps (Hadley et al., 2024). In addition, it optimises the resource by pooling human, financial, and material resources in enhancing capacity to meet standards, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Janta & Harte, 2023). By promoting shared responsibilities, engagement among stakeholder is fostered, involving

families and communities buy-in and responsiveness to children's needs (Gibbs & Côté, 2020). And finally, it promotes sustainability whereby distributed responsibility mitigates risks associated with dependency on a single actor, fostering resilience, and continuity (Urban et al., 2021).

Despite its advantages, shared responsibility frameworks face several challenges as expanded in second research objective. It does not only promote ambiguity in roles leading to confusion and accountability gaps (Rosli et al., 2024) but also would result in unequal power dynamics which may marginalise voices of families or frontline educators (Gibbs & Côté, 2020). Moreover, it could lead to limited capacity or willingness among stakeholders to fully engage due to time, knowledge, or resource constraints (Neuman & Powers, 2020), while resulting in coordination difficulties across sectors and agencies, affecting coherent policy execution (Janta & Harte, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires transparent communication, capacity building, and inclusive governance structures. Among the effective strategies include establishing clear roles and expectations through policy guidelines and memoranda of understanding (OECD, 2021), building capacity among parents and community members for meaningful participation (Gibbs & Côté, 2020), apart from facilitating intersectoral collaboration and regular stakeholder meetings to promote coordination (Neuman & Powers, 2020) as well as implementing monitoring systems that track contributions and outcomes across stakeholders (Ferrette, 2022).

Shared responsibilities are fundamental to ensuring standardised structural quality in preschool programmes. By clearly defining and supporting the roles of diverse stakeholders, early childhood education systems can enhance accountability, resource mobilisation, and sustainability. Both the policymakers and practitioners should perhaps foster inclusive, transparent, and coordinated frameworks to realise the full potential of shared responsibility models in advancing quality early education.

5.3.3.4 Synthesis of Research Objective 3 – Framework for Standardising Structural Quality in Malaysian Public Preschools

Minimum standard principles with contextual approach were the pillars of what formed the proposed framework for the standardisation of quality in federal-funded preschools in Malaysia. Such an approach would then balance between the national uniformity and the requirement for such standards to be adaptable to the region,

considering that Malaysia is not made up of a uniform socio-geographical landscape. Standardisation policies usually stumble as seen in the Malaysia Education Blueprint because they assume some form of application rigidity between such contrasting areas like the urban centre and the remoteness of rural areas. It operationalises Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem principle: national standards set developmental guardrails that cannot be negotiated, while allowing flexibility at the district level for ecological responses.

This duality is empirically imperative. A tiered standardisation would still permit regions to emphasise the most elementary sanitation, and as Brinkman et al. (2017) found in Indonesia, a contextual adjustment would still allow such a standard to align closely with local quality benchmarks to enhance ECCE accessibility without compromising core objectives. In fact, contextual flexibility counters performative compliance that previous reforms have suffered. As Hamilton (2014) irony in the fact of technocratic tools like Excel templates as ‘lip service’ compliance instruments rather than formative supports. This framework, by contrast, embeds situational discretionary freedom: preschools in indigenous communities (such as Orang Asli settlements) have the option of exchanging digital tools for nature-based learning resources where internet access is lacking, provided core literacy/numeracy standards are met. Similar like Adams et al. (2025) inclusive leadership model allows principals adapt resources to reflect local constraints while maintaining quality. Resources would be allocated on a socio-geographic basis, rather than via fragmentation owing to diversity.

On the ground, this allows for flexibility to local actors, a structural innovation intended to address the MOE (2013) admission that 'overlaps in federal/state roles' severely hampered historical efforts in this regard. Thus, embedding an adaptive capacity while ensuring accountability within the framework. With such a governance structure, the tension with respect to centralisation and decentralisation faced by earlier reforms in demonstrating standardisation and contextualisation as either pillars for equitable quality or counter forces to such an understanding has been resolved.

Theoretical frameworks illuminate these complexities. Structural policies, according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979), reside in the exosystem and indirectly affect classroom microsystems. Policy implementation theory goes further in unpacking this: top-down emphasises central mandates (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975) while bottom-up highlights street-level bureaucrat agency (Lipsky, 1980). Matland's (1995) synthesis weighs ambiguity and conflict in policy goals. Katz's model (1995)

enhances it by pushing for a multi-stakeholder perspective that involves researchers (top-down), implementers (bottom-up), and parents (outside-in) to holistically define quality. These perspectives are woven into our argument that structural quality standardisation in Malaysia rests on reconciling top-down policy design, bottom-up frontline execution, and outside-in parental expectations to move beyond fragmentation.

Shared responsibility, the very core of the public preschool system in Malaysia, is thus another building block with serious cracks, perhaps owing to the systemic disjunction between theoretical need and practical detachment. In theory, shared governance is seen, according to OECD (2006), as collaborative action among ministries, agencies, and sectors all coming together to exert institutional expertise in a holistic method for delivery of ECCE. This arrangement theoretically agrees with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model that one should create exosystem policies that would allow microsystem processes to take place. Disturbingly, the reality is one of growing contradictions: non-existent mandatory coordination mechanisms have allowed shared responsibilities to evolve into structural fragmentation, thus weakening quality standardisation, while aggravating inequities.

The proposed three-pronged framework thus meets the findings for all the three research objectives within culturally responsive design. Firstly, it recognises minimal impairment with contextual flexibility: the socio-geographic diversity of Malaysia. Instead of applying inflexible universal metrics, there would be tiers enabling preschools to prioritise some form of basic infrastructure as validated by Brinkman et al.'s (2017) work in decentralised ECCE systems (2017). This counters the so-called 'one-size-fits-all' failures in national assessments in implementation (Van Ravens et al., 2023). Secondly, mechanisms of collective support seal fragmentation through pooling resources and synchronising monitoring. This formalises the coordination divisions within MoE, which are all siloed entity with replicative functions under the framework of Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem principle, where connective tissue between systems enhances functionality. Thirdly, shared responsibility among all the stakeholders; this operationalises Katz (1995)'s argument on inclusive quality definitions. This 360-degree engagement averts policy-reality divides by centering voices of implementers and recipients in standard refinement.

This discussion illustrates the governance challenge that structural quality standardisation in Malaysian preschools is less than a resource issue. Findings confirm

that human capital, qualified teachers, and empowered assistants are critical requirements for quality. Their delivery into effective services, however, is mediated through enabling environments and policy coherence. The same old barriers-fractured leadership, inequities in resource distribution, lack of alignment of stakeholder interests, reflect larger systemic issues that permeate the whole of Malaysia's education system, from primary teacher allocation disparity (Abdul Aziz et al., 2021; Ngadni & Sammy, 2025) to bureaucratic centralisation (Meloy et al., 2019). Contextually sensitive standards, cross-institutional collaboration, and participatory governance are what the proposed framework espouses in response to that challenge. By embedding structural quality within the pluralistic boundary realities of Malaysia but drawing on global evidence, therefore, the action pathways toward early childhood education equity are drawn - where intentions of policy transform into practice in classrooms.

5.4 Summary of Chapter

This chapter tied together the rich empirical findings of this study with theoretical frameworks that give them deeper meaning in a counter clockwise provision from the diagnosis of the problem to the presentation of the viable pathway ahead. It has also extensively discussed on the findings for each of the research objective by relating the findings of study to the relevant literature. Majority of the findings of this study are the reiterations of the previous research with few new emerging discoveries.

The identification of human factors as paramount structural requirements is congruent with world evidence that teacher capacity is the foremost immediate determinant of programme effectiveness. Teacher qualification was shown to correlate with higher process quality through response and developmentally appropriate interaction (Burchinal, 2018; Embacher & Smidt, 2023). Unfortunately, the collapse of quality goals due to a tropical shortage of teachers has thus been examined in light of this evidence (Ngadni & Sammy, 2025). This study has highlighted, however, that the other dimension of teacher assistants is critically enabling viable classroom ecosystems. Whereas prior studies have cast assistant roles in terms of mere support, this study positions assistant teachers as critical facilitators who can relieve administrative burdens, support individualisation, and contribute overall stability of the programme, especially in Malaysia, where they bear the extra burden of preparing meals. The contribution of this workload redistribution (Mowrey & Farran, 2021) would explain,

however, why this role received unanimous emphasis from stakeholders, even though it was not captured in any of the formalised quality frameworks.

Through further elucidation of these findings, an important hierarchy of needs follows, guiding any intervention. The human factor is, without doubt, the central pillar of structural quality. This means good teachers and, significantly, teacher assistants who are formally recognised and supported as partners in education. They are the two main actors through which any inputs can function and thus form the apex of the quality pyramid. The enabling environment, the iron triangle of ratios, group size, and infrastructure constitutes the second tier, which should, in fact, support the human factors to work. Last but not least, aiding infrastructure of digital access and nutrition means the changing contextual layer that elevates a way of working that fulfils the needs of the 21st century and holistic child development. This hierarchy would serve as a strategic map to prioritise policy and investment, arguing against a hopeful scattergun approach in favor of a sequenced foundational build-up of quality.

The second research objective of the study was two-fold with the first one investigating stakeholders experience and interpretation towards challenges faced in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools while the second one involved examining extent to which these challenges act as barriers to the implementation of standard structural quality among federal-funded preschools in Malaysia. As emphasised in the earlier chapters, the analysis for the first part of this second research question was done independently for each category of the stakeholders, unlike the analysis on all other parts of the research questions that were done collectively.

The first part of research objective 2 saw quite a number of responses received shared nearly similar views across the stakeholders despite specific questions were tailored to certain explicit stakeholders in the interview guide. The analysis saw four emerging themes for the policymaker and policy receiver each, whereas only three emerging themes recorded for the policy implementer. Meanwhile, the second part of research objective 2 recorded three themes that described the extent of these challenges becoming barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality in Malaysian public preschools: two of which are positively inclined which turned challenges into something positive while the remaining one can be categorised as undesirable or negative that succumb to the challenges.

On a data-wise trajectory, it has been repeatedly revealed that the quest for standardised structural quality in public preschools in Malaysia stands out as being a far more complex challenge than the simple view of financial resource deficits. At its most elemental, this challenge is in relation to governance and systemic coherence. The fragmentation of authority engenders an ecosystem wherein policy vagueness, conflicting mandates, and lack of a clearly visible authority render first choice terms. This fragmentation at the exosystem level, which through Bronfenbrenner's lens does not concern much the earthly affairs of bureaucracies, pours directly into the microsystem of each classroom, finding expression in terms of overcrowded ratios, unsafe facilities, and overburdened teaching force.

When aggregated, the stakeholder-specific analyses reveal a grim picture depicting a vicious cycle of systemic failures. The absence of a clear leader and a coherent plan on the part of the policymakers generates conflicting directives and ill-defined monitoring. Street-level implementers are subsequently forced along a continuum of adaptive responses: from the innovative resilience of the optimists and pragmatic coping of the contingency planners to the resigned compliance of the complacent. These adaptations, often remarkable, are unsustainable and foster glaring disparities in quality, coupled with considerable professional fatigue. Parents and children suffer the most from these ramifications: confronted with a confusing landscape of unmet expectations and inequitable services. Mumbling largely off the confusion parent, and other such structurally deficient feedback mechanisms, generate the needed coherent pressure to trigger systemic reform, thus sidelining the original fragmentation. Such a self-reinforcing cycle suggests that any marginal tinkering adding a little increment to the budget or launching a new isolated curriculum initiative would be utterly futile as the system is designed to produce just these unattractive outcomes.

In direct reply to such a diagnostic situation, the study has, therefore, designed a framework for standardisation that is also a blueprint for systemic change with broad application built upon three interdependent pillars, each designed to break the vicious cycle at various points. The principle of minimum standard with contextual approach brings minimum clarity and non-negotiable benchmark sets to reduce any ambiguities in policy, while its inbuilt flexibility accommodates socio-geographic diversities in Malaysia and thus empowers the local to solve problems. collective support targets fragmentation head-on by requiring formal integration not only among the federal

preschool providers, but also within MoE, so that resources can be jointly utilised, goals aligned, and accountability can be unified. Last but not least, shared responsibility is where the voice of the vulnerable implementers and parents is operationalised as per Katz's model, thus instituting the long-missing feedback loops and nurturing a culture of joined accountability.

So, on this score, the way illuminated by the study lays a pathway forward that necessarily includes a fundamental paradigm shift. It requires a shift from a rigid, fragmented, top-down mandate towards an integrated, responsive and contextually tamped ecosystem. This ecosystem is expected to listen to and cater for all its stakeholders - the policymaker in Putrajaya designing the national strategy, the principal with the local navigation of constraints, the teacher improvising in a resource-scarce classroom, and the teacher assistant, whose multifaceted roles provide the very stability that keeps the system afloat. The environment in which policy is being not just pronounced but also cocreation and adaptive evolution; consequently, the clearest articulation of accountability will be equally shared. Most essentially, nurturing the interests of a nation's youngest citizens will deliver a purpose that, in turn, will become a binding force transcending bureaucratic implementation silos. This research is, therefore, a practice that not only critiques but gives a validated account of the pathway for the proposed transformation, that is, that standardisation is ultimately feasible with realisation through the arms of coherence, collaboration, and sincere respect to the human realities on ground.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter puts a concluding remark for the thesis. The chapter starts with deliberations on summary of the research in section 6.2 before proceeding with summary of key findings in section 6.3. This is followed by a sharing on the research contributions covering theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects in section 6.4. The chapter later outlines the implications to policy and practice in section 6.5 followed by recommendations for each of the key stakeholders covered in this study in section 6.6. Section 6.7 later focused the discussions on prospects for future research. The conclusion section of 6.8 ultimately wraps up both the chapter and the thesis.

6.2 Research Summary

Efforts have significantly been directed towards increasing preschool process quality instead of structural quality, thus policy implementation of structural quality in public preschool has been undermined and neglected. This thesis attempted to examine the need for policy on the standard structural quality for Malaysian public federally funded preschools. The main purpose of this study was to explore the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives. In addition, this study aimed at investigating the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools. The final objective of this study was to propose a framework that ensures standardisation of structural quality among federal-funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives.

The scope of the research concerns preschool education programme with emphasis on structural quality elements of public preschools in Malaysia. There are gaps in Malaysian public education policy implementation. In this study, the main issue addressed is quality discrepancies in preschool programme variation, which stems from multiple policy implementation approaches.

As highlighted in the earlier chapters, public preschool education in Malaysia is presently being provided by three different agencies, namely MoE, KEMAS, and JPNIN. However, this research is a single case study on MoE as the lead agency and the main reference point regarding preschool education in Malaysia. Selecting MoE as the sample of the study gives this research the advantage of the helicopter's view on the issue as the ministry's tasks' coverage encompasses not only the initial stage of policy drafting but also policy implementation as well as the monitoring and evaluating phase of the nation's entire preschool education programme.

This study is confined to the area of Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya due to practicality, feasibility, and familiarity with the context, apart from the fact that preschool programme in Putrajaya resemble a comprehensive setting for Putrajaya population since there is no other state in Malaysia that has a 100 percent rate of primary schools with annex preschool programme in that individual school.

Next, this research took a constructivist position. In terms of methodology, the study employed a qualitative method as constructivists are most likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods and analysis. The study looked at both perspectives, the federal agencies providing the service and the parents who are receiving the service on behalf of their children, by employing the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches for the supply side, and the Katz model on perspectives of childcare quality for the demand side. The key informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. A total of 18 key informants participated in this research. The supply side stakeholders comprised of government officials, preschool experts, and preschool teachers; while the demand side involved parents, who sent their children to MoE preschool programmes and acted as proxies to their children.

In-depth semi-structured interviews, document review, and auto-photography/photovoice were employed as means for collecting data. Through these approaches, the researcher managed to understand the actual issues of preschool quality, particularly the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality among public preschools in Malaysia. Apart from that, through the interviews conducted, the researcher was able to gauge the similarities and differences of perspectives among these key stakeholders. Thus, the research managed to obtain two-sided stakeholders' perspectives, both from the demand and supply side resulting in better and holistic views on the policy implementation of structural quality in public preschool programme. The triangulation process involving document review and auto-

photography/photovoice were utilised to support the interview sessions conducted. Thematic analysis was later applied to analyse the interviews and photos, while content analysis was utilised to analyse the documents reviewed.

6.3 Summary of Key Findings

This portion is a brief empirical summary of the central findings of the study. It is meant to reprise the reader on the fundamental data and themes emanating from an analysis of interviews, documents, and photographic evidence and thus establish a clear basis for the ensuing discussion regarding the broader implications of what has been revealed. The findings are organised according to the three main research objectives of the study, thus presenting an objective landscape of Malaysian federally funded preschools concerning their structural quality ecosystem.

The first research objective was to investigate structural requirements from the stakeholders' perspective around quality. In answering the first research question, the study revealed three structural quality elements required in Malaysian settings, that were human, conducive environment, and other supporting factors. The first emerging theme, human factors consist of two sub-themes: preschool teachers and teacher assistants. Meanwhile, the second emerging theme, conducive environment factors comprise of five sub-themes, namely infrastructure or facilities, furniture or equipment, number of children per class, teacher: student ratio, and class environment and surroundings. Lastly, two sub-themes fell under the final emerging theme of other supporting factors: involving digital support, and health and nutrition.

Analysis uncovered a constant and hierarchical set of expectations, with human factors in the foreground, all identified by stakeholders as crucial for being structural quality. This category highlights the role qualified preschool teacher plays as the linchpin of any quality programme, thus directly affecting pedagogical effectiveness and child development. A significant, and perhaps more novel finding was the paramount importance assigned to teacher assistants. Stakeholders highlighted them not merely as auxiliary support but as indispensable figures who enable classroom functionality, often taking on multifaceted roles from individualised child support to essential non-teaching duties like meal preparation, thereby stabilising the learning environment, especially under challenging conditions.

Beyond human capital, the data underscored non-negotiable conducive environment factors. This theme was inclusive of the tangible, physical prerequisites for quality and closely aligned with the internationally recognised iron triangle of structural quality. The need for infrastructure and facilities, including safe, dedicated buildings with proper sanitation, potable water, and playgrounds, was indicated. Availability of appropriate furniture and equipment, specifically child-sized furniture and sufficient learning materials, was also a recurring requirement. Furthermore, two interrelated factors were consistently raised: manageable group sizes and favourable teacher-student ratios. The data indicated that excessively high ratios, particularly in rural settings, were perceived as a primary barrier to implementing the child-centered pedagogy mandated by the NSPC. Finally, the overall class environment and surroundings encompassing lighting, ventilation, cleanliness, and external safety, were considered crucial areas of entropy for ensuring a healthy and focused learning atmosphere.

Emerging from the data were what this study terms other supporting factors, which reflect evolving definitions of quality in the 21st century. Digital support, in the form of reliable internet access and educational technology, was strongly emphasised, particularly in the post COVID-19 context, as essential for continuity of learning and digital literacy. Equally highlighted was health and nutrition, with stakeholders identifying the provision of balanced meals as a foundational element that supports children's cognitive capacity and overall well-being, thus enabling them to engage fully in the learning process.

The second research question of the study was two-fold. The first was to specifically investigate the challenges that prohibit the achievement of standard structural quality, while the second was to further examine how these become hindrances. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, this final chapter once again reiterates the emphasis on the second research question, whereby the analysis for the first part of the research question was done separately for each stakeholder category. This is in contrast with the analysis conducted for all other research questions, including the second part of this research question, which was done collectively for all groups of stakeholders.

The findings showed a clear picture of a complex and fractured policy ecosystem. The challenges were thus multi-layered and differed markedly by stakeholder group. Data analysis for the first part of the second research question

revealed four challenges in implementing a standard structural quality from the top-down perspective, that were planning and monitoring, governance, evaluation and accreditation, and leader identification. Two sub-themes fell under each of these identified main themes. The two sub-themes that fell under planning and monitoring were divisional objectives and unstructured ad hoc monitoring mechanisms. While knowledge and expertise were identified as the two sub-themes under governance. Meanwhile, emphasis on process quality rather than structural quality and self-assessment tool were the sub-themes that fell under accreditation and enforcement theme. Finally, the two sub-themes that emerged from the leader identification theme were no single leader and lack of coordination.

For policymakers (top-down), it was mainly systemic planning and monitoring deficiencies that arose out of narrowly divisional objectives and ad hoc, unstructured monitoring mechanisms. This was worsened through the non-integration of governance among the implementers involving not only divisions in MoE but also among the implementers on the ground (administrators), thereby resulting in a critical knowledge gap and policy disorientation. Another major challenge is the misaligned focus of evaluation and accreditation, which appeared to be skewed towards emphasising process quality in the NSPC, while lacking any compulsory and uniform system for the evaluation of structural inputs. All these unfortunate developments stem from one ambiguous issue which is leader identification since there is no one entity that has clear authority over the entire public preschool system to coordinate, resolve conflicts, and enforce standards.

Meanwhile, the bottom-uppers (policy implementers) highlighted three challenges involving resource constraint, capability and capacity, and adaptive implementation. Subsequently, four sub-themes fell under the themes of resources constraints, and capacity and capability each, while two sub-themes fell under the adaptive implementation theme. The four sub-themes under resources constraints cover financial, digital, facilities, and equipment constraints. While the four sub-themes under capacity and capability include empowerment, overburdened, double standard, and disappointment. Lastly, the two sub-themes that fell under the adaptive implementation comprised of no one-size-fits-all, and situational and contextual based.

For policy implementers, these were the challenges to bear, the teachers and administration, right at the site level, operational constraints that were becoming visible. Deep resource constraints were the immediate issues: long-standing lack of financial

resources, poor digital infrastructure, and very limited facilities and equipment. These were interpreted with capacity and capability constraints; implementers reported with high child-teacher ratios and administrative duties that they were burdened on the professional side, lacked power in policy matters, and felt let down by what they perceived to be a double standard between policy creators and people on the ground. Implementers resorted to adaptive implementation in response to these systemic gaps, producing ad hoc, context-accommodating workarounds that spurned a one-size-fits-all model, yet did so often at great personal cost.

The outside-inners of the demand side saw four challenges in implementing a standard structural quality for preschool programme in Malaysia, consisting of parents' perception, expectation, involvement, and responsibility. From a policy receivers' (outside-in) point of view, difficulties were perception and expectation. Perception ranged drastically in terms of what is a quality preschool among parents divided along socio-geographic lines; from an academically oriented head start early on to a mainly supervised stay arrangement for children. Expectations were as varied: from those seeking sophisticated digital facilities in some areas to those requesting even such basics as safe buildings and basic furniture in others. An important problem found to be present was a limited mechanism of parental involvement with few formalised channels of parental input to feed into policy. This frequently results in a befuddled sense of parental responsibility whereby parents are unclear about their role relative to that of the system's responsibility by virtue of inconsistent levels of service offered by a diverse array of suppliers.

For the second part of research question 2, that is to answer the question on the extent of the challenges becoming barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality, data analysis revealed three main themes: optimistic (a group who view it as only a challenge, but not a barrier), contingency plans (people who try to work within the obstacles), and complacent (individuals who admit that challenges somewhat impede the implementation of standard structural quality in public preschool programmes). The first emerging theme, optimistic, consisted of two sub-themes: ambitious and positive thinking. Meanwhile, the two sub-themes that fell under the main theme of contingency plans were option and action plans. And the final theme emerged from the analysis was complacent, involving two sub-themes as well, namely feeling of content and acceptance.

The inspection of how far these challenges have, in fact, metamorphosed into barriers shows that categorisation can be done along a spectrum concerning implementer responses, thus effectively grouping the frontline undertaking into three categories based on adaptive approaches. The first group termed optimists viewed institutional challenges as prospects for innovative practice and community involvement and proactively constructed partnerships to bridge resource shortfalls. The second ones identified themselves as contingency planners, who developed mainly ad-hoc pragmatic measures - borrowing personal devices and data plans for lessons - to navigate everyday resource challenges and bureaucratic demands. And, lastly, there existed a group of implementers classified as complacent, normalised in systemic deficiencies, sometimes praying for the ritualised, performative compliance to policy mandates because of a sense of resignation and numbing agency.

Lastly, the analysis for the final research question saw a common trend in recommendations shared among the triparty stakeholders. To summarise the key informants' feedback, there were three emerging themes gauged from data analysis that ultimately make up the framework of the study. The first being the minimum standard with contextual approach, while the second was collective support, and the third and final one was shared responsibility. These three themes added up to the initial framework set at the beginning of the study, thus making up the proposed framework of the study.

In relation to third research objective, which was to develop a framework for standardising structural quality, findings from all stakeholder groups coalesced around the three core interdependent principles highlighted above. The first fundamental principle is minimum standard with contextual approach. This integrates the non-negotiable national benchmarks for all structural quality elements from teacher qualifications to sanitation and safety while providing for flexible, tiered implementation that accommodates Malaysia's profound socio-geographic disparities. The second principle, collective support, calls for an end to the siloed operations of divisions in MoE. It proposes formalised mechanisms for holistic collaboration, joint resource pooling, and synchronised monitoring for a more effective, cohesive, and universally supported preschool system. The third principle, shared responsibility, presents a new dynamic in governance. It brings about demand for institutionalising structured feedback loops integrating bottom-up insights from implementers and more directly outside-in expectations from parents into policymaking and refinement,

creating a culture of mutual accountability and responsive governance. This summary of empirical findings provides the essential evidence base.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the proposed framework on structural quality for policy implementation in Malaysian public preschools as translated from the triparty stakeholders' responses. This framework is the revised version of the initial framework set at the beginning of the study (refer to Figure 2.6) taking into consideration on all the emerging themes discussed. The four key themes revealed as challenges in implementing a standard structural quality from the top-down perspective involved (1) planning and monitoring, (2) governance, (3) accreditation and enforcement, and (4) leader identification. Meanwhile, the bottom-uppers highlighted three key themes as challenges covering (1) resource constraint, (2) capability and capacity, and (3) adaptive implementation. While the outside-inners of the demand side revealed four challenges consisting of (1) parents' perception, (2) parents' expectation, (3) parents' involvement, and (4) parents' responsibility. The framework also spells out the structural quality elements required for Malaysian public preschools setting, which include human, conducive environment and other supporting factors.

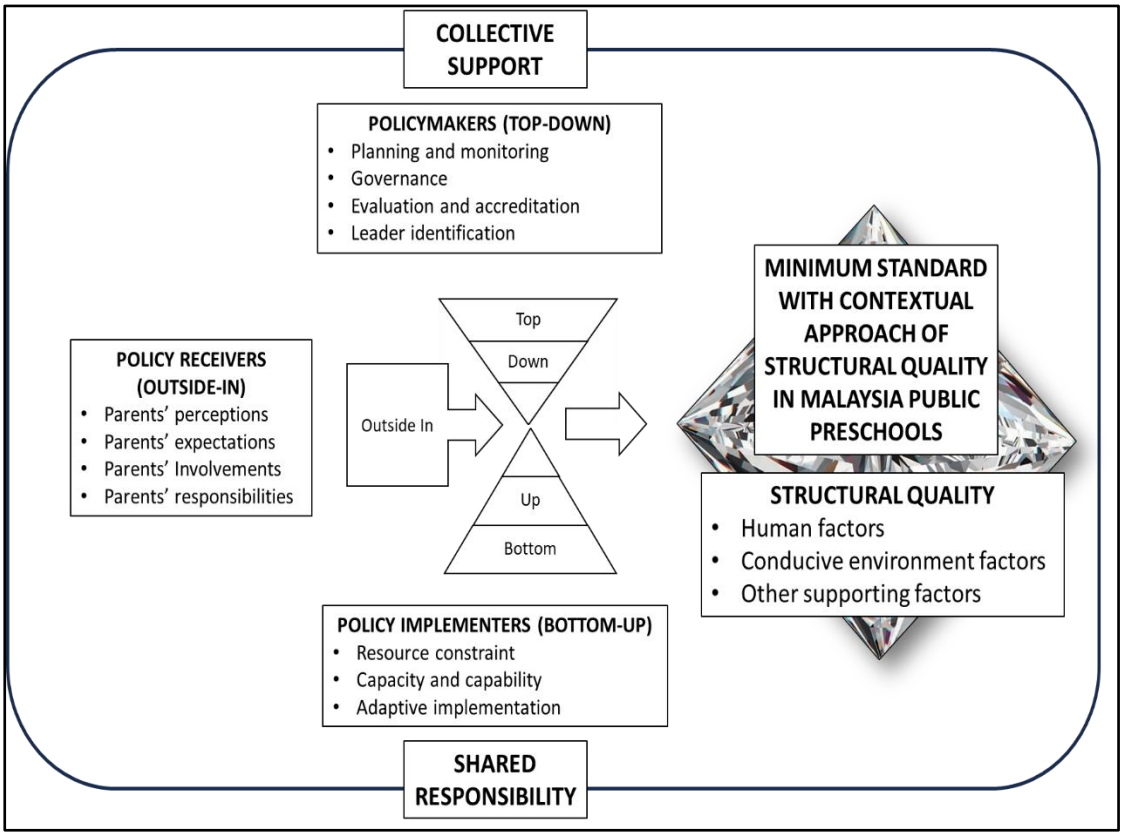


Figure 6.1 Proposed Framework on Structural Quality for Policy Implementation in Malaysian Public Preschools

In overcoming the challenges, the study specified the importance of collective support and shared responsibility among the triparty stakeholders apart from their distinct individual roles. Perhaps the most significant finding of the study was the indication that what Malaysia preschool programmes need is not a rigid standard, but rather a minimum standard with contextualised or situational approach.

6.4 Research Contributions

Research contributions play a vital role in advancing knowledge, driving innovation, and solving complex challenges across various fields. A significant research contribution not only deepens understanding within a particular discipline but also influences practice, policy, and future studies. By providing fresh perspectives and practical solutions, research contributes to societal progress, improves decision-making, and fosters interdisciplinary collaboration. Among the contributions of the study worth highlighting covered the theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects.

6.4.1 Theoretical Contributions

The study recorded a couple of theoretical contributions, namely:

a) First, this study adopted the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory in the definition of structural and process quality elements of preschool quality, similar to other found prior research.
b) Additionally, this study enhances understanding on the structural quality elements required in public preschools through the lenses of triparty stakeholders by employing the top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches for the supply side that comprises of policymakers and policy implementers, with the injection of Katz model on perspectives of childcare quality for the demand side of policy receivers. This study basically fills the gap of most prior studies whereby mostly were focusing purely on demand side.

6.4.2 Methodological Contributions

Apart from that, there are several contributions in terms of methodological aspects, which are:

a) Firstly, this study addressed the methodology gap whereby most studies in the past employed quantitative method. This research fills the gap by conducting the study using qualitative approach.
b) Secondly, this research utilised visual method, particularly the autophotography/photovoice technique, as a replacement to the conventional observations due to strict restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a fairly new methodological approach for studying education given the common observation method practiced in the field.
c) Thirdly, this study adopted a case study design involving three methods of data collection (1) interview as the primary data, (2) auto-photography/photovoice, and (3) document review as the secondary data. Each of these methods offers diverse and triangulation of multiple data approaches for gathering rich and in-depth qualitative insights. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena studied.

6.4.3 Empirical Contributions

And finally, there are a number of empirical contributions of this study, which include:

a) First, the study revealed the importance of teacher assistants as newly identified structural quality elements required for preschool programme despite not being highlighted by most previous studies.
b) Second, this research emphasised diverse challenges faced by different key stakeholders in implementing a standard structural quality in a public preschool programme and its interpretations as perceived by multiple stakeholders which influence its practice. Although there exists some common ground among the stakeholders, the interpretations by each group seemed varied.

c) Third, the findings from this research discovered the significance of collective support and shared responsibility required among the triparty stakeholders.
d) Fourth, though some standard is needed to standardise the structural quality elements, in the case of Malaysia, the very much needed by preschool programme is not a rigid standard, but rather a minimum standard with contextualised or situational approach.
e) Finally, perhaps the ultimate contribution of the study is the proposed framework that covers the 360-degree views encompassing the triparty stakeholders involved (top-downers or policymakers, bottom-uppers or policy implementers, and outside-inners or policy receivers).

6.5 Implications to Policy and Practice

Findings of this study extend well beyond the world of academia and have raised a clear and urgent call to action. The challenges articulated and the framework proffered have grave implications for the strategic direction of early childhood policy and the actual everyday work in Malaysian public preschools. Moving from the diagnosis to remedial action requires concrete implementable steps that engage the system failures revealed by the study.

6.5.1 Implications to Policy

At the policy level, this study calls for the complete re-examination of the governance and regulatory architecture in public preschools. Most critical is the dismantling of the siloed response of the divisions within MoE. The situation of being very much in the hands of fragmented governance and lacking a just one single leader necessitates the establishment of a dedicated Preschool Division, operating independently from the current School Management Division. The division should be set up with a mandate and authorise to harmonise standards, align budgets, and resolve inter-agency disputes. Its prime responsibility will be ensuring accountability so that contradicting divisional objectives are subordinated to a national vision for early childhood education. This division could serve as a feeder to the school management system, ensuring a smooth transition for children entering formal education. Additionally, all federally funded preschools, including those currently managed by

KEMAS and JPNIN, should perhaps be consolidated in staggered under the sole jurisdiction of the MoE to create a unified governance structure. While preschools refer specifically to the year before formal schooling, ECCE programmes can remain under the purview of KPWKM. This consolidation would allow for more efficient pooling of resources and distribution of resources, addressing the existing variations in standards and quality across public preschools. Ultimately, such a reform would assist in narrowing the quality gap between public and preschool providers, ensuring equitable access to high quality early education for all children. Hence, this would render operational the proposed framework's principle of collective support from holistic cooperation to binding coordination.

The quality of preschool is not being given equal emphasis as education in general across majority of the documents examined. Therefore, the government should not only focus on quality education in general but could specifically focus on preschool programme as the entry point for education. Similarly, structural quality is being given less emphasis as compared to process quality. NSPC, a specific policy document on process quality, is available for public reference, but no policy document on structural quality has been found in existence thus far. Since this is the case, process quality aspects are imposed on all preschool providers, while the one structural quality policy document available, that is Guideline on Preschool Management, is only meant for preschool programme under MoE known as prasekolah.

This study essentially lays a huge regulatory gap concerning the absence of any mandatory document to elaborate on structural quality accompanying the process quality NSPC. Presently, this assumed over-dependency on self-assessment, and the emphasis on process quality rather than structural quality and basic inequities in infrastructure and resources, continue to exist. Hence, an implication for policy arising directly from this would be the setting up of a Mandatory Structural Quality Standards (MSQS) document. This document must specify in unambiguous terms the non-negotiable minimum benchmarks for all the criteria highlighted in this study, namely human, conducive environment, and other supporting factors. This is to create the backbone of the proposed framework as minimum standard and gives the target for the implementers and a definite tool for the regulators to evaluate and accredit the preschool programmes beyond the ad-hoc checks that are in place. Therefore, it is crucial for MoE, as the lead agency and the main reference point regarding preschool education

programme in Malaysia, to develop a standard guideline for structural quality elements similar to the NSPC that Malaysia currently has.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of quality early childhood education. Numerous studies have linked high-quality preschool experiences with improved cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children. However, while much attention has been paid to process quality, structural quality often remains underexplored. Structural quality is an alternative approach or view of preschool programme quality to neo-technology, specifically when resources are limited. Perhaps it is also timely for the MoE to start paying attention to enhancing the required structural quality elements identified from the study (human, conducive environment, and other supporting factors) to guarantee the quality of preschool education in Malaysia.

The reported condemnable financial constraints and deep disparities have brought a need to reform funding mechanisms. The continuation of inequality is further engrained in the existing methods as urban MoE preschools of better defence may still be getting undue concentration of investment. This shifts the policy focus towards a need-based and equity-driven funding formula. Federal and state funding should be directly tied to the MSQS and weighted based on socio-geographic indices. Additional funding should be provided to preschools in inaccessible areas of Sabah and Sarawak or disadvantaged rural communities to cater for the additional costs of infrastructure development and teacher incentives and transportation. This would ensure that the reachable goal of a contextual approach is assured of tangible resources that will heavily tilt the balance in bridging the quality gap rather than just describing it.

6.5.2 Implications to Practice

For practitioners and administrators on the ground, this study offers several actionable points for improving practice and building systemic resilience. A key recommendation is district-based contextualisation committees. The committee would include representatives of principals, senior teachers, and the parents. They would share the interpretation of the national MSQS in view of local realities and take decisions on how to vary standards within the approved flexibility margin. For instance, this committee could allow a community hall to serve as a temporary classroom until such time as a permanent structure is built or endorse a native programme of nature-based

learning in an indigenous community without digital infrastructure. Such a delegation of problem-solving would empower periodic actors, making an adaptive implementation a bona fide and recognised professional practice instead of one hanging on for dear life.

A second aspect of practical implication, and a most urgent one, is that there is a need to define, support, and professionalise the roles of teacher assistants. The study has revealed teacher assistants to be the hidden actors upon whom classroom stability depends, yet their functions are undefined, training inconsistent, and pathways non-existent. Immediate steps should involve drawing up a national job description that clearly delineates the educational support tasks from secondary functions, a compulsory training and certification programme for their employment, and an established career pathway linked to performance and promotion with reward. By recruiting teacher assistants as nationally recognised paraprofessionals, their untold value is maximised, while providing relief for the preschool teachers from the aforementioned burdens on staff and untenable ratios.

Next, the findings also call for a shift in the approach to leadership development. The dichotomies of resource constraints and adaptive implementation demand a different breed of school leader. Training of preschool principals must, therefore, be realigned towards adaptive leadership. Such training should go beyond mere administrative management and equip these school leaders with the capacity to advocate for resources, maneuverer bureaucratic complexity, build collective staff problem-solving capacities, and securely steward innovation in resource-constrained contexts. The principals should also be trained as contextualisation champions to bail their teams out of the challenges cited in this study, while keeping their unwavering eye on the core mission of child development. Such an investment in leadership would put the system in a better position to support its optimists and contingency planners while reconciling its complacent implementers, thereby propping the entire edifice of the public preschool ecosystem.

6.6 Recommendations for Key Stakeholders

This study has produced an overview of the structural quality elements required for Malaysian public preschools based on triparty stakeholders' perspectives. It has also brought out the insights on challenges in implementing a standard structural quality in

Malaysian public preschools, apart from surfacing the extent of the challenges becoming barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality. The main contribution of the study is the framework for ensuring standardisation of structural quality among Malaysian federally funded preschools developed from the translation of responses from the triparty stakeholders' perspectives.

The Malaysian early childhood education system is characterised by a diverse provision landscape, covering public preschools under the MOE, KEMAS, and JPNIN; state funded agencies; as well as private providers and childcare centres, each regulated by different ministries. This diversity necessitates clear standards and coordinated stakeholders' involvement to ensure consistent structural quality across settings. The implementation of standard structural quality in Malaysia preschool programmes is guided by national policies and regulatory frameworks aimed at ensuring equitable, safe, and developmentally appropriate early childhood education. Achieving these standards requires collaborative engagement among multiple stakeholders, covering government officials as the policymakers; administrators and teachers as the policy implementers; as well as parents and community partners at large as the policy receivers, each playing distinct yet interconnected roles.

From the findings, several policy recommendations are put forward for the key stakeholders to enhance and implement a decent or perhaps better structural quality for the Malaysia preschool programme. This section specifically puts forward the recommendations for each of the stakeholders involved in the study, starting with policymakers followed by policy implementers and conclude with policy receivers.

6.6.1 Policymakers

In general, policymakers should perhaps prioritise in setting clear, comprehensive, enforceable evidence-based standards for preschool programme, including among others teacher qualifications, facilities and equipment, class size, curriculum development, and health and safety measures. They could possibly ensure that funding is allocated to support these standards, particularly for underserved communities. Additionally, regular monitoring and evaluation of preschool programmes are necessary to ensure that standards are maintained and that all children have access to high-quality learning environments. By strengthening the structural

quality of preschool programmes, policymakers can contribute to better educational outcomes and a stronger foundation for lifelong learning.

In the context of Malaysia, government officials and preschool experts as the policymakers play a primary and regulatory role in implementing structural quality standards in Malaysian preschool programmes. Policymakers function at the macro-system level, shaping the legal, institutional, and financial conditions that govern early childhood education. MOE as the lead agency, is responsible for preschools attached to national schools and oversees curriculum implementation through the NSPC. The MOE establishes minimum standards related to teachers' qualifications, classroom size, learning materials, and curriculum delivery in line with the Education Act 1996 (Ahmad et al., 2022; Kong, 2022; Mamat et al., 2023; Muhamad Ridza et al., 2024). Meanwhile, childcare centres catering to younger children are regulated by KPWKM under the Child Care Centre Act 1984 (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2017). This dual governance structure highlights the complexity of ensuring consistent structural quality across early childhood settings.

Policymakers are also responsible for licensing, monitoring, and quality assurance mechanisms, including inspections and compliance assessments. Such regulatory oversight is essential to maintaining minimum quality thresholds, particularly in private and community-based preschools where variation in resources may be significant. Furthermore, government funding and subsidies influence the extent to which preschools can invest in infrastructure, teaching resources, and staff development, thereby directly affecting structural quality.

6.6.2 Policy Implementers

Undeniably, the roles of policy implementers are also essential in shaping and ensuring a standard and proper structural quality of preschool programmes. Policy implementers play a critical role in translating the standards set by policymakers into tangible improvements in preschool programme quality.

To ensure the structural quality of preschool programmes, they could perhaps prioritise the effective execution of regulations, providing clear guidance, adequate training, and support to preschool staff. Implementers must ensure that teacher qualifications are consistently upheld, offering regular professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their skills in early childhood education. It is also

important to maintain effective oversight and monitoring mechanisms to evaluate compliance with infrastructure standards, class sizes, and safety protocols. Policy implementers could also work closely with local communities to identify specific needs and facilitate targeted support to ensure equitable access to high-quality preschool programmes. By fostering collaboration between all stakeholders and ensuring the smooth implementation of policies, they can help create learning environments that promote the development and well-being of young children.

In Malaysian context, government officials at the operational level as the upper end of policy implementers, serve as institutional-level implementers of structural quality standards. These administrators operate at the meso-system level, translating macro-level policies into daily organisational practices. In particular, administrators in Malaysia preschool settings are responsible for ensuring that preschools comply with licensing requirements, maintain appropriate child–teacher ratios, and provide safe, well-equipped learning environments. This includes managing classroom space, ensuring adequate ventilation and sanitation, and providing age-appropriate furniture and instructional materials. Research indicates that leadership quality at school level significantly influences the consistency and sustainability of structural quality implementation, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Slot, 2018).

On top of that, administrators also play a key role in human resource management, including the recruitment, supervision, and retention of qualified teachers. Studies highlight teacher qualifications as one of the most influential structural indicators of quality, as better-trained teachers are more likely to engage in effective pedagogical practices (Embacher & Smidt, 2023; Guerrero & Camargo-Abello, 2023; Herut & Setlhako, 2025). In Malaysia, administrators must ensure that teachers meet minimum qualification standards as stipulated by the MOE and relevant regulatory bodies (Masnan et al., 2021). Additionally, these administrators are responsible for internal quality assurance processes, such as self-evaluation and documentation. By fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, administrators help sustain structural quality over time. Their leadership commitment is particularly critical in private and community-based preschools, where external monitoring may be less frequent.

Meanwhile, teachers and teacher assistants as the lower end of policy implementers, are central stakeholders in implementing structural quality, despite structural elements often being defined externally. Teachers are positioned at the

interface between structural and process, as their qualifications and working conditions directly influence classroom interactions and learning experiences (Taye et al., 2024).

In Malaysia, preschool teachers are required to meet minimum training and certification standards set by the MOE, including foundational knowledge in early childhood education and child development. Teacher qualifications are a core component of structural quality, as they determine educators' ability to design developmentally appropriate learning environments, manage classroom organisation, and ensure child safety (Slot et al., 2018). Teachers also contribute to structural quality through their management of classroom space, group size, and daily routines. For example, adherence to recommended child–teacher ratios enables teachers to provide more individualised attention and maintain effective supervision (Surianshah, 2022). Such conditions reduce teacher stress and enhance emotional support for children, thereby indirectly improving developmental outcomes (Bowne et al., 2017).

Continuous professional development is another critical aspect of teachers' role in sustaining structural quality (Simon et al., 2018; Taye et al., 2024). In Malaysia, training programmes supported by government agencies and higher education institutions aim to enhance teachers' competencies and align practices with national standards. Teachers' participation in professional learning communities further strengthens the link between structural quality and classroom practice.

6.6.3 Policy Receivers

Equally important is the contributions of parents as the policy receivers, who play critical functions in supporting the structural quality of preschool programmes. Parents, being on the demand side of the preschool system, play a supportive and advocacy-oriented role in the implementation of structural quality standards. They are part of the exosystem, influencing institutional practices through their choices, expectations, and engagement.

Parents play a vital role by advocating for high-quality preschool education, engaging with teachers, and ensuring that their children attend programmes that meet or exceed these standards. Parents could be proactive in participating in parent-teacher meetings and school activities, ensuring open communication about their child's development and the quality of the learning environment. Additionally, parents can advocate for better preschool facilities and services by joining local parent groups or

supporting policies that promote high standards in early childhood education. By staying informed and involved, parents can help create a positive learning environment that supports their children's growth and contributes to the overall improvement of preschool programme quality.

In the Malaysian preschool context, parents contribute to structural quality by selecting registered and licensed preschools that comply with national standards. Parental awareness of quality indicators, such as teacher qualifications and safety provisions, can drive demand for higher-quality services and encourage providers to maintain compliance. Parents also support structural quality through active involvement in school activities, communication with teachers and administrators, and feedback on facilities and resources. Parent-school partnerships enhance transparency and accountability, reinforcing institutional commitment to quality standards (Ashiabi et al., 2022). Such partnerships help sustain quality over time by aligning stakeholder expectations around children's well-being and learning. Moreover, parental advocacy can influence policy-level decisions, particularly when collective concerns are communicated to school operators or regulatory authorities. In this way, parents contribute indirectly to strengthening the broader structural quality framework within the Malaysian preschool system.

In a larger context of demand side, community organisations, NGOs, and other supporting agencies play a complementary role in enhancing structural quality, particularly in addressing contextual inequalities. Structural conditions are shaped not only by formal regulation but also by resource availability and community support. In Malaysia, NGOs and higher education institutions often collaborate with preschools to provide teacher training, technical assistance, and infrastructure support. These partnerships are particularly important in rural or underserved communities, where preschools may face challenges related to funding, facilities, and access to qualified staff. Community-based initiatives also support structural quality by promoting inclusive practices and ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to safe and well-resourced preschool environments. Such collaborations extend the reach of government policies and contribute to more equitable implementation of quality standards across diverse settings.

Together, these triparty stakeholders can create a strong foundation for early childhood education, ultimately enhancing the developmental outcomes for young children and ensuring that every child has access to a quality preschool experience. The

realisation of Malaysia preschool future directions depends very much on collective support and shared responsibility among triparty stakeholders, which include policymakers covering government officials and preschool experts; policy implementers involving administrators and preschool teachers; and policy receivers consisting of parents, children, and society at large. The collaboration of all these stakeholders, combined with initiatives provided by the government, would perhaps improve and elevate the quality of the Malaysia preschool programme. Effective structural quality depends on multi-level governance, clear communication and formal partnerships that align actors around shared accountability and resource flows. Comparative and synthesis studies attribute uneven outcomes primarily to fragmented governance, while coordinated networks and investment correlate with system improvements. This simple comparison summarises core contributions across stakeholder types and where coordination is essential, as depicted in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1
Core Contributions and Coordination Needed Among the Triparty Stakeholders

No.	Stakeholder	Core responsibilities	Evidence examples and coordination needs
1.	Policymakers	Set standards, legislate, fund, coordinate agencies	Fragmented multi agency delivery and mixed funding create varied quality. Unified standards and cross agency coordination reduce variation
2.	Policy implementers	Operate centers, train staff, monitor compliance	Implementation capacity (inspection, professional development, leadership) determines whether policies become effective structural inputs
3.	Policy receivers	Demand quality, provide feedback, support access	Parental/community engagement and NGO roles can supplement resources but require regulation and feedback channels

Indeed, while the aspirations of the MEB can be saluted as the driving and motivating force, the transformation ideals cannot be achieved, and discrepancies cannot be narrowed without a proper plan of action in addressing Malaysia's current scenario. The policymakers, policy implementers, policy receivers, and community at all levels should collaborate to address fundamental issues and challenges as highlighted in this study. In a nutshell, this study would perhaps assist the government in coordinating the efforts of not only the public preschool providers to move from independent and overlapping services towards a seamless system, but to some extent

pool the support from multiple preschool stakeholders and society to contribute to the betterment of a public preschool programme. Thus, this would not only be avoiding duplications among the providers, but also ultimately attaining the cost effectiveness of the preschool programme, and, to some extent, budget savings to the country. It is especially timely to consider such measures in an era of federal budget limitations. Thus, federal-funded preschool programme in Malaysia would not only achieve the important educational goals but would also be a sound public investment.

6.7 Prospects for Future Research

Recognising the findings and limitations of the research, there would invariably be some attractive avenues for future research that could extend, quantify, and deepen an understanding of structural quality particularly in Malaysia's ECCE landscape. Several recommendations for future research are put forth to help open doors for more research to be done in this area.

Firstly, as highlighted in the opening chapter, the initially identified policymaker, Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD), MoE redirected the researcher to the Preschool Unit of School Management Division (SMD), MoE, the operational policymaker. Hence, this study only managed to capture the perspective of the operational policymaking involving SMD, MoE while the macro policymaking standpoint of EPRD, MoE is still in absence. Therefore, to get a holistic view of the policymaker stakeholders, it is proposed for future study to include macro policymaking perspective.

Secondly, one of the limitations of the study was that document review was conducted on a combination of English and Bahasa Melayu documents, whereby the macro policy documents were in English while the preschool specific documents were in Bahasa Melayu. Thus, there might be concerns that the keywords selected in Bahasa Melayu might have different connotations and understandings among the preschool experts. Hence, for future research, it is proposed to perhaps incorporate the English version of preschool specific documents to justify the concerns of the preschool experts regarding the different connotations and understandings on the keywords selected in Bahasa Melayu might have.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, this study utilised online interview as an alternative to facilitate conventional in-person interviews during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Under certain limited circumstances where traditional face-to-face interview was not possible due to school closure during lockdown, it was being replaced with an online interview method. Online interview has its own downsides and disadvantages. In particular, it limits the researcher's ability to fully and directly observe the key informants' gestures and body language. Moreover, information shared by parents and preschool teachers were based on their limited experiences or time spent during the 2020 school session due to lockdown measure because of the pandemic. Hence, the researcher reserves the fact that such mixture of methods and limited encounters of school session might contribute to the discrepancy and remoteness of data collected. Direct observations at schools or sites were also not possible due to lockdown imposed during the pandemic hit. Thus, as an alternative, observations were replaced with photos shared by the key informants involving preschool teachers and parents, a technique known as autophotography/photovoice. However, the researcher did have an opportunity to visit a couple of preschools to confirm on the situation as per the shared photos by the key informants. Undeniably, the implementation of qualitative data collection through conventional communication would give more added value to the wealth and richness of the data. Therefore, this research suggests for future studies to consider such an option.

In addition, given the nature of a qualitative study that is not statistically representative, this study basically explored the initial issue on structural quality of preschool programme. It only sets a stage, but no generalisation can be drawn from it. Thus, future research would perhaps be extended into a quantitative manner to offer generalisation to the issue. A large-scale quantitative survey is the next logical and most rewarding step in the inquiry. The survey can be designed to measure the national prevalence of those challenges and phenomena identified within this research. This would allow researchers to determine whether the observed distributions in this qualitative study are indeed borne out at a national level and to identify the specific demographic, geographic, and institutional factors (agency, location, years of experience, etc.) that may predict an implementer's orientation. This will give some strong generalisable data that could really assist in targeting support systems and professional development initiatives.

Next, the study was confined to the area of Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya, characterised by predominantly urban/sub urban community structure. This geographic limitation may affect the applicability of the findings to other diverse settings. As such,

while the results provide valuable insights of the key informants in this specific locality, caution should be exercised in generalising these findings to other areas. Therefore, future research would perhaps explore a wider area of coverage, particularly the rural and remote areas.

Finally, this research was mainly seeking the understanding of structural quality elements required and their implementation through a different and diverse lens and context in Malaysia setting. Hence, future research may be necessary to bridge the knowledge gap by examining the policy implementation of structural quality in other individual country settings with different structural quality policies in place.

This study has not only provided a critical diagnosis into the systemic ailments inflicting structural quality but also set a line along which sustained research agenda may progress. Thus, future research will build upon this foundation. It takes the lead toward essential contribution to the journey of equitable, high-quality early education for all children in Malaysia.

6.8 Conclusion

This research sheds a light on the policy implementation of structural quality specifically in Malaysian public preschool settings. This thesis in particular has critically examined the complexities and imperatives of implementing standardised structural quality in Malaysian preschool programmes. It has been established that structural quality comprising elements such as human, conducive environment and other supporting factors are foundational to achieving equitable and effective early childhood education outcomes.

The challenges faced by policymakers and policy implementers, ranging from governance and resource limitations to parental expectations and capacity gaps as policy receivers, demand innovative and inclusive responses. Building institutional and community capacity, strengthening governance, and ensuring adaptive implementation strategies are perhaps crucial to overcoming these barriers. At the same time, collective support and shared responsibilities must be institutionalised, fostering meaningful partnerships between ministries, educators, families, and local communities.

Ensuring standardised structural quality in preschool education is not merely a technical exercise but a vital investment in Malaysia's social and economic future. Given the country's socio-cultural diversity, regional disparities, and multi-provider

preschool landscape, a one-size-fits-all approach to early childhood education is neither feasible nor equitable. This necessitates the adoption of a contextualised policy framework: one that balances national minimum standards with local adaptability.

In conclusion, ensuring structural quality in Malaysia's preschool programmes is both a policy and practice challenge that requires collaborative, flexible, and evidence-based responses. By embedding contextual sensitivity, institutional capacity-building, inclusive governance, and community participation into preschool quality frameworks, Malaysia is better positioned to achieve not only policy compliance but also the broader goals of equity, inclusivity, and national development through early childhood education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

REC Approval Letter

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

Pejabat
Timbalan Naib Canselor
(Penyelidikan dan Inovasi)

Reference : 600-TNCPI (5/1/6)
Our reference : REC/09/2020 (MR/290)
Date : 30th September 2020

Assoc. Prof. Dr Hajjah Nor Hafizah binti Mohamed Harith
Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam
SELANGOR

Dear Assoc. Prof. Dr Hajjah Nor Hafizah,

ETHICS APPROVAL BY UiTM RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Title: The Study on the Policy Implementation of Structural Quality Among Malaysia Public Preschools

Trial Site: Public preschools in Malaysia (Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya)

Thank you for your research ethics application and your amendment for the above study on 11th September 2020. It is our pleasure to inform you that the Research Ethics Committee has agreed to grant an ethics approval for the said study. The approval code for the study is REC/09/2020 (MR/290), and validity period is from 30th September 2020 until 31st August 2021.

Please submit progress report of the study to the REC Secretariat 12 months after the date of approval letter and annually until the study has completed. Please kindly notify the REC for any amendments to the relevant documents for this study. A summary of the final report should be submitted at the end of your study.

The UiTM Research Ethics Committee operates in accordance to the ICH Good Clinical Practice Guidelines, Malaysia Good Clinical Practice Guidelines and the Declaration of Helsinki.

If you require further information, please contact REC Secretariat at 03-55448069/03-55442794 or email at recsecretariat@uitm.edu.my.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DR ROHANA HASSAN
Chair
UiTM Research Ethics Committee

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UiTM di hatiku

APPENDIX 2

Expert Check – Method Aspects

WORKING TITLE: **STRUCTURAL QUALITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA'S PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS**

Dear Nadzmin,

First of all, congratulations. I am proud to see such a robust effort coming from you. I am impressed with how much you have done at this stage. Any how, let me put my thoughts about your research into a spreadsheet.

I have mapped your work into five components, as below:

Research Objectives	Information Needed (What Researcher Wants to Know)	Research Framework	Methods	Data Analysis
1. to explore the structural quality requirement in Malaysia's federal funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives	Federal agencies/ Parents 1. Background information 2. Structural quality requirement 3. Implementation of standard quality structure 4. Structural quality framework	Top-down and bottom-up policy implementation approaches for the supply side	Interview with **Supply side** a. Policy makers – involving two officers from Education Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education (EPRD, MoE) b. Preschool experts – a single preschool expert from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) c. Policy implementers – involving a couple of officers from Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya, MoE (JPNWP) d. Preschool teachers as the actual policy implementers on the ground – involving five teachers from five selected primary schools that run preschool program in Putrajaya; one from each school	Thematic analysis
2. to investigate the challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschool	Federal agencies/ Parents 1. Background information 2. Structural quality requirement 3. Implementation of standard quality structure 4. Structural quality framework	Katz model on perspectives of preschool quality definition for the demand side	Interview with **Demand side** a. Parents – involving five parents from the same five schools where the teachers are being selected; one from each school. Priority given to mothers rather than fathers; taking into consideration their involvement and attachment in the decision making related to children's preschool education	Thematic analysis
3. to propose a framework that ensures standardization of structural quality among federal funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives.	Federal agencies/ Parents 1. Background information 2. Structural quality requirement 3. Implementation of standard quality structure 4. Structural quality framework			

I read through your Abstract, Research Framework and Interview Protocol. This is a well-thought, and thorough work that you have. However, allow me to add a tiny element that can enhance your interview process.

Here is what I think, need to be revised:

1. Look at PARENTS section, research question no.3.
   a) My advice is to change the wording of the questions into those words which are easily understandable by lay persons.
   b) You can change the term "structural quality" to elements of quality. Then, explain the parents what you meant by elements of quality in terms of cl;ass size, teacher-student ratio, etc.
2. Interview duration: change to 30 minutes - 1 hour. The time duration sometimes can be hindrance factor to persuade parents to give their commitment as participants. Tell them you want to interview them just for 30 minutes. But once they are in the interview session, whenever they begin to develop mutual trust, they will spare more time with you. This is a tip.
3. Interview location: make sure the place is quiet, example in a library.

That's it for now. All the best in your PhD journey.

Warm regards,
Saidatul Akmar Ismail
Faculty of Information Management
UiTM Selangor, Kampus Puncak Perdana.
15 April 2020

APPENDIX 3

Expert Check – Content Aspects

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL VALIDATION ON

STRUCTURAL QUALITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA'S PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS

As a whole, the researcher has managed to prepare or put forward an interview protocol that seems adequate or sufficient, in guiding her in the journey towards obtaining and securing relevant information or response pertaining to the research topic. The interview protocol was designed based on the research framework, covering the three (3) main research objectives and targeted at both the supply and demand perspectives. In particular, different sets of interview questions were prepared for each of the respective respondents from the supply side to gauge their views, thoughts or opinions pertaining to the research questions. This approach to a certain extent will enabled the researcher to gauge or capture their views, thoughts and opinions more effectively. More specifically, the researcher has succeeded in the following aspects:

- Creating a thorough and effective interview protocol;
- Crafting a variety of types of questions to elicit high quality information;
- Establishing a clear sense of the direction of the journey and the ground it will eventually cover;
- Organising the interview questions in a structure that facilitates gaining the most useful and meaningful information and response;
- Ensuring that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each respondent or person interviewed;
- Ensuring that all relevant topics are covered;
- Keeping the interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge; and
- Soliciting additional information by using open-ended questions, which enabled them to express their feeling, thoughts and experience freely.

Prepared by:

NORLIZA HJ. MOHAMAD ZIN
Deputy Director (Science and Technology)
Division of Manufacturing Industry, Science and Technology
Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department

APPENDIX 4

Interview Protocol (*Protokol Temubual*)

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Introduce myself to the key informant and explain the purpose of the research.

   This research is a requirement for a PhD degree at the University of Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam. The focus of this study is on the policy implementation of structural quality in Malaysia's public preschools. Structural quality in this study context covers four aspects, that is class size or number of students/classes, teacher:student ratio, teachers' qualification, and preschool infrastructure, as per literature findings.

   There are three parts to the interview guide, involving information regarding:

   a. The structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools.
   b. The challenges and barriers in implementing the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia.
   c. The framework in ensuring standardisation of structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools.

   The interview is targeted at both perspectives, the supply side i.e., the federal agencies providing the service, and the demand side i.e., parents who are receiving the service on behalf of their children. It involves five groups of key informants, namely:

   <u>Supply side</u>
   a. Policymakers – involving two officers from the School Management Division, Ministry of Education (SMD, MoE).
   b. Policy implementers – involving a couple of officers from Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya (JPWP), MoE.
   c. Preschool teachers as the actual policy implementers on the ground – involving five teachers from five selected primary schools that run preschool programme in Putrajaya: one from each school.

   <u>Demand side</u>
   a. Parents – involving five parents from the same five schools where the teachers are selected: one from each school. Priority given to mothers rather than fathers; taking into consideration their involvement and attachment in the decision making related to children's preschool education.

   In addition, to seek impartial view on the issue, input and opinions from preschool experts should also be obtained. The key informants in this category involve a couple of academicians, one from the Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI), and the other is from the National Child Development Research Center (NCDRC).

   Each interview session would take approximately a half to an hour.

2. Ask the key informant if he/she has any questions about the study/interview.

3. Assure the key informant of complete anonymity and confidentiality.

   Maintaining key informants' anonymity and confidentiality are priorities in this study. Every practical precaution will be taken to disguise your identity. There will not be any identifying information on the recordings or transcripts of interviews.

   Additional note for the supply side
   This is not an attempt to evaluate your performance or that of the organisation you represent.

4. Ask for the key informants' consent to participate in the interview and to have the interview recorded. Give the consent form to the key informant to sign.

   Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the recordings or the transcripts. Transcripts of the interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in subsequent analysis, presentations, or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in subsequent analysis, presentations, or written products that result from this study. Information obtained from this study will be used solely for academic purposes including publications.

5. Introductory Protocol.

   To facilitate my notetaking, I would like to record our conversations today. Appreciate it if you could please sign the interview consent form. For your information, only researchers on this study will be privy to the tapes. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time you feel uncomfortable.

6. Getting to know the key informant and obtain background information.

   a. For supply side – government officers, preschool experts, and teachers

      <u>Government officers (policymakers and implementers)</u>
      - What is your position in the organisation?
      - What is your job scope?
      - How long have you been in the organisation?
      - What other divisions have you been attached to prior to your current position?
      - Can you please share your experience in implementing the ECCE programme?

      <u>Preschool experts</u>
      - What is your position in the organisation?
      - What is your job scope?
      - How long have you been in the organisation?
      - What other areas have you been involved in prior to your current position?

- Can you please share your experience in implementing the ECCE programme?

Preschool teachers

- How many classes are you teaching?
- How many children per class?
- What is your job scope?
- Do you have an assistant to help you out with your teaching duty?
- How long have you been with the school?
- What other schools have you been attached to prior to your current position?
- If you don't mind, may I know what is your highest paper qualification?
- What do you think of the current infrastructure at this school?

b. For demand side - parents

- Where do you live?
- What do you do for a living?
- How old are you?
- How many children do you have?
- What types of preschools have your children enrolled in before?
- Is this the first child of yours going to *prasekolah* MoE?
- Where do you plan to send your next child for preschool education?

An impartial view is obtained from the preschool experts

Preschool experts

- What is your position in the organisation?
- What is your job scope?
- How long have you been in the organisation?
- What other divisions have you been attached to prior to your current position?
- Can you please share your experience in implementing the ECCE programme?

7. Ask questions as in the Interview Guide.

8. Follow-up/probing questions.

   The researcher will follow up on the responses with questions that ask for more details of structural quality for policy implementation in public preschools.

9. Ask for supporting documents if available.

10. Debriefing

    At the end of the interview session, the key informants will be given the opportunity to ask questions.

11. Thank the key informants.

    Express gratitude for the consent and ask for permission to ask follow-up questions/obtain clarification at a later date, if necessary.

PROTOKOL TEMUBUAL

1. Memperkenalkan diri dan menerangkan tentang tujuan kajian kepada peserta.

   Kajian ini merupakan keperluan bagi pengajian PhD di Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam. Fokus kajian berkisar kepada pelaksanaan dasar elemen kualiti struktur di kalangan prasekolah awam Malaysia. Elemen kualiti struktur dalam konteks kajian ini merangkumi 4 aspek, iaitu saiz kelas atau bilangan murid/kelas, nisbah guru:kanak-kanak, kelayakan guru dan infrastruktur prasekolah, seperti yang terdapat dalam kajian literatur.

   Terdapat tiga bahagian dalam panduan temubual yang merangkumi maklumat berikut:

   a. Keperluan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia.
   b. Cabaran dan halangan untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia.
   c. Kerangka dalam memastikan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia.

   Temubual ini disasarkan kepada dua perspektif, iaitu bahagian penawaran, merangkumi agensi persekutuan yang menawarkan perkhidmatan prasekolah; dan bahagian permintaan merangkumi ibu bapa yang menerima perkhidmatan ini bagi pihak anak masing-masing. Ianya melibatkan lima kumpulan informan utama, iaitu:

   <u>Penawaran</u>
   a. Pembuat dasar – melibatkan dua orang pegawai dari Unit Pengurusan Prasekolah, Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian, Kementerian Pendidikan (BPSH, KPM).
   b. Pelaksana dasar – melibatkan dua orang pegawai dari Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya, Kementerian Pendidikan (JPWP Putrajaya, KPM).
   c. Guru prasekolah yang merupakan pelaksana dasar sebenar di lapangan – melibatkan lima orang guru dari lima buah sekolah rendah terpilih yang melaksanakan program prasekolah di Putrajaya; seorang bagi setiap sekolah.

   <u>Permintaan</u>
   a. Ibu bapa – melibatkan lima orang ibu bapa dari lima buah sekolah yang sama di mana pemilihan guru dibuat; seorang ibu atau bapa bagi setiap sekolah. Keutamaan akan diberi kepada golongan ibu berbanding bapa; mengambilkira penglibatan seorang ibu dalam membuat keputusan berkaitan pendidikan prasekolah anak-anak.

   Selain itu, untuk mendapatkan pandangan yang lebih *impartial* terhadap isu ini, input dan pandangan dari pakar akademik dalam bidang prasekolah juga wajar diperolehi. Informan utama pakar prasekolah melibatkan seorang pensyarah akademik dari Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) dan seorang dari Pusat Penyelidikan Perkembangan Kanak-kanak Negara/*National Child Development Research Centre* (NCDRC), UPSI.

Setiap sesi temubual akan mengambil masa lebih kurang 30 minit atau lebih.

2. Mendapatkan input sekiranya peserta mempunyai sebarang pertanyaan mengenai kajian/ sesi temubual.

3. Memberi jaminan kepada peserta tentang kerahsiaan identiti dan maklumat.

   Kerahsiaan peserta adalah perkara utama bagi kajian ini. Setiap langkah yang diambil adalah bagi memastikan identiti anda adalah sulit. Tiada maklumat pada transkrip dan rekod temubual yang akan mendedahkan tentang identiti anda.

   Nota tambahan bagi penawaran
   Ini bukanlah cubaan untuk menilai prestasi anda atau organisasi yang anda wakili.

4. Memohon persetujuan peserta untuk ditemubual dan merekod sesi temubual. Mengemukakan borang persetujuan kepada peserta untuk ditandatangani.

   Tiada nama atau maklumat yang boleh mengenalpasti identiti anda pada rakaman atau transkrip. Transkip temubual yang merupakan hasil dari kajian ini akan diterbitkan secara sebahagian atau keseluruhannya bagi tujuan analisis, pembentangan atau hasil bahan bertulis. Tiada maklumat yang akan mendedahkan tentang identiti anda pada semua perkara tersebut. Maklumat yang diperolehi dari kajian akan digunakan hanya bagi tujuan akademik termasuk penerbitan bahan ilmiah.

5. Protokol Pengenalan.

   Bagi membantu proses pengambilan nota, saya mohon untuk merekodkan perbualan kita pada hari ini. Mohon peserta untuk menandatangani borang persetujuan temubual. Untuk makluman, hanya penyelidik yang terlibat sahaja akan mempunyai akses kepada pita rakaman. Secara dasarnya, dokumen ini memaklumkan tentang (1) semua maklumat adalah sulit, dan (2) penyertaan anda adalah secara sukarela dan boleh berhenti pada bila-bila masa sekiranya tidak selesa.

6. Mengenali dan mendapatkan maklumat asas dari informan utama

   a. Bagi bahagian penawaran – pegawai Kerajaan dan guru prasekolah

      <u>Pegawai Kerajaan (pembuat dan pelaksana dasar)</u>
      - Apakah kedudukan anda dalam organisasi?
      - Apakah skop kerja anda?
      - Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan organisasi ini?
      - Kongsikan maklumat mengenai bahagian lain yang pernah anda berkhidmat sebelum berkhidmat di kedudukan sekarang.
      - Mohon anda kongsikan pengalaman dalam melaksanakan dasar yang melibatkan program berkaitan pendidikan awal kanak-kanak.

      <u>Guru prasekolah</u>
      - Aktiviti pengajaran anda melibatkan berapa kelas?
      - Berapa ramai kanak-kanak dalam setiap kelas?
      - Apakah skop kerja anda?

- Adakah anda mempunyai pembantu bagi melaksanakan tugas mengajar?
- Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan sekolah ini?
- Kongsikan maklumat mengenai sekolah lain yang anda pernah mengajar sebelum berada di sekolah sekarang.
- Jika tidak keberatan, bolehkah anda kongsikan kelayakan tertinggi anda?
- Apakah pandangan anda tentang infrastrutur sedia ada di sekolah ini?

b. Bagi bahagian permintaan – ibu bapa
- Di manakah anda tinggal?
- Apakah pekerjaan anda?
- Berapakah usia anda?
- Berapa orang anak anda?
- Di manakah anda menghantar anak anda sebelum ini bagi program prasekolah?
- Adakah ini merupakan anak anda yang pertama memasuki prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan?
- Di manakah anda bercadang untuk menghantar anak anda yang seterusnya bagi mendapatkan pendidikan prasekolah?

Pandangan *impartial* terhadap isu ini diperolehi dari pakar akademik dalam bidang prasekolah

<u>Pakar prasekolah</u>
- Apakah kedudukan anda dalam organisasi?
- Apakah skop kerja anda?
- Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan organisasi ini?
- Kongsikan maklumat mengenai bidang lain yang pernah anda terlibat sebelum berada di kedudukan sekarang
- Mohon anda kongsikan pengalaman dalam melaksanakan dasar yang melibatkan program berkaitan pendidikan awal kanak-kanak

7. Bertanya soalan berdasarkan Panduan Temuduga

8. Soalan susulan/terperinci

Penyelidik akan mengambil tindakan susulan bagi soalan yang memerlukan maklumat terperinci mengenai pelaksanaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur di prasekolah awam.

9. Mohon dokumen sokongan, sekiranya ada

10. ‘Debriefing’

Pada akhir sesi temubual, peserta diberi peluang untuk mengemukakan soalan.

11. Berterima kasih kepada peserta

Menyampaikan penghargaan di atas persetujuan dan mohon izin untuk bertanyakan soalan susulan atau mendapatkan penjelasan pada masa akan datang, sekiranya perlu.

APPENDIX 5

Interview Guide (*Panduan Temubual*)

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section A1: Supply Side
Interview with the officers from SMD, MoE cum policymakers - the top-down policy implementation approach

Background information
- What is your position in the organisation?
- What is your job scope?
- How long have you been in the organisation?
- What other divisions have you been attached to prior to your current position?
- Can you please share your experience in implementing policy related to the ECCE programme?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
1.	**RQ1** Structural quality elements required	
a.	What are the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?	What do you think of the overall quality of public preschools in Malaysia? Through your experience, what do you understand with the term structural quality for preschool programme? Are you aware of the four aspects of structural quality, as per literature findings, that is class size, teacher:student ratio, teachers' qualifications, and preschool infrastructure? Can you please share your views on the policy of structural quality in Malaysia's public preschools? What do you see as important structural quality elements that should be present in preschool settings? What elements of structural quality in the current public preschools that you think are adequate and what else is still lacking? What elements of structural quality that you think should be given priority by the government of Malaysia? Why?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
2.	**RQ2** Implementation of standard structural quality	
a.	What are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?	In your opinion, what are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest challenge is? Why? And what would be the least challenging? Why? Does Malaysia face challenges in putting a good planning and monitoring mechanism for preschool structural quality in place? Is there any policy that specifically governed the structural quality aspects of the agencies offering preschool programme? How successfully or effectively does this policy governed the structural quality aspects of the agencies offering preschool programme? What are the challenges related to this? Does the current policy on structural quality of public preschool programme being enforced effectively? What are the challenges involved? What are the challenges faced in identifying the lead agency responsible for preschool programme in Malaysia?
b.	To what extent do these challenges become barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?	In your opinion, what are the challenges that hinder the implementation of the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest barrier is? Why? And what would be the least hindrance? Why? To what extent do the earlier challenges become barriers that affect the policy implementation of structural quality for public preschools in Malaysia?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
		Through your experience, why do you think all this happened? Do you think the existence of multiple policies on preschool programme has resulted in overlapping of policies, particularly relating to structural quality aspect? As compared to other countries, why do you think Malaysia has not been focusing on the implementation of structural quality elements? On the scale of 10, where do you think Malaysia stand when it comes to policy implementation of structural quality in public preschools?
3.	**<u>RQ3</u>** Structural quality framework	
a.	How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework in ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools?	How do you think Malaysia should improve on its policy regarding structural quality aspects of preschool programme? What part do you think Malaysia should emphasise for improvement? Is there anything new that you think should be taken into consideration in improving the current structural quality policy of public preschools in Malaysia? Anything that you think you could contribute to this improvement effort? Is there anything I missed or new things that you wish to highlight regarding this issue?

Section A2: Supply Side
Interview with preschool experts - the top-down policy implementation approach

Background information
- What is your position in the organisation?
- What is your job scope?
- How long have you been in the organisation?
- What other areas have you been involved in prior to your current position?
- Can you please share your experience in implementing policy related to the ECCE program?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
1.	**RQ1** Structural quality elements required	
a.	What are the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?	What do you think of the overall quality of public preschools in Malaysia? In your expert opinion, what is the precise definition of the term structural quality for preschool programme? Do you agree with the four aspects of structural quality, as per literature findings, that is class size, teacher:student ratio, teachers' qualifications, and preschool infrastructure? Or do you think it should include more than that? Can you please share your expert views on the policy of structural quality in Malaysian public preschools? What do you see as important structural quality elements that should be present in preschool settings? What elements of structural quality in the current public preschools that you think are adequate and what else is still lacking? In your expert opinion, what elements of structural quality should be given priority by the government of Malaysia? Why?
2.	**RQ2** Implementation of standard structural quality	
a.	What are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among	In your expert opinion, what are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
	Malaysia's federal funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?	Among them, what do you think the biggest challenge is? Why? And what would be the least challenging? Why? Do you think Malaysia faces challenges in putting a good planning and monitoring mechanism for preschool structural quality in place? Do you think there is any policy that specifically governed the structural quality aspects of the agencies offering preschool programme? How successfully or effectively does this policy governed the structural quality aspects of the agencies offering preschool programme? What are the challenges related to this? Does the current policy on structural quality of public preschool programme being enforced effectively? What are the challenges involved? What are the challenges faced in identifying the lead agency responsible for preschool programme in Malaysia? Do you think there are challenges related to the availability of resources in implementing standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Is there any policy that specifically empower the agencies offering preschool programme in regard to structural quality aspects? How successfully or effectively does this policy empower the agencies offering preschool programme, particularly pertaining to the structural quality aspects? What are the challenges related to this? Do you think the current policy is sufficient to guide and achieve the objective of proper implementation of structural quality aspects in public preschool programme? What are the challenges involved? Do you think with the current policy, there is a need to implement an adaptive implementation (particularly on

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
		structural quality aspects) based on priorities at sites? What are the challenges related to this?
b.	To what extent do these challenges become barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?	In your expert opinion, what are the challenges that impede the implementation of the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest barrier is? Why? And what would be the least impediment? Why? To what extent do the earlier challenges become barriers that affect the policy implementation of structural quality for public preschools in Malaysia? From your expert opinion, why do these happen? Do you think the existence of multiple policies on preschool programme has resulted in overlapping of policies, particularly relating to structural quality aspect? As compared to other countries, why do you think Malaysia has not been focusing on the implementation of structural quality elements? On the scale of 10, where do you think Malaysia stand when it comes to policy implementation of structural quality in public preschools?
3.	**RQ3** Structural quality framework	
a.	How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework in ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools?	How do you think Malaysia should improve on its policy regarding structural quality aspects of preschool programme? What part do you think Malaysia should emphasise for improvement? Is there anything new that you think should be taken into consideration in improving the current structural quality policy of public preschools in Malaysia?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
		I believe the country would greatly benefit from your expertise. Anything that you think is worth sharing for this improvement effort? Is there anything I missed or new things that you wish to highlight regarding this issue?

Section B1: Supply Side
Interview with the officers from JPWP, MoE cum policy implementers - the bottom-up policy implementation approach

Background information
- What is your position in the organisation?
- What is your job scope?
- How long have you been in the organisation?
- What other areas have you been involved in prior to your current position?
- Can you please share your experience in implementing policy related to the ECCE programme?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
1.	**RQ1** Structural quality elements required	
a.	What are the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?	What do you think of the overall quality of public preschools in Malaysia? Through your experience, what do you understand with the term structural quality for preschool programme? Are you aware of the four aspects of structural quality, as per literature findings, that is class size, teacher:student ratio, teachers' qualifications, and preschool infrastructure? Can you please share your views on the policy of structural quality in Malaysia's public preschools? What do you see as important structural quality elements that should be present in preschool settings? What elements of structural quality in the current public preschools that you think are adequate and what else is still lacking? What elements of structural quality should be given priority by the government of Malaysia? Why?
2.	**RQ2** Implementation of standard structural quality	
a.	What are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysia's federal	In your opinion, what are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
	funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?	Among them, what do you think the biggest challenge is? Why? And what would be the least challenging? Why? Do you think there are challenges related to the availability of resources in implementing standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Is there any policy that specifically empower the agencies offering preschool programme in regard to structural quality aspects? How successfully or effectively does this policy empower the agencies offering preschool programme, particularly pertaining to the structural quality aspects? What are the challenges related to this? Do you think the current policy is sufficient to guide and achieve the objective of proper implementation of structural quality aspects in public preschool programme? What are the challenges involved? Do you think with the current policy, there is a need to implement an adaptive implementation (particularly on structural quality aspects) based on priorities at sites? What are the challenges related to this?
b.	To what extent do these challenges become barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?	What do you think are the challenges that hinder the implementation of the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest obstacle is? Why? And what would be the least hindrance? Why? To what extent do the earlier challenges become obstacles that affect the policy implementation of structural quality for public preschools in Malaysia? Through your experience, why do you think all this happened? Do you think the existence of multiple policies on preschool programme has resulted in overlapping of

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
		policies, particularly relating to structural quality aspect? As compared to other countries, why do you think Malaysia has not been focusing on the implementation of structural quality elements? On the scale of 10, where do you think Malaysia stand when it comes to policy implementation of structural quality in public preschools?
3.	**<u>RQ3</u>** Structural quality framework	
a.	How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework in ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools?	How do you think Malaysia should improve on its policy regarding structural quality aspects of preschool programme? What part do you think Malaysia should emphasise for improvement? Is there anything new that you think should be taken into consideration in improving the current structural quality policy of public preschools in Malaysia? Anything that you think you could contribute to this improvement effort? Is there anything I missed or new things that you wish to highlight regarding this issue?

Section B2: Supply Side
Interview with preschool teachers cum the actual actors on-the-ground - the bottom-up policy implementation approach

Background information
- How many classes are you teaching?
- How many children per class?
- What is your job scope?
- Do you have an assistant to help you out with your teaching duty?
- How long have you been with the school?
- What other schools have you been attached to prior to your current position?
- If you don't mind, may I know what is your highest paper qualification?
- What do you think of the current infrastructure at this school?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
1.	**RQ1** Structural quality elements required	
a.	What are the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?	What do you think of the overall quality of public preschools in Malaysia? Through your experience, what do you understand with the term structural quality for preschool programme? Are you aware of the four aspects of structural quality, as per literature findings, that is class size, teacher:student ratio, teachers' qualifications, and preschool infrastructure? Can you please share your views on the policy of structural quality in Malaysia's public preschools? What do you see as important structural quality elements that should be present in preschool settings? What elements of structural quality in the current public preschools that you think are adequate and what else is still lacking? What elements of structural quality should be given priority by the government of Malaysia? Why?
2.	**RQ2** Implementation of standard structural quality	
a.	What are the challenges in implementing the standard structural	In your opinion, what are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
	quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?	Among them, what do you think the biggest challenge is? Why? And what would be the least challenging? Why? Do you think there are challenges related to the availability of resources that hinder you from giving the best in your teaching? Are you aware of the policy that specifically empower the agencies offering preschool programme in regard to structural quality aspects? How successfully or effectively does this policy empower you to carry out your responsibility as a preschool teacher, particularly pertaining to the structural quality aspects? What challenges do you face relating to this? Do you think the current policy is sufficient to guide and achieve the objective of proper implementation of structural quality aspects in public preschool programme? What are the challenges related to this? Do you think there is a need for adjustments to the current policy (particularly on structural quality aspects) to suit your teaching needs based on priorities at school level? What are the challenges involved? To what extent are you involved in the policy making of structural quality elements? How far is your input/feedback/voice being heard by the management regarding policy on structural quality aspect of preschool programme? Do you spend your own money to contribute to the improvement of structural quality aspects in the school you are teaching?
b.	To what extent do these challenges become barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality among federal	What do you think are the challenges that impede the implementation of the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest barrier is? Why?

No.	Research Questions	Interview Questions
	funded preschools in Malaysia?	And what would be the least hindrance? Why? To what extent do the earlier challenges become obstacles that affect the policy implementation of structural quality for public preschools in Malaysia? Through your experience, why do you think all this happened? Do you think the existence of multiple policies on preschool programme has resulted in overlapping of policies, particularly relating to structural quality aspect? As compared to other countries, why do you think Malaysia has not been focusing on the implementation of structural quality elements? On the scale of 10, where do you think Malaysia stand when it comes to policy implementation of structural quality in public preschools?
3.	**RQ3** Structural quality framework	
a.	How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework in ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools?	How do you think Malaysia should improve on its policy regarding structural quality aspects of preschool programme? What part do you think Malaysia should emphasise for improvement? Is there anything new that you think should be taken into consideration in improving the current structural quality policy of public preschools in Malaysia? Anything that you think you could contribute to this improvement effort? Is there anything I missed or new things that you wish to highlight regarding this issue?

Section C: Demand side
Interview with parents cum policy receivers - the outside-in perspective

Background information
- Where do you live?
- What do you do for a living?
- How old are you?
- How many children do you have?
- What types of preschools have your children enrolled in before?
- Is this the first child of yours going to *prasekolah* MoE?
- Where do you plan to send your next child for preschool education?

No.	Research Questions	Questions on Perception	Questions on Expectation
1.	**RQ 1** Structural quality elements required		
a.	What are the structural quality elements required in Malaysian federally funded preschools based on stakeholders' perspectives?	What do you think of the overall quality of public preschools in Malaysia? Where do you think *prasekolah* MoE stands as compared to other public preschools in terms of quality? Are you aware of your child's class size? How many children are there in your child's class?	What does an ideal public preschool mean to you? What do you look for when you choose a preschool for your children? In your opinion, what elements are important in making up the quality of a preschool?

No.	Research Questions	Questions on Perception	Questions on Expectation
		Do you know the ratio of teacher to child in your child's class? Are you aware of the teachers' qualifications in your child's school? Have you been to your child's class? What do you think of the infrastructure there? What is your prime concern regarding quality aspects in *prasekolah* MoE? How can this be addressed? Are you satisfied with the current quality level of your child's school?	What elements of structural quality in the current public preschools that you think are adequate and what else is still lacking? Any suggestions on how to improve the current structural quality of public preschool?
2.	**RQ 2** Implementation of standard structural quality		
a.	What are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools in an effort to promote a high-quality public preschool programme?	In your opinion, what are the challenges in implementing the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest challenge is? Why?	How do you think this can be overcome? Any suggestions on how to improve the current state?

No.	Research Questions	Questions on Perception	Questions on Expectation
		And what would be the least challenging? Why? Any challenges of structural quality aspects other than the ones highlighted earlier that you think worth being given consideration?	
b.	To what extent do these challenges become barriers that affect the implementation of standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia?	What do you think are the challenges that hinder the implementation of the standard structural quality among federal funded preschools in Malaysia? Among them, what do you think the biggest barrier is? Why? And what would be the least hindrance? Why?	How do you think this can be overcome? Any suggestion on how to improve the current situation?
3.	**RQ 3** Structural quality framework		
a.	How can the stakeholders' perspectives be translated into a framework in ensuring a standardised structural quality among Malaysia's federal funded preschools?	What do you think of the government's role concerning this issue? Do you think that it is high time for the government to develop a structural quality	What are your suggestions to the government regarding this issue? What is your expectation for the betterment of structural quality policy of public preschools in Malaysia?

No.	Research Questions	Questions on Perception	Questions on Expectation
		framework for federal funded preschools in Malaysia?	What do you think the roles schools should play for the betterment of structural quality aspects of preschool programme? Do you think you, as a parent, could play a significant role in the betterment of structural elements in preschool programme? Anything that you think you could contribute to this improvement effort? How do you think you can contribute? Is there anything I missed or new things that you wish to highlight regarding this issue?

PANDUAN TEMUBUAL

Seksyen A1: Bahagian Penawaran
Temubual bersama pegawai Unit Pengurusan Prasekolah, Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian, Kementerian Pendidikan (BPSH, KPM) selaku pembuat dasar – pendekatan pelaksanaan dasar secara 'top-down'

Maklumat Asas
- Apakah kedudukan anda dalam organisasi?
- Apakah skop kerja anda?
- Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan organisasi ini?
- Kongsikan maklumat mengenai bahagian lain yang pernah anda berkhidmat sebelum berkhidmat di kedudukan sekarang
- Mohon anda kongsikan pengalaman dalam melaksanakan dasar yang melibatkan program berkaitan pendidikan awal kanak-kanak

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
1.	**RQ1** Keperluan elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Apakah keperluan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif pihak berkepentingan?	Apakah pandangan anda tentang kualiti keseluruhan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan pengalaman anda, apakah yang anda faham dengan terma 'kualiti struktur' bagi program prasekolah? Adakah anda tahu tentang empat aspek 'kualiti struktur' sepertimana yang terdapat dalam kajian literatur, iaitu saiz kelas atau bilangan murid/kelas, nisbah guru:kanak-kanak, kelayakan guru dan infrastruktur prasekolah? Bolehkah anda kongsikan pandangan anda tentang dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah elemen penting kualiti struktur yang perlu ada bagi program prasekolah? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur sedia ada di kalangan prasekolah awam yang anda rasakan mencukupi dan apakah elemen yang masih kurang? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur yang anda fikirkan perlu diberi keutamaan oleh Kerajaan Malaysia? Mengapa?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
2.	**RQ2** Pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard	
a.	Apakah cabaran dalam melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia dalam usaha mempromosi program prasekolah awam yang berkualiti tinggi?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah cabaran terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan cabaran paling kurang? Mengapa? Adakah Malaysia menghadapi cabaran untuk menyediakan perancangan dan mekanisma pemantauan yang baik bagi elemen kualiti struktur prasekolah? Adakah terdapat dasar khusus yang mengawal aspek kualiti struktur bagi agensi yang menyediakan program prasekolah? Sejauh mana efektif atau berjayanya dasar ini? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam perkara ini? Adakah penguatkuasaan dasar sedia ada mengenai elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia dilaksanakan secara berkesan? Apakah cabaran yang terlibat? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam mengenalpasti agensi utama yang bertanggungjawab terhadap program prasekolah di Malaysia?
b.	Sejauh manakah cabaran ini menjadi halangan yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran yang menghalang pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah halangan terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan halangan paling kurang? Mengapa? Sejauh mana cabaran yang dibincangkan sebelum ini menjadi penghalang yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
		Berdasarkan pengalaman anda, mengapakah semua ini terjadi? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dengan wujudnya pelbagai dasar berkaitan program prasekolah telah mengakibatkan pertindihan dasar, terutamanya berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur? Jika dibandingkan dengan negara lain, mengapakah Malaysia masih kurang memberi tumpuan kepada pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur dalam program prasekolahnya? Dalam skala 10, pada pandangan anda di manakah kedudukan Malaysia dalam pelaksanaaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur di prasekolah awam?
3.	**RQ3** Kerangka elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Bagaimanakah perspektif pihak berkepentingan ini boleh diterjemahkan kepada satu kerangka kerja dalam memastikan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, bagaimanakah Malaysia boleh menambah baik dasar berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur bagi program prasekolahnya? Aspek manakah yang perlu diberi penekanan bagi tujuan penambahbaikan? Pada pendapat anda, adakah terdapat perkara baru yang perlu diberi perhatian dalam menambahbaik dasar sedia ada berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Adakah anda berpendapat anda boleh menyumbang kepada usaha penambahbaikan ini? Selain dari apa yang telah dibincangkan di sini, adakah perkara berkaitan yang dirasakan masih tidak disentuh oleh saya atau terdapat perkara baru yang anda rasa perlu diberi perhatian?

Seksyen A2: Bahagian Penawaran
Temubual bersama pakar prasekolah – pendekatan pelaksanaan dasar secara 'top-down'

Maklumat Asas
- Apakah kedudukan anda dalam organisasi?
- Apakah skop kerja anda?
- Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan organisasi ini?
- Kongsikan maklumat mengenai bahagian/organisasi lain yang pernah anda berkhidmat sebelum berkhidmat di kedudukan sekarang
- Mohon anda kongsikan pengalaman dalam melaksanakan dasar yang melibatkan program berkaitan pendidikan awal kanak-kanak

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
1.	**RQ1** Keperluan elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Apakah keperluan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif pihak berkepentingan?	Apakah pandangan anda tentang kualiti keseluruhan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan pengalaman dan kepakaran anda, apakah takrifan yang tepat untuk terma 'kualiti struktur' bagi program prasekolah? Adakah anda bersetuju dengan empat aspek 'kualiti struktur' sepertimana yang terdapat dalam kajian literatur, iaitu saiz kelas atau bilangan murid/kelas, nisbah guru:kanak-kanak, kelayakan guru dan infrastruktur prasekolah? Atau adakah anda berpendapat ia perlu merangkumi lebih dari itu? Bolehkah anda kongsikan pandangan anda tentang dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah elemen penting kualiti struktur yang perlu ada bagi program prasekolah? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur sedia ada di kalangan prasekolah awam yang anda rasakan mencukupi dan apakah elemen yang masih kurang? Berdasarkan pengalaman dan kepakaran anda, apakah elemen kualiti struktur yang anda fikirkan perlu diberi keutamaan oleh Kerajaan Malaysia? Mengapa?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
2.	**RQ2** Pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard	
a.	Apakah cabaran dalam melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia dalam usaha mempromosi program prasekolah awam yang berkualiti tinggi?	Berdasarkan pengalaman dan kepakaran anda, apakah cabaran untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah cabaran terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan cabaran paling kurang? Mengapa? Adakah Malaysia menghadapi cabaran untuk menyediakan perancangan dan mekanisma pemantauan yang baik bagi elemen kualiti struktur prasekolah? Adakah terdapat dasar khusus yang mengawal aspek kualiti struktur bagi agensi yang menyediakan program prasekolah? Sejauh mana efektif atau berjayanya dasar ini? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam perkara ini? Adakah penguatkuasaan dasar sedia ada mengenai elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia dilaksanakan secara berkesan? Apakah cabaran yang terlibat? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam mengenalpasti agensi utama yang bertanggungjawab terhadap program prasekolah di Malaysia? Pada pandangan anda, adakah wujud cabaran yang melibatkan ketersediaan sumber untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Adakah terdapat dasar khusus yang memperkasa agensi yang menawarkan program prasekolah dalam aspek kualiti strukur? Sejauh mana efektif atau berjayanya dasar ini memperkasa agensi yang menawarkan program prasekolah, terutamanya dalam aspek yang melibatkan

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
		elemen kualiti struktur? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam perkara ini? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dasar sedia ada adalah mencukupi untuk memberi panduan dalam mencapai objektif pelaksanaan aspek kualiti struktur program prasekolah awam? Apakah cabaran yang terlibat? Adakah dengan dasar sedia ada, masih wujud keperluan untuk melaksanakan pelaksanaan adaptif (terutamanya dalam aspek kualiti struktur) berdasarkan keutamaan di lapangan? Apakah cabaran berkaitan perkara ini?
b.	Sejauh manakah cabaran ini menjadi halangan yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Berdasarkan pandangan pakar anda, apakah cabaran yang menghalang pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah halangan terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan halangan paling kurang? Mengapa? Sejauh mana cabaran yang dibincangkan sebelum ini menjadi penghalang yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan kepakaran anda, mengapakah semua ini terjadi? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dengan wujudnya pelbagai dasar berkaitan program prasekolah telah mengakibatkan pertindihan dasar, terutamanya berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur? Jika dibandingkan dengan negara lain, mengapakah Malaysia masih kurang memberi tumpuan kepada pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur dalam program prasekolahnya? Dalam skala 10, pada pandangan anda di manakah kedudukan Malaysia dalam pelaksanaaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur di prasekolah awam?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
3.	**<u>RQ3</u>** Kerangka elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Bagaimanakah perspektif pihak berkepentingan ini boleh diterjemahkan kepada satu kerangka kerja dalam memastikan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, bagaimanakah Malaysia boleh menambah baik dasar berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur bagi program prasekolahnya? Aspek manakah yang perlu diberi penekanan bagi tujuan penambahbaikan? Pada pendapat anda, adakah terdapat perkara baru yang perlu diberi perhatian dalam menambahbaik dasar sedia ada berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Saya percaya negara boleh mendapat manfaat dari kepakaran tuan. Adakah perkara yang anda ingin kongsikan terhadap usaha penambahbaikan ini? Selain dari apa yang telah dibincangkan di sini, adakah perkara berkaitan yang dirasakan masih tidak disentuh oleh saya atau terdapat perkara baru yang anda rasa perlu diberi perhatian?

Seksyen B1: Bahagian Penawaran
Temubual bersama pegawai Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya, Kementerian Pendidikan (JPWP Putrajaya, KPM) selaku pelaksana dasar – pendekatan pelaksanaan dasar secara 'bottom-up'

Maklumat Asas
- Apakah kedudukan anda dalam organisasi?
- Apakah skop kerja anda?
- Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan organisasi ini?
- Kongsikan maklumat mengenai bahagian lain yang pernah anda berkhidmat sebelum berkhidmat di kedudukan sekarang
- Mohon anda kongsikan pengalaman dalam melaksanakan dasar yang melibatkan program berkaitan pendidikan awal kanak-kanak

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
1.	**RQ1** Keperluan elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Apakah keperluan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif pihak berkepentingan?	Apakah pandangan anda tentang kualiti keseluruhan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan pengalaman anda, apakah yang anda faham dengan terma 'kualiti struktur' bagi program prasekolah? Adakah anda tahu tentang empat aspek 'kualiti struktur' sepertimana yang terdapat dalam kajian literatur, iaitu saiz kelas atau bilangan murid/kelas, nisbah guru:kanak-kanak, kelayakan guru dan infrastruktur prasekolah? Bolehkah anda kongsikan pandangan anda tentang dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah elemen penting kualiti struktur yang perlu ada bagi program prasekolah? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur sedia ada di kalangan prasekolah awam yang anda rasakan mencukupi dan apakah elemen yang masih kurang? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur yang anda fikirkan perlu diberi keutamaan oleh Kerajaan Malaysia? Mengapa?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
2.	**<u>RQ2</u>** Pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard	
a.	Apakah cabaran dalam melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia dalam usaha mempromosi program prasekolah awam yang berkualiti tinggi?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah cabaran terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan cabaran paling kurang? Mengapa? Pada pandangan anda, adakah wujud cabaran yang melibatkan ketersediaan sumber untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Adakah terdapat dasar khusus yang memperkasa agensi yang menawarkan program prasekolah dalam aspek kualiti strukur? Sejauh mana efektif atau berjayanya dasar ini memperkasa agensi yang menawarkan program prasekolah, terutamanya dalam aspek yang melibatkan elemen kualiti struktur? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam perkara ini? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dasar sedia ada adalah mencukupi untuk memberi panduan dalam mencapai objektif pelaksanaan aspek kualiti struktur program prasekolah awam? Apakah cabaran yang terlibat? Adakah dengan dasar sedia ada, masih wujud keperluan untuk melaksanakan pelaksanaan adaptif (terutamanya dalam aspek kualiti struktur) berdasarkan keutamaan di lapangan? Apakah cabaran berkaitan perkara ini?
b.	Sejauh manakah cabaran ini menjadi halangan yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran yang menghalang pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah halangan terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan halangan paling kurang? Mengapa?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
	persekutuan di Malaysia?	Sejauh mana cabaran yang dibincangkan sebelum ini menjadi penghalang yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan pengalaman anda, mengapakah semua ini terjadi? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dengan wujudnya pelbagai dasar berkaitan program prasekolah telah mengakibatkan pertindihan dasar, terutamanya berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur? Jika dibandingkan dengan negara lain, mengapakah Malaysia masih kurang memberi tumpuan kepada pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur dalam program prasekolahnya? Dalam skala 10, pada pandangan anda di manakah kedudukan Malaysia dalam pelaksanaaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur di prasekolah awam?
3.	**RQ3** Kerangka elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Bagaimanakah perspektif pihak berkepentingan ini boleh diterjemahkan kepada satu kerangka kerja dalam memastikan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, bagaimanakah Malaysia boleh menambah baik dasar berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur bagi program prasekolahnya? Aspek manakah yang perlu diberi penekanan bagi tujuan penambahbaikan? Pada pendapat anda, adakah terdapat perkara baru yang perlu diberi perhatian dalam menambahbaik dasar sedia ada berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Adakah anda berpendapat anda boleh menyumbang kepada usaha penambahbaikan ini? Selain dari apa yang telah dibincangkan di sini, adakah perkara berkaitan yang dirasakan masih tidak disentuh oleh saya atau terdapat perkara baru yang anda rasa perlu diberi perhatian?

Seksyen B2: Bahagian Penawaran
Temubual bersama guru prasekolah selaku pelaksana dasar sebenar di lapangan – pendekatan pelaksanaan dasar secara 'bottom-up'

Maklumat Asas
- Aktiviti pengajaran anda melibatkan berapa kelas?
- Berapa ramai kanak-kanak dalam setiap kelas?
- Apakah skop kerja anda?
- Adakah anda mempunyai pembantu bagi melaksanakan tugas mengajar?
- Sudah berapa lama anda berkhidmat dengan sekolah ini?
- Kongsikan maklumat mengenai sekolah lain yang anda pernah mengajar sebelum berada di sekolah sekarang
- Jika tidak keberatan, bolehkah anda kongsikan kelayakan tertinggi anda?
- Apakah pandangan anda tentang infrastrutur sedia ada di sekolah ini?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
1.	**RQ1** Keperluan elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Apakah keperluan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif pihak berkepentingan?	Apakah pandangan anda tentang kualiti keseluruhan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan pengalaman anda, apakah yang anda faham dengan terma 'kualiti struktur' bagi program prasekolah? Adakah anda tahu tentang empat aspek 'kualiti struktur' sepertimana yang terdapat dalam kajian literatur, iaitu saiz kelas atau bilangan murid/kelas, nisbah guru:kanak-kanak, kelayakan guru dan infrastruktur prasekolah? Bolehkah anda kongsikan pandangan anda tentang dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah elemen penting kualiti struktur yang perlu ada bagi program prasekolah? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur sedia ada di kalangan prasekolah awam yang anda rasakan mencukupi dan apakah elemen yang masih kurang? Apakah elemen kualiti struktur yang anda fikirkan perlu diberi keutamaan oleh Kerajaan Malaysia? Mengapa?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
2.	**RQ2** Pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard	
a.	Apakah cabaran dalam melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia dalam usaha mempromosi program prasekolah awam yang berkualiti tinggi?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah cabaran terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan cabaran paling kurang? Mengapa? Pada pandangan anda, adakah wujud cabaran yang melibatkan ketersediaan sumber yang boleh menghalang anda untuk memberikan perkhidmatan pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang terbaik? Adakah anda tahu tentang dasar khusus yang memperkasa agensi yang menawarkan program prasekolah dalam aspek kualiti strukur? Sejauh mana efektif atau berjayanya dasar ini memperkasa diri anda dalam melaksanakan tugas sebagai seorang guru prasekolah, terutamanya dalam aspek yang melibatkan elemen kualiti struktur? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi dalam perkara ini? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dasar sedia ada adalah mencukupi untuk memberi panduan dalam mencapai objektif pelaksanaan aspek kualiti struktur program prasekolah awam? Apakah cabaran yang terlibat? Pada pandangan anda, adakah wujud keperluan untuk mengubahsuai dasar sedia ada (terutamanya yang melibatkan aspek kualiti struktur) agar sesuai dengan keperluan pengajaran anda berdasarkan keutamaan di peringkat sekolah? Apakah cabaran yang dihadapi? Sejauh manakah anda terlibat dalam proses membuat dasar yang melibatkan elemen kualiti struktur? Sejauh manakah input/maklum balas/suara anda didengari oleh pihak pengurusan dalam melaksanakan dasar berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur program prasekolah?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
		Adakah anda membelanjakan wang anda sendiri demi menambah baik aspek kualiti struktur di sekolah anda bertugas?
b.	Sejauh manakah cabaran ini menjadi halangan yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran yang menghalang pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah halangan terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan halangan paling kurang? Mengapa? Sejauh mana cabaran yang dibincangkan sebelum ini menjadi penghalang yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Berdasarkan pengalaman anda, mengapakah semua ini terjadi? Pada pandangan anda, adakah dengan wujudnya pelbagai dasar berkaitan program prasekolah telah mengakibatkan pertindihan dasar, terutamanya berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur? Jika dibandingkan dengan negara lain, mengapakah Malaysia masih kurang memberi tumpuan kepada pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur dalam program prasekolahnya? Dalam skala 10, pada pandangan anda di manakah kedudukan Malaysia dalam pelaksanaaan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur di prasekolah awam?
3.	**RQ3** Kerangka elemen kualiti struktur	
a.	Bagaimanakah perspektif pihak berkepentingan ini boleh diterjemahkan kepada satu kerangka kerja dalam memastikan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan	Pada pandangan anda, bagaimanakah Malaysia boleh menambah baik dasar berkaitan aspek kualiti struktur bagi program prasekolahnya? Aspek manakah yang perlu diberi penekanan bagi tujuan penambahbaikan? Pada pendapat anda, adakah terdapat perkara baru yang perlu diberi perhatian dalam menambahbaik

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Temubual
	prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	dasar sedia ada berkaitan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Adakah anda berpendapat anda boleh menyumbang kepada usaha penambahbaikan ini? Selain dari apa yang telah dibincangkan di sini, adakah perkara berkaitan yang dirasakan masih tidak disentuh oleh saya atau terdapat perkara baru yang anda rasa perlu diberi perhatian?

Seksyen C: Bahagian Permintaan
Temubual bersama ibu bapa selaku penerima dasar – perspektif 'outside-in'

Maklumat Asas
- Di manakah anda tinggal?
- Apakah pekerjaan anda?
- Berapakah usia anda?
- Berapa orang anak anda?
- Di manakah anda menghantar anak anda sebelum ini bagi program prasekolah?
- Adakah ini merupakan anak anda yang pertama memasuki prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan?
- Di manakah anda bercadang untuk menghantar anak anda yang seterusnya bagi pendidikan prasekolah?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Berkaitan Persepsi	Soalan Berkaitan Ekspektasi
1.	**RQ1** Keperluan elemen kualiti struktur		
a.	Apakah keperluan elemen kualiti struktur bagi prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia berdasarkan perspektif pihak berkepentingan?	Apakah pandangan anda tentang kualiti keseluruhan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Dari segi aspek kualiti, di manakah kedudukan prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan jika dibandingkan dengan lain-lain prasekolah awam? Dalam skala 10, pada pandangan anda di manakah kedudukan prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan? Adakah anda tahu saiz kelas anak anda? Berapa ramaikah kanak-kanak dalam kelas anak anda?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah yang dimaksudkan dengan prasekolah awam yang ideal? Apakah perkara utama yang menjadi perhatian anda semasa memilih prasekolah untuk anak anda? Pada pendapat anda, apakah elemen penting dalam membentuk prasekolah yang berkualiti?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Berkaitan Persepsi	Soalan Berkaitan Ekspektasi
		Adakah anda tahu nisbah guru:kanak-kanak dalam kelas anak anda? Adakah anda tahu tentang kelayakan guru di sekolah anak anda? Adakah anda pernah melawat ke kelas anak anda? Apakah pandangan anda tentang infrastruktur di situ? Apakah perkara utama mengenai aspek kualiti di prasekolah Kementerian Pendidikan yang menjadi tumpuan anda? Mengapa? Bagaimanakah perkara ini dapat ditangani? Secara keseluruhan, adakah anda berpuashati dengan tahap kualiti sedia ada di sekolah anak anda?	Apakah elemen kualiti sedia ada di kalangan prasekolah awam yang anda rasakan mencukupi dan apakah elemen yang masih kurang? Adakah anda mempunyai sebarang cadangan untuk menambahbaik elemen kualiti sedia ada di prasekolah awam?
2.	**RQ2** Pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard		
a.	Apakah cabaran dalam melaksanakan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia dalam usaha	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran untuk melaksanakan elemen kualiti yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, bagaimanakah perkara ini dapat diatasi?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Berkaitan Persepsi	Soalan Berkaitan Ekspektasi
	mempromosi program prasekolah awam yang berkualiti tinggi?	Apakah cabaran terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan cabaran paling kurang? Mengapa? Adakah lain-lain cabaran yang melibatkan aspek kualiti yang anda rasa wajar dipertimbangkan selain dari yang dibincangkan tadi?	Adakah anda mempunyai sebarang cadangan untuk menambahbaik keadaan sedia ada?
b.	Sejauh manakah cabaran ini menjadi halangan yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, apakah cabaran yang menghalang pelaksanaan elemen kualiti yang standard di kalangan prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Apakah halangan terbesar? Mengapa? Dan apakah yang merupakan halangan paling kurang? Mengapa?	Pada pandangan anda, bagaimana perkara ini dapat diatasi? Adakah anda mempunyai sebarang cadangan untuk menambahbaik situasi sedia ada?
3.	**RQ3** Kerangka elemen kualiti struktur		
a.	Bagaimanakah perspektif pihak berkepentingan ini boleh diterjemahkan kepada satu kerangka kerja dalam memastikan	Apakah pandangan anda tentang peranan Kerajaan berkaitan isu ini?	Apakah cadangan anda kepada pihak Kerajaan berkaitan isu ini?

Bil.	Persoalan Kajian	Soalan Berkaitan Persepsi	Soalan Berkaitan Ekspektasi
	elemen kualiti struktur yang standard di kalangan prasekolah biayaan persekutuan di Malaysia?	Pada pandangan anda, adakah wujud keperluan untuk membangunkan satu kerangka komprehensif elemen kualiti bagi prasekolah awam di Malaysia?	Apakah ekspektasi anda terhadap usaha penambahbaikan dasar berkaitan elemen kualiti prasekolah awam di Malaysia? Pada pendapat anda, apakah peranan yang perlu dimainkan oleh pihak sekolah dalam menambahbaik aspek kualiti program prasekolah? Adakah anda berpandangan ibubapa boleh berperanan dalam menambahbaik elemen kualiti program prasekolah? Adakah anda berpendapat anda boleh menyumbang kepada usaha penambahbaikan ini? Bagaimana? Selain dari apa yang telah dibincangkan di sini, adakah perkara berkaitan yang dirasakan masih tidak disentuh oleh saya atau terdapat perkara baru yang anda rasa wajar diberi perhatian?

APPENDIX 6

Interview Consent Form (*Borang Persetujuan Temubual*)

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

STRUCTURAL QUALITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA'S PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study, or you may withdraw yourself from participating in the research at any time without penalty. Your information will be kept confidential and will not be made public unless disclosure is required by law. Information obtained from this study will be used solely for academic purposes including publications.

By signing this consent form, you authorise the review of record, analysis and use of data arising from this research. If you have any question about this research or your rights, please contact the researcher:

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Contact no.:
Email: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

☐ I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.

☐ I voluntarily agree to take part in the research, to follow the procedures and to provide all the necessary information required.

☐ I agree for this session to be recorded for academic purposes and can request to pause at any time.

☐ I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without penalty.

☐ Except for damages resulting from negligence or malicious conduct of the researcher, I hereby release UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred due to my participation in the research.

Signature:
Interviewee:
Date:

BORANG PERSETUJUAN TEMUBUAL

PELAKSANAAN DASAR ELEMEN KUALITI STRUKTUR DI KALANGAN PRASEKOLAH AWAM MALAYSIA

Tarikh Temubual:

Waktu Temubual:

Tempat Temubual:

Penyertaan anda dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela. Anda boleh menarik diri dari menyertai kajian ini pada bila-bila masa tanpa dikenakan penalti. Semua maklumat anda adalah sulit dan tidak akan didedahkan kepada umum kecuali diperlukan oleh undang-undang. Maklumat yang diperolehi dari kajian akan digunakan hanya bagi tujuan akademik termasuk penerbitan bahan ilmiah.

Dengan menandatangani borang persetujuan, anda memberi kebenaran kepada penyelidik untuk menggunakan rekod, analisa dan data hasil dari kajian ini. Sekiranya anda mempunyai sebarang soalan berkaitan kajian ini, sila berhubung dengan penyelidik:

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Nombor untuk dihubungi:
Emel: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

☐ Saya telah membaca dan memahami semua terma dan syarat penyertaan saya dalam kajian ini.

☐ Saya secara sukarela bersetuju untuk menyertai kajian ini, mengikuti prosedur kajian dan memberi maklumat yang diperlukan.

☐ Saya bersetuju agar sesi temubual ini dirakamkan bagi tujuan akademik dan boleh memohon untuk memberhentikan rakaman pada bila-bila masa.

☐ Saya pada bila-bila masa boleh memilih untuk menarik diri dari menyertai kajian ini tanpa dikenakan penalty.

☐ Kecuali kerosakan akibat dari kecuaian dan niat jahat penyelidik, saya dengan ini melepaskan UiTM dan semua penyelidik terlibat dari semua liabiliti yang berkaitan atau timbul akibat dari penyertaan saya dalam kajian ini. Saya bersetuju untuk tidak menyalahkan mereka sekiranya berlaku sebarang kemudaratan atau kerugian akibat dari penyertaan saya dalam kajian ini.

Tandatangan:
Nama peserta:
Tarikh:

APPENDIX 7

eRAS Approval Letter

KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA
BAHAGIAN PERANCANGAN DAN PENYELIDIKAN DASAR PENDIDIKAN
ARAS 1-4, BLOK E8
KOMPLEKS KERAJAAN PARCEL E
PUSAT PENTADBIRAN KERAJAAN PERSEKUTUAN
62604 PUTRAJAYA

TEL : 0388846591
FAKS : 0388846579

Ruj. Kami : KPM.600-3/2/3-eras(8370)
Tarikh : 19 Oktober 2020

NADZMIN BINTI AHMAD NAZIR
NO. KP :

SHAH ALAM 40000 SHAH ALAM
SELANGOR

Tuan,

KELULUSAN UNTUK MENJALANKAN KAJIAN DI SEKOLAH, INSTITUT PENDIDIKAN GURU, JABATAN PENDIDIKAN NEGERI DAN BAHAGIAN DI BAWAH KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA

Perkara di atas adalah dirujuk.

2. Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan untuk menjalankan kajian seperti di bawah telah diluluskan.

" STRUCTURAL QUALITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA'S PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS "

3. Kelulusan adalah berdasarkan kepada kertas cadangan penyelidikan dan instrumen kajian yang dikemukakan oleh tuan kepada bahagian ini. Walau bagaimanapun kelulusan ini bergantung kepada kebenaran Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri dan Pengetua / Guru Besar yang berkenaan.

4. Surat kelulusan ini sah digunakan bermula dari **10 November 2020** hingga **7 Mei 2021** .

5. Tuan dikehendaki menyerahkan senaskhah laporan akhir kajian dalam bentuk *hardcopy* bersama salinan *softcopy* berformat pdf dalam CD kepada Bahagian ini.Tuan juga diingatkan supaya mendapat kebenaran terlebih dahulu daripada Bahagian ini sekiranya sebahagian atau sepenuhnya dapatan kajian tersebut hendak diterbitkan di mana-mana forum, seminar atau diumumkan kepada media massa.

Sekian untuk makluman dan tindakan tuan selanjutnya. Terima kasih.

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

Ketua Penolong Pengarah Kanan
Sektor Penyelidikan dan Penilaian Dasar
b.p. Pengarah
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

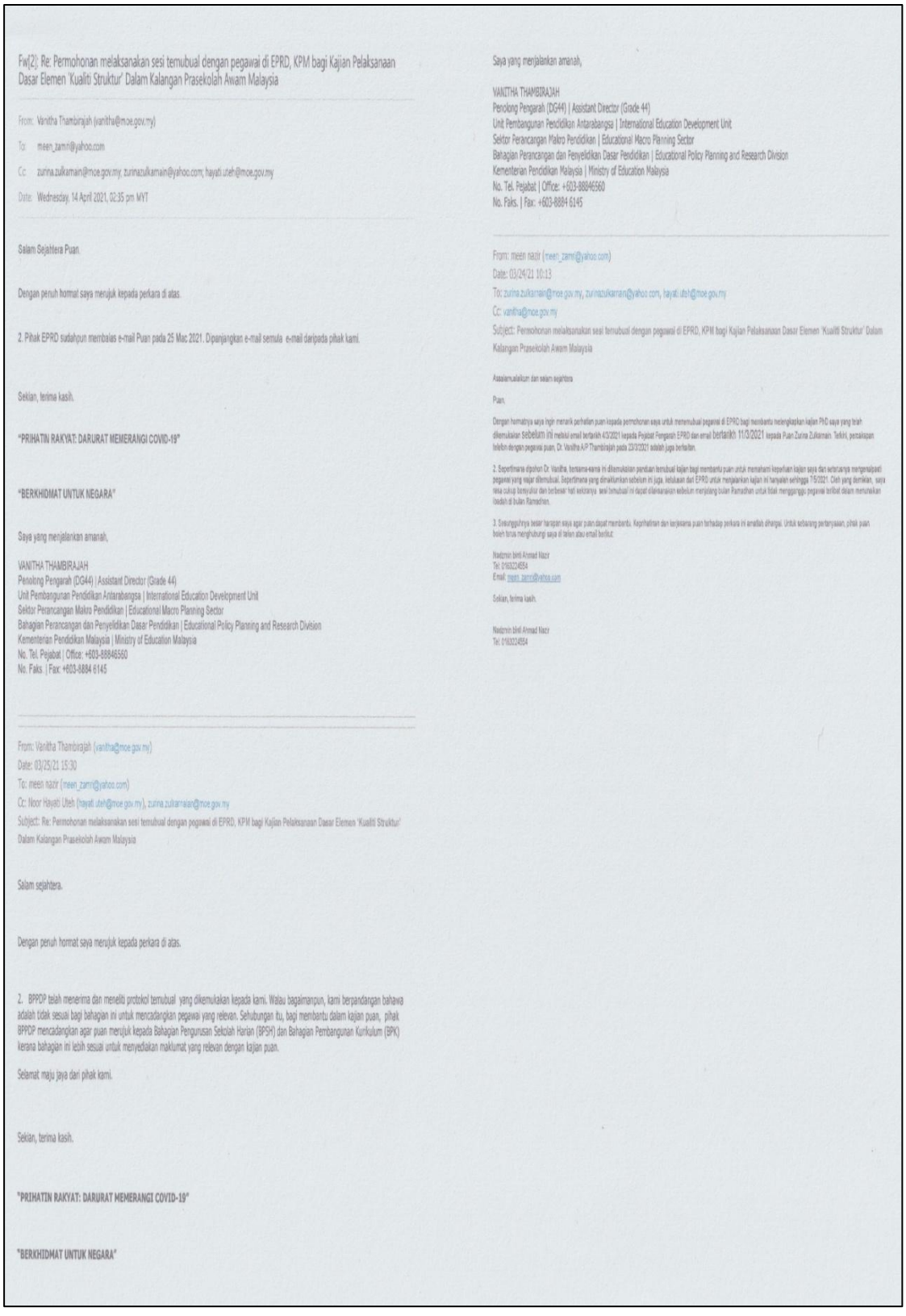
salinan kepada:-

JABATAN PENDIDIKAN WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN PUTRAJAYA

* SURAT INI DIJANA OLEH KOMPUTER DAN TIADA TANDATANGAN DIPERLUKAN *

APPENDIX 8

Response Email from EPRD



Fw[2]: Re: Permohonan melaksanakan sesi temubual dengan pegawai di EPRD, KPM bagi Kajian Pelaksanaan Dasar Elemen 'Kualiti Struktur' Dalam Kalangan Prasekolah Awam Malaysia

From: Vanitha Thambirajah (vanitha@moe.gov.my)

To: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

Cc: zurina.zulkarnain@moe.gov.my; zurinazulkarnain@yahoo.com; hayati.uteh@moe.gov.my

Date: Wednesday, 14 April 2021, 02:35 pm MYT

Salam Sejahtera Puan.

Dengan peruh hormat saya merujuk kepada perkara di atas.

2. Pihak EPRD sudahpun membalas e-mail Puan pada 25 Mac 2021. Dipanjangkan e-mail semula e-mail daripada pihak kami.

Sekian, terima kasih.

"PRIHATIN RAKYAT: DARURAT MEMERANGI COVID-19"

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

VANITHA THAMBIRAJAH
Penolong Pengarah (DG44) | Assistant Director (Grade 44)
Unit Pembangunan Pendidikan Antarabangsa | International Education Development Unit
Sektor Perancangan Makro Pendidikan | Educational Macro Planning Sector
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan | Educational Policy Planning and Research Division
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia | Ministry of Education Malaysia
No. Tel. Pejabat | Office: +603-88846560
No. Faks. | Fax: +603-8884 6145

From: Vanitha Thambirajah (vanitha@moe.gov.my)
Date: 03/25/21 15:30
To: meen nazir (meen_zamri@yahoo.com)
Cc: Noor Hayati Uteh (hayati.uteh@moe.gov.my), zurina.zulkarnain@moe.gov.my
Subject: Re: Permohonan melaksanakan sesi temubual dengan pegawai di EPRD, KPM bagi Kajian Pelaksanaan Dasar Elemen 'Kualiti Struktur' Dalam Kalangan Prasekolah Awam Malaysia

Salam sejahtera.

Dengan peruh hormat saya merujuk kepada perkara di atas.

2. BPPDP telah menerima dan meneliti protokol temubual yang dikemukakan kepada kami. Walau bagaimanpun, kami berpandangan bahawa adalah tidak sesuai bagi bahagian ini untuk mencadangkan pegawai yang relevan. Sehubungan itu, bagi membantu dalam kajian puan, pihak BPPDP mencadangkan agar puan merujuk kepada Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian (BPSH) dan Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum (BPK) kerana bahagian ini lebih sesuai untuk menyediakan maklumat yang relevan dengan kajian puan.

Selamat maju jaya dari pihak kami.

Sekian, terima kasih.

"PRIHATIN RAKYAT: DARURAT MEMERANGI COVID-19"

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

VANITHA THAMBIRAJAH
Penolong Pengarah (DG44) | Assistant Director (Grade 44)
Unit Pembangunan Pendidikan Antarabangsa | International Education Development Unit
Sektor Perancangan Makro Pendidikan | Educational Macro Planning Sector
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan | Educational Policy Planning and Research Division
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia | Ministry of Education Malaysia
No. Tel. Pejabat | Office: +603-88846560
No. Faks. | Fax: +603-8884 6145

From: meen nazir (meen_zamri@yahoo.com)
Date: 03/24/21 10:13
To: zurina.zulkarnain@moe.gov.my, zurinazulkarnain@yahoo.com, hayati.uteh@moe.gov.my
Cc: vanitha@moe.gov.my
Subject: Permohonan melaksanakan sesi temubual dengan pegawai di EPRD, KPM bagi Kajian Pelaksanaan Dasar Elemen 'Kualiti Struktur' Dalam Kalangan Prasekolah Awam Malaysia

Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera

Puan,

Dengan hormatnya saya ingin merarik perhatian puan kepada permohonan saya untuk menemubual pegawai di EPRC bagi membantu melengkapkan kajian PhD saya yang telah dikemukakan Sebelum ini melalui email bertarikh 4/3/2021 kepada Pejabat Pengarah EPRD dan email bertarikh 11/3/2021 kepada Puan Zurina Zulkarnain. Terkini, perbincangan telefon dengan pegawai puan, Dr. Vanitha A/P Thambirajah pada 23/3/2021 telah juga berlaku.

2. Sepertimana dipohon Dr. Vanitha, bersama-sama ini dilemukakan pandulan temubual kajian bagi membantu puan untuk memahami kepentingan kajian saya dan seterusnya mengenalpasti pegawai yang wajar ditemubual. Sepertimana yang dimaklumkan sebelum ini juga, kelulusan dari EPRD untuk menjalankan kajian ini hanyalah sehingga 7/5/2021. Oleh yang demikian, saya rasa cukup bersyukur dan berbesar hati sekiranya sesi temubual ini dapat dilaksanakan sebelum menjelang bulan Ramadhan untuk tidak menggangu pegawai terlibat dalam menunaikan ibadah di bulan Ramadhan.

3. Sesungguhnya besar harapan saya agar puan dapat membantu. Kerjasamanya dan kerjasama puan terhadap perkara ini amatlah dihargai. Untuk sebarang pertanyaan, pihak puan boleh terus menghubungi saya di talian atau email berikut:

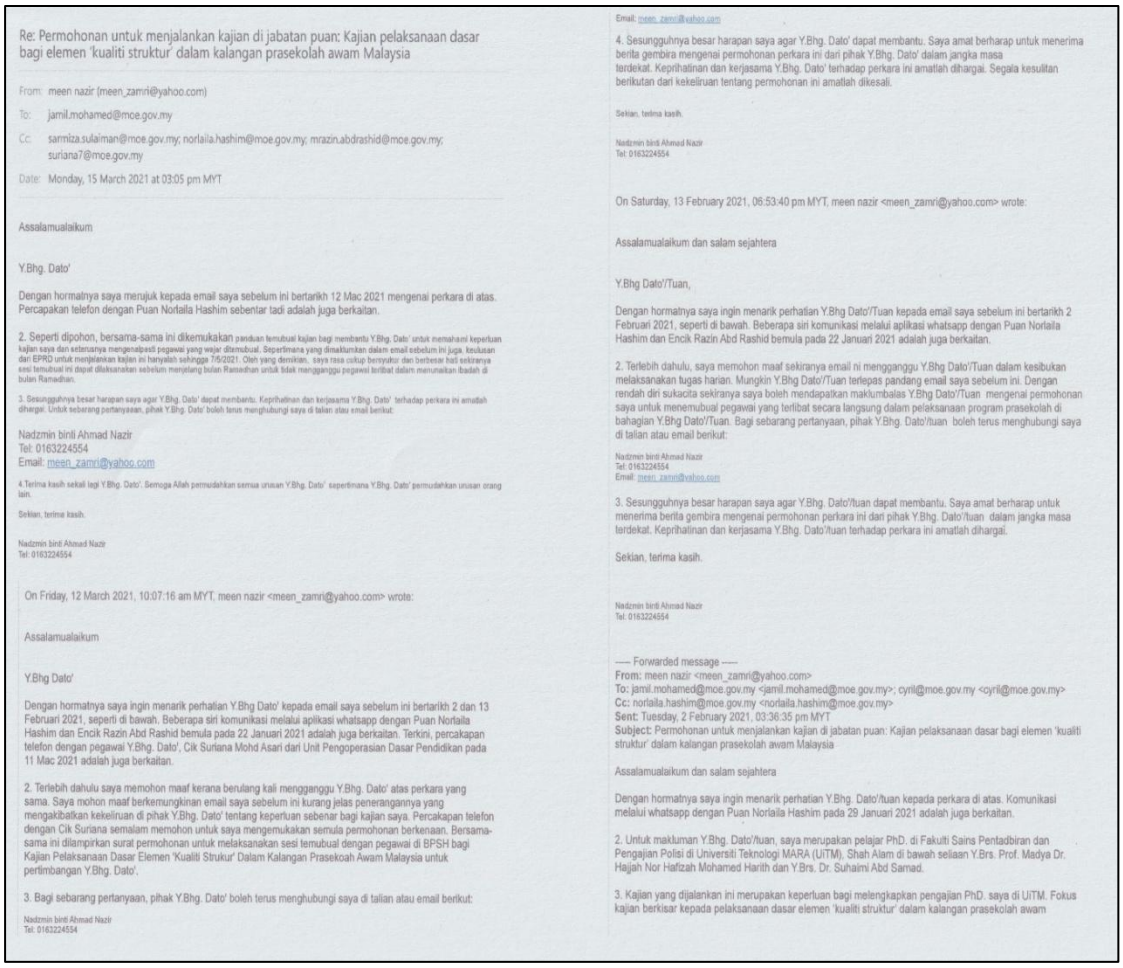
Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224854
Email: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

Sekian, terima kasih.

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224854

APPENDIX 9

Application Email to Conduct Research



Re: Permohonan untuk menjalankan kajian di jabatan puan; Kajian pelaksanaan dasar bagi elemen 'kualiti struktur' dalam kalangan prasekolah awam Malaysia

From: meen nazir (meen_zamri@yahoo.com)

To: jamil.mohamed@moe.gov.my

Cc: sarmiza.sulaiman@moe.gov.my; norlaila.hashim@moe.gov.my; mrazin.abdrashid@moe.gov.my; suriana7@moe.gov.my

Date: Monday, 15 March 2021 at 03:05 pm MYT

Assalamualaikum

Y.Bhg. Dato'

Dengan hormatnya saya merujuk kepada email saya sebelum ini bertarikh 12 Mac 2021 mengenai perkara di atas. Percapakan telefon dengan Puan Norlaila Hashim sebentar tadi adalah juga berkaitan.

2. Seperti dipohon, bersama-sama ini dikemukakan panduan temubual kajian bagi membantu Y.Bhg. Dato' untuk memahami keperluan kajian saya dan keterunaya mengenalpasti pegawai yang wajar ditemubual. Sepertimana yang dimaklumkan dalam email sebelum ini juga, keulusan dari EPRD untuk menjalankan kajian ini hanyalah sehingga 7/6/2021. Oleh yang demikian, saya rasa cukup bersyukur dan berbesar hati sekiranya sesi temubual ini dapat dilaksanakan sebelum menjelang bulan Ramadhan untuk tidak mengganggu pegawai terlibat dalam menunaikan ibadah di bulan Ramadhan.

3. Sesungguhnya besar harapan saya agar Y.Bhg. Dato' dapat membantu. Keprihatinan dan kerjasama Y.Bhg. Dato' terhadap perkara ini amatlah dihargai. Untuk sebarang pertanyaan, pihak Y.Bhg. Dato' boleh terus menghubungi saya di talian atau email berikut:

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554
Email: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

4.Terima kasih sekali lagi Y.Bhg. Dato'. Semoga Allah permudahkan semua urusan Y.Bhg. Dato' sepertimana Y.Bhg. Dato' permudahkan urusan orang lain.

Sekian, terima kasih.

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554

On Friday, 12 March 2021, 10:07:16 am MYT, meen nazir <meen_zamri@yahoo.com> wrote:

Assalamualaikum

Y.Bhg Dato'

Dengan hormatnya saya ingin menarik perhatian Y.Bhg Dato' kepada email saya sebelum ini bertarikh 2 dan 13 Februari 2021, seperti di bawah. Beberapa siri komunikasi melalui aplikasi whatsapp dengan Puan Norlaila Hashim dan Encik Razin Abd Rashid bemula pada 22 Januari 2021 adalah juga berkaitan. Terkini, percakapan telefon dengan pegawai Y.Bhg. Dato', Cik Suriana Mohd Asari dari Unit Pengoperasian Dasar Pendidikan pada 11 Mac 2021 adalah juga berkaitan.

2. Terlebih dahulu saya memohon maaf kerana berulang kali mengganggu Y.Bhg. Dato' atas perkara yang sama. Saya mohon maaf berkemungkinan email saya sebelum ini kurang jelas penerangannya yang mengakibatkan kekeliruan di pihak Y.Bhg. Dato' tentang keperluan sebenar bagi kajian saya. Percakapan telefon dengan Cik Suriana semalam memohon untuk saya mengemukakan semula permohonan berkenaan. Bersama-sama ini dilampirkan surat permohonan untuk melaksanakan sesi temubual dengan pegawai di BPSH bagi Kajian Pelaksanaan Dasar Elemen 'Kualiti Strukur' Dalam Kalangan Prasekoah Awam Malaysia untuk pertimbangan Y.Bhg. Dato',

3. Bagi sebarang pertanyaan, pihak Y.Bhg. Dato' boleh terus menghubungi saya di talian atau email berikut:

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554

Email: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

4. Sesungguhnya besar harapan saya agar Y.Bhg. Dato' dapat membantu. Saya amat berharap untuk menerima berita gembira mengenai permohonan perkara ini dari pihak Y.Bhg. Dato' dalam jangka masa terdekat. Keprihatinan dan kerjasama Y.Bhg. Dato' terhadap perkara ini amatlah dihargai. Segala kesulitan berikutan dari kekeliruan tentang permohonan ini amatlah dikesali.

Sekian, terima kasih.

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554

On Saturday, 13 February 2021, 06:53:40 pm MYT, meen nazir <meen_zamri@yahoo.com> wrote:

Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera

Y.Bhg Dato'/Tuan,

Dengan hormatnya saya ingin menarik perhatian Y.Bhg Dato'/Tuan kepada email saya sebelum ini bertarikh 2 Februari 2021, seperti di bawah. Beberapa siri komunikasi melalui aplikasi whatsapp dengan Puan Norlaila Hashim dan Encik Razin Abd Rashid bemula pada 22 Januari 2021 adalah juga berkaitan.

2. Terlebih dahulu, saya memohon maaf sekiranya email ni mengganggu Y.Bhg Dato'/Tuan dalam kesibukan melaksanakan tugas harian. Mungkin Y.Bhg Dato'/Tuan terlepas pandang email saya sebelum ini. Dengan rendah diri sukacita sekiranya saya boleh mendapatkan maklumbalas Y.Bhg Dato'/Tuan mengenai permohonan saya untuk menemubual pegawai yang terlibat secara langsung dalam pelaksanaan program prasekolah di bahagian Y.Bhg Dato'/Tuan. Bagi sebarang pertanyaan, pihak Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan boleh terus menghubungi saya di talian atau email berikut:

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554
Email: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

3. Sesungguhnya besar harapan saya agar Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan dapat membantu. Saya amat berharap untuk menerima berita gembira mengenai permohonan perkara ini dari pihak Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan dalam jangka masa terdekat. Keprihatinan dan kerjasama Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan terhadap perkara ini amatlah dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554

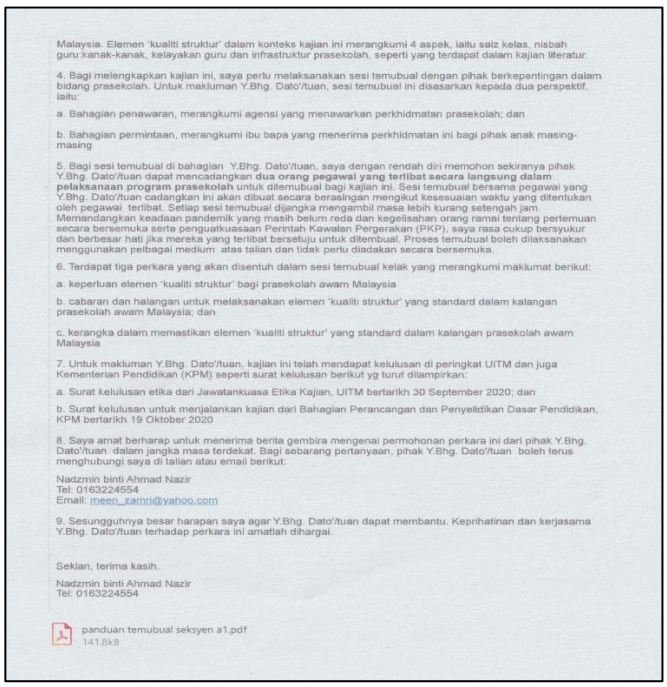
---- Forwarded message ----
From: meen nazir <meen_zamri@yahoo.com>
To: jamil.mohamed@moe.gov.my <jamil.mohamed@moe.gov.my>; cyril@moe.gov.my <cyril@moe.gov.my>
Cc: norlaila.hashim@moe.gov.my <norlaila.hashim@moe.gov.my>
Sent: Tuesday, 2 February 2021, 03:36:35 pm MYT
Subject: Permohonan untuk menjalankan kajian di jabatan puan: Kajian pelaksanaan dasar bagi elemen 'kualiti struktur' dalam kalangan prasekolah awam Malaysia

Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera

Dengan hormatnya saya ingin menarik perhatian Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan kepada perkara di atas. Komunikasi melalui whatsapp dengan Puan Norlaila Hashim pada 29 Januari 2021 adalah juga berkaitan.

2. Untuk maklumat Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan, saya merupakan pelajar PhD. di Fakulti Sains Pentadbiran dan Pengajian Polisi di Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam di bawah seliaan Y.Brs. Prof. Madya Dr. Hajjah Nor Hafizah Mohamed Harith dan Y.Brs. Dr. Suhaimi Abd Samad.

3. Kajian yang dijalankan ini merupakan keperluan bagi melengkapkan pengajian PhD. saya di UiTM. Fokus kajian berkisar kepada pelaksanaan dasar elemen 'kualiti struktur' dalam kalangan prasekolah awam



Malaysia. Elemen 'kualiti struktur' dalam konteks kajian ini merangkumi 4 aspek, iaitu saiz kelas, nisbah guru:kanak-kanak, kelayakan guru dan infrastruktur prasekolah, seperti yang terdapat dalam kajian literatur.

4. Bagi melengkapkan kajian ini, saya perlu melaksanakan sesi temubual dengan pihak berkepentingan dalam bidang prasekolah. Untuk makluman Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan, sesi temubual ini disasarkan kepada dua perspektif, iaitu:

a. Bahagian penawaran, merangkumi agensi yang menawarkan perkhidmatan prasekolah; dan

b. Bahagian permintaan, merangkumi ibu bapa yang menerima perkhidmatan ini bagi pihak anak masing-masing

5. Bagi sesi temubual di bahagian Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan, saya dengan rendah diri memohon sekiranya pihak Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan dapat mencadangkan **dua orang pegawai yang terlibat secara langsung dalam pelaksanaan program prasekolah** untuk ditemubual bagi kajian ini. Sesi temubual bersama pegawai yang Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan cadangkan ini akan dibuat secara berasingan mengikut kesesuaian waktu yang ditentukan oleh pegawai terlibat. Setiap sesi temubual dijangka mengambil masa lebih kurang setengah jam. Memandangkan keadaan pandemik yang masih belum reda dan kegelisahan orang ramai tentang pertemuan secara bersemuka serta penguatkuasaan Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan (PKP), saya rasa cukup bersyukur dan berbesar hati jika mereka yang terlibat bersetuju untuk ditemubual. Proses temubual boleh dilaksanakan menggunakan pelbagai medium atas talian dan tidak perlu diadakan secara bersemuka.

6. Terdapat tiga perkara yang akan disentuh dalam sesi temubual kelak yang merangkumi maklumat berikut:

a. keperluan elemen 'kualiti struktur' bagi prasekolah awam Malaysia

b. cabaran dan halangan untuk melaksanakan elemen 'kualiti struktur' yang standard dalam kalangan prasekolah awam Malaysia; dan

c. kerangka dalam memastikan elemen 'kualiti struktur' yang standard dalam kalangan prasekolah awam Malaysia

7. Untuk makluman Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan, kajian ini telah mendapat kelulusan di peringkat UiTM dan juga Kementerian Pendidikan (KPM) seperti surat kelulusan berikut yg turut dilampirkan:

a. Surat kelulusan etika dari Jawatankuasa Etika Kajian, UiTM bertarikh 30 September 2020; dan

b. Surat kelulusan untuk menjalankan kajian dari Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan, KPM bertarikh 19 Oktober 2020

8. Saya amat berharap untuk menerima berita gembira mengenai permohonan perkara ini dari pihak Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan dalam jangka masa terdekat. Bagi sebarang pertanyaan, pihak Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan boleh terus menghubungi saya di talian atau email berikut:

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554
Email: meen_zamri@yahoo.com

9. Sesungguhnya besar harapan saya agar Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan dapat membantu. Keprihatinan dan kerjasama Y.Bhg. Dato'/tuan terhadap perkara ini amatlah dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir
Tel: 0163224554

panduan temubual seksyen a1.pdf
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APPENDIX 10

Approval Letter from JPWP

KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA
Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya
Aras 7, Blok E2, Kompleks E
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan
62604 Putrajaya

Tel. : 03-88890000
Faks. : 03-88903087
Laman Web : www.moe.gov.my

Ruj.Kami : JPWPP.100-2/2/2 Jld.7 (98)
Tarikh : 21 Januari 2021

NADZMIN BINTI AHMAD NAZIR
NO.KP. :

40000 Shah Alam
Selangor

Tuan,

KELULUSAN UNTUK MENJALANKAN KAJIAN DI SEKOLAH DAN JABATAN PENDIDIKAN DI WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN PUTRAJAYA

Dengan hormatnya perkara di atas dirujuk.

2. Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa pihak **Jabatan tiada halangan** atas permohonan pihak tuan menjalankan kajian di Sekolah-sekolah dan di Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya (JPWPP) :

Nama : NADZMIN BINTI AHMAD NAZIR
No. K/P :
Tajuk Kajian : STRUCTURAL QUALITY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA'S PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS

3. Untuk makluman tuan, memandangkan pandemic Covid-19 yang melanda negara, tuan **dilarang** melaksanakan kajian **secara bersemuka.** Pihak tuan perlu menggunakan medium yang sesuai untuk berurusan dengan pihak sekolah. Sekiranya pihak tuan melanggar *Standard Operating Procedure* (SOP) Covid-19 yang ditetapkan oleh Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia dan Majlis Keselamatan Negara yang sedang berkuat kuasa , pihak JPWPP akan menarik balik kelulusan yang diberikan.

4. Sehubungan dengan itu, tuan boleh menghubungi YBhg. Datin Rumaizah binti Rahim, Ketua Penolong Pengarah, Sektor Pengurusan Sekolah, JPWPP di talian 03 8889 0024 untuk urusan kajian tersebut. Kelulusan ini hanya untuk tujuan yang dipohon dan sah digunakan bermula dari **10 November 2020 hingga 7 Mei 2021.**

Sekian, terima kasih.

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"
"HEBATKAN PUTRAJAYA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

(DR. HAJI ROSLAN BIN HUSSIN)
Timbalan Pengarah
Jabatan Pendidikan Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya
mrm.Jan.2021

APPENDIX 11

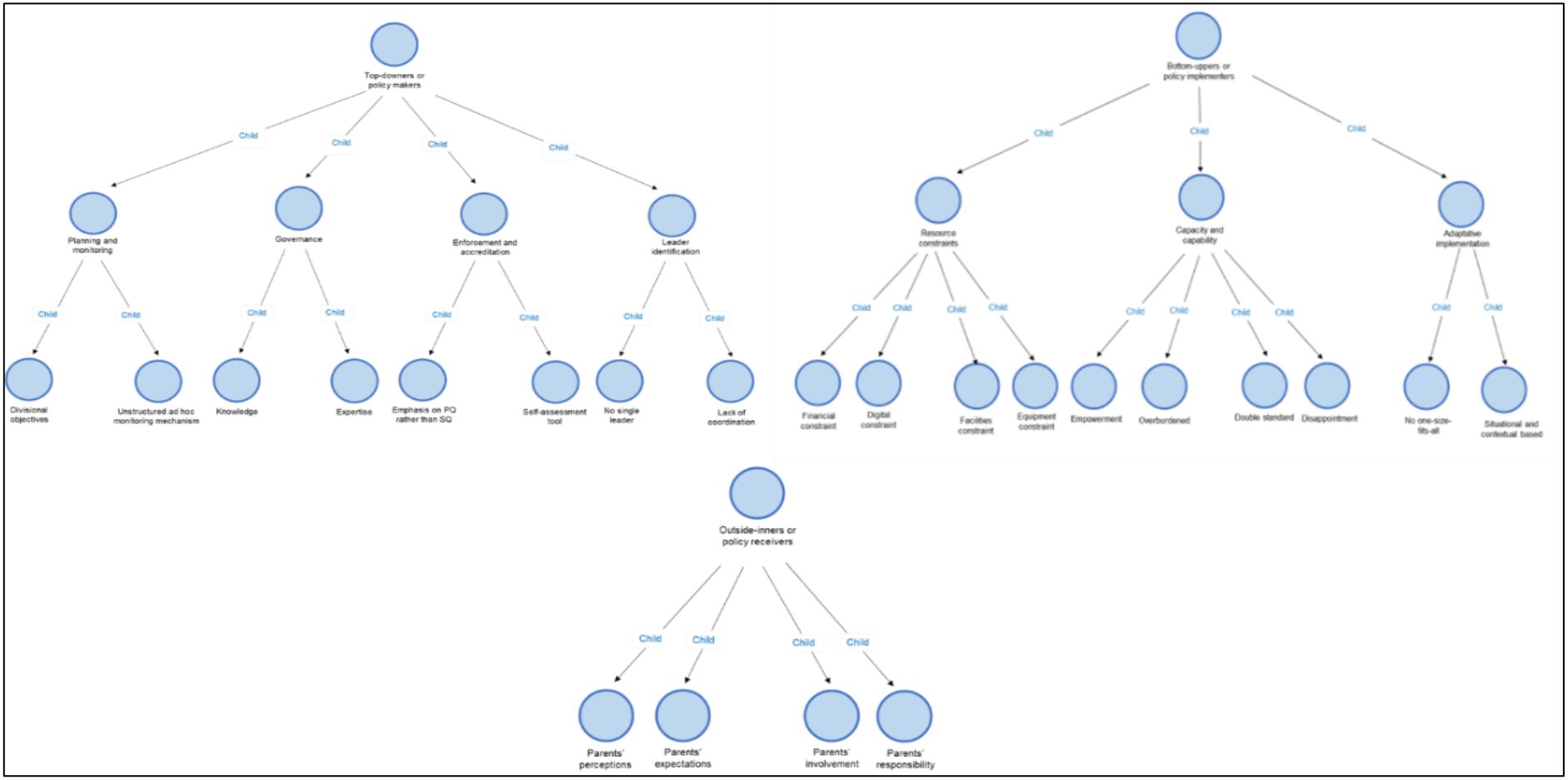
Member Check

Member Check from Few Key Informants of Each Stakeholder's Category

No.	Key Informants	Response	Researcher's Action
A	Policymaker (top-down)		
1.	Mr. R (SMD, MoE) (31st March 2022)	"No missing points. Everything is there."	No action required
2.	Dr M (SMD, MoE) (5th April 2022)	"As comprehensive as it could be. Nothing to change or add."	No action required
3.	Associate Professor Dr H (UPSI) (14th April 2022)	"Well done. Rigorously written."	No action required
B	Policy implementer (bottom-up)		
4.	Datin R (JPWP) (28th February 2022)	"You jot down and wrote everything. Nothing is missing."	No action required
5.	Teacher Ha (preschool teacher) (8th April 2022)	"Alhamdulillah. All look right. May Allah ease."	No action required
6.	Teacher Hi (preschool teacher) (12th April 2022)	"You got all my points. Everything looks good. All the best *kak*."	No action required
7.	Teacher M (preschool teacher) (29th April 2022)	"All points are correct. No additional information or changes from my side."	No action required
C	Policy receiver (outside-in)		
8.	Mrs. L (research officer) (25th February 2022)	"Looks ok to me. Good luck *kak*."	No action required
9.	Mrs. S (fulltime housewife) (6th May 2022)	"I can't believe what begins as a chit chat session has become thick notes like this. Alhamdulillah. All the best to you."	No action required
10.	Mrs. U (home-based tailor) (8th May 2022)	"Alhamdulillah. I don't wish to amend anything."	No action required

APPENDIX 12

Project Map



AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Nadzmin binti Ahmad Nazir obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA in 1997. She later earned her Master of Arts in Economics from the Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA in 2008. She recently completed her PhD in Administrative Science from MARA University of Technology (UiTM) in 2026. Her PhD thesis entitled 'Structural Quality for Policy Implementation in Malaysian Public Preschools: A Stakeholder-based Case Study' is a single case study on the Ministry of Education involving triparty stakeholders: the policymaker, policy implementer, and policy receiver. She is currently serving the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability in Putrajaya.

LIST OF PUBLICATION:

Ahmad Nazir, N., Mohamed Harith, N. H., & Abd Samad, S. (2024). Preliminary Findings of Structural Quality Requirements in Malaysia Public Preschools from Multiple Stakeholders' Perspectives. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal, 9* (SI22), 27–33. https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9iSI22.5810

Nadzmin Ahmad Nazir. Preliminary Findings of Structural Quality Requirements in Malaysia Public Preschools from Multiple Stakeholder's Perspectives, International Conference on Public Policy and Social Sciences (ICoPS) 2023 – Contemporary Public Administration & Governance on 13-15th September 2023.

Nazir, N. A., Harith, N. H. M., Samad, S. A. (2023). A Summative Content Analysis on Malaysia Policy Documents of Preschool Quality. International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences, 13(2), 947-959. http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARAFMS/v13-i2/18066

Nadzmin Ahmad Nazir. A Summative Content Analysis on Malaysia Policy Documents of Preschool Quality. 9th International Conference on Social and Science Research (CSSR) 2022 – Addresssing Global Challenges for Societal Well-Being on 14-15th December 2022.

Ahmad Nazir, N., Mohamed Harith, N. H., & Abd Samad, S. (2022). A Systematic Literature Review of Structural Quality Policy Implementation in Public Preschools. Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 7(9), e001779. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i9.1779.

Nadzmin Ahmad Nazir. The Challenges of Structural Quality for Policy Implementation in Public Preschools: A Systematic Review, 7th International Conference on Public Policy and Social Sciences (ICoPS) 2019 - Embracing Neo-Technology Through the Lens of Social Sciences on 18-19th November 2019.

Nadzmin Ahmad Nazir. Structural Quality for Policy Implementation: A Conceptual Overview, 3rd International Conference of Social Science and Education (ICSSED) 2019 – Challenges of Social Sciences and Education for Achieving SDGs on 23rd-26th July 2019.