

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Kindergarten Teachers' Beliefs on the Implementation of Play-Based Learning (PBL) in China

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ABSTRACT

Kindergarten teachers' beliefs play a vital role in the implementation of Play-Based Learning (PBL) pedagogy. This study aims to analyze the impact of teachers' beliefs on the design, implementation, and evaluation of play-based pedagogy through semi-structured interviews with two public kindergarten teachers. The results show that teachers' beliefs directly affect the positioning of play in the curriculum, the selection of play content, and the combination with teaching objectives. Teachers' professional development and policy environment also play an important role in the formation and change of beliefs. This study provides practical suggestions for promoting the further development of play-based teaching in Early Childhood Education of China.

Keywords: *kindergarten teachers' belief, play-based learning (PBL), case study, teachers' professional development*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, play have received widespread attention as an important form of early childhood education. Most researches have shown that play is beneficial to children's academic learning and enhances their academic skills (Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). Play not only provides children with a way to explore their environment and build their individuality but also offers them unique knowledge (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015). However, the implementation of PBL pedagogy often faces conflicts between teaching objective and play freedom in China, and teachers' beliefs play a key role in this process. Teachers' beliefs are their views and attitudes on educational values, teaching goals and practice methods. These beliefs affect their understanding of play and their application in teaching.

Teachers' beliefs about the purpose of education (i.e., students' learning goals) often influence their teaching practice, which also includes whether and how teachers integrate play-based instruction (Gordon, 2005; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Understanding teachers' perceptions of play-based learning has far-reaching implications for theory-

building, practice, teacher education and future policy development (Pyle et al., 2017).

In addition to this, it is important to consider the teachers' embrace of flexibility and variation in play-based instruction. This is well demonstrated in Pyle, Prioletta, and Poliszczuk's (2018) study, where they identified two different groups of teachers: one group used free play in their teaching and the other group integrated different types of play.

Research Objective

This study aims to explore the belief of Chinese kindergarten teachers hold about the pbl; to investigate the teaching practice adopted by kindergarten teachers to support children during play; to explore the indirect impact of external factors on the implementation of PBL through teachers' beliefs.

Research Problem

1. What beliefs do kindergarten teachers hold about PBL?
2. How do kindergarten teachers support

children's play with their teaching practice?
3. How do policies, parental expectations and other external factors affect the implementation of game teaching by influencing teachers' beliefs?

This study explores the impact of kindergarten teachers' beliefs on the implementation of PBL in China, and provides important theoretical and practical value for the implementation of PBL. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the research on the impact of teachers' beliefs on teaching practice and deepens the understanding of the field of PBL. From a practical perspective, this study can provide targeted guidance and suggestions for kindergarten teachers to improve the quality of implementing of PBL. At the same time, this study provides a basis for supervisor and manager to formulate more effective training policies and support measures. In addition, this study also has positive significance for promoting collaboration among parents, policymakers and educators, promoting the popularization and development of PBL education, and creating a better educational environment for the all-round development of young children.

METHOD

Research Design

“How” and “Why” questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of a case study (Yin, 2018). This study adopts the case study method in qualitative research. The case study method can provide rich insights into research problems through detailed analysis of specific individuals or groups.

Participants

The sample selection method of case study mainly follows the principle of purposeful sampling. According to the research purpose and problem, samples that can represent specific phenomena or

have rich information are selected in a targeted manner.

This study mainly uses the Typical Case Sampling and Homogeneous Sampling method to select participants. First, a kindergarten that is relatively representative of PBL in China was selected, and then two qualified teachers were selected from following three conditions (see Table 1):

1. Possess a bachelor's degree in early-childhood education;
2. Have received relevant training in PBL pedagogy;
3. Have been engaged in PBL pedagogy more than 3 years.

Table 1. The Information of Teacher Participants

No	Age	Years of Teaching in PBL	Professional Training Experience
T1	29	6	Received multiple PBL teaching training programs
T2	26	4	Completed several PBL teaching training sessions

Data Collection

This study mainly uses semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, supplemented by observation and analysis of teaching materials.

1. Semi-structured interviews:

open-ended questions were designed to focus on teachers' beliefs on PBL, the process of belief formation, application in teaching practice, and their understanding of relationship between play and learning, and integrating with teaching objectives. The interview time for each teacher was about 60 minutes, and the entire interview process was recorded and transcribed.

2. Teaching observation:

enter the classroom where the research participant is located, observe the specific implementation process of their PBL teaching, and record the specific performance of teachers in play design, guidance and evaluation.

3. Analysis of teaching materials:

collect and analyze the PBL plans and related teaching records designed by teachers to further verify and supplement the interview data.

Data Analysis

This study uses Thematic analysis to analyze data. Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clark, 2006). The specific steps are as follows:

- **Data collation and transcription:**
transcribe the interview recordings into text, and organize observation records and teaching materials.
- **Coding and classification:**
code the transcribed text and related materials paragraph by paragraph, and extract core themes related to the research questions, such as "play positioning", "goal integration", "external influence", etc.
- **Thematic induction and analysis:**
classify the preliminary coding, and combine the case details to extract the key themes reflecting the relationship between teachers' beliefs and PBL, revealing its internal logic.
- **Comparative analysis:**
compare the differences in beliefs and practices between the two teachers, and analyze the common factors and individual specificity behind them.

RESULTS

Through data collection and analysis, this study has drawn the following findings:

1. The different beliefs the teachers hold and the impact of beliefs on the positioning of PBL education

T1 believes that play is an important way for children to explore and learn independently, and reserves sufficient time in the teaching plan for children to freely choose play activities.

T2 tends to use play as a tool for teaching objective, and believes that play activities should serve the imparting of knowledge and skills. This instrumental positioning leads to the compression of game time and the uniformity and structure of content.

2. The influence of beliefs on the integration of play content and teaching objectives

Teachers' beliefs not only determine the selection of play content, but also affect the combination of play and teaching objectives.

T1 adopts children's interest-oriented content design to encourage children to learn spontaneously through play, such as role-playing and constructive games.

T2 tends to choose content related to subject knowledge, such as digital games and puzzles, and focuses on conveying specific knowledge through play.

3. The moderating effect of external factors on teachers' beliefs and practices

External factors such as policies, parental expectations, and colleagues' opinions further affect PBL education by influencing teachers' beliefs.

T1 mentioned that local kindergarten policies encourage PBL teaching, which makes them more willing to try a variety of game activities.

T2 pointed out that parents' high expectations for knowledge learning force them to focus on subject knowledge in teaching, and play is more of an auxiliary activity.

DISCUSSION

1. The difference in beliefs stems from the teachers' personal educational experience and training background. Teachers who have received PBL teaching training tend to attach more importance to the autonomy and child-centeredness of play, while teachers with more traditional teaching experience emphasize the goal orientation of play.

2. The influence of beliefs on play content reflects the teacher's trade-off between "child-oriented" and "goal-oriented". The former is conducive to stimulating children's learning interest and creativity, while the latter may limit children's autonomy and exploration.

3. Policy support and parental cognition are important external variables in the formation of teachers' beliefs. In an environment where the policy orientation is clear and parents support PBL teaching, it is easier for teachers to implement the concept of PBL education in practice.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the profound impact of teachers' beliefs on the implementation of PBL education in Chinese public kindergarten and provides evidence for understanding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices.

Teachers' educational beliefs significantly influence how play is positioned, designed, and implemented in the curriculum. Teachers who hold the belief of "child-centered" are more likely to regard play as core teaching method and design

creative and interactive activities, while other beliefs may lead to the weakening of the functions of play.

Teachers' educational experience and professional training play an important role in the formation of their beliefs. Teachers who have received professional training in PBL education and have rich teaching experience are more likely to form a belief system based on child development, thereby promoting the diversification and effective implementation of PBL education.

External factors such as policy requirements and parent expectations indirectly affect PBL education by affecting teachers' beliefs. Teachers will consider external pressure and personal beliefs in actual teaching to adjust the practice of PBL education.

In order to better promote the implementation of PBL education in China, the following practical suggestions are put forward:

1. Strengthen professional training

The education department should provide more professional training on the concept and practice of PBL education for kindergarten teachers, help teachers update their educational beliefs, enhance their understanding and recognition of the value of PBL education, and improve their practical ability.

2. Optimize policy support

Develop a policy framework to support PBL teaching, and reduce the implementation pressure of teachers through clear guidance and resource investment. At the same time, through publicity activities, enhance parents' recognition of the importance of PBL education and create a more relaxed teaching environment for teachers.

3. Build a cooperative environment

Encourage communication and cooperation among teachers, build a professional learning community, and jointly explore innovative ways of PBL pedagogy. By sharing experiences and

practical cases, enrich the form and connotation of PBL education, and further improve the effectiveness and fun of PBL teaching.

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DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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