

RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING THE CHILD-CENTRED MONTESSORI CURRICULUM**¹ZHOU YUAN, ¹MOHD NAZRI BIN ABDUL RAHMAN***23066008@siswa.um.edu.m^[1]Faculty of Education Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**ABSTRACT**

The Montessori curriculum is one of the most popular types of kindergarten curriculum nowadays, which is also in accordance with the rules of physical and mental development of young children, and at the same time, the Montessori curriculum is also the favourite curriculum of many parents and teachers. In this paper, the authors used literature analysis and interviews with two kindergarten teachers in Montessori kindergarten in Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province, China, to explore the current status of Montessori curriculum implementation in kindergartens.

Keywords: *early childhood education, montessori curriculum, young children*

ABSTRAK

Kurikulum Montessori adalah salah satu jenis kurikulum taman kanak-kanak yang paling populer saat ini, yang juga sesuai dengan kaidah perkembangan fisik dan mental anak usia dini, dan pada saat yang sama, kurikulum Montessori juga menjadi kurikulum favorit banyak orang tua dan guru, dalam makalah ini, penulis menggunakan analisis literatur dan wawancara dengan dua orang guru taman kanak-kanak di Taman Kanak-Kanak Montessori di Kota Taizhou, Provinsi Zhejiang, Cina, untuk mengeksplorasi status implementasi kurikulum Montessori di taman kanak-kanak saat ini.

Kata kunci: *anak usia dini, kurikulum montessori, pendidikan anak usia dini*

INTRODUCTION

“The Montessori education method is the educational philosophy and method designed by Maria Montessori of Italy in 1907” (Chen & Shu, 2024, p. 27). On 6 January 1907, Mrs Maria Montessori founded the world's first children's home in Italy. She used the method of educating children with developmental disabilities to educate normal children. This experiment was a great success and can be described as a miracle in the field of education. The Montessori curriculum sees the child as an active learner, and the curriculum also advocates that adults provide children with a prepared environment, mixed-age education and

freedom. As Montessori's curriculum was a new idea in the field of education, it soon attracted early childhood educators from different countries, including America and Asia. “It was first introduced in China over 100 years ago yet remained underdeveloped until the 1990s and 2000s” (Chen & Shu, 2024, pp. 27-28). In the 1990s, driven by the forces of globalisation and educational reform, China's education sector began to revisit and embrace the Montessori philosophy.

In the 21st century, the Montessori approach gained even more traction in China, gradually evolving into a model that blends traditional Montessori principles with local cultural

elements. Today, Montessori education is seen not only as a teaching method, but as a comprehensive educational framework aimed at fostering independence and promoting children's social, emotional and cognitive growth. As educators increasingly recognise and respond to the developmental needs of young children, the Montessori curriculum will continue to shape early childhood education on a global scale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Montessori method promotes preparation for the child's future life rather than academic achievement. 'Child-centredness' is at the heart of the Montessori philosophy. The Montessori method promotes respect for the nature of the child as an active learner, while the teacher is guided to help the child achieve holistic growth. "With this respect, it can be stated that in the communication they establish with children the participant Montessori teachers show respect and love to the child and also, based on their observations, follow a line that takes into consideration the individual differences and needs of the child" (BAVLI & USLU KOCABAŞ, 2022, p. 457). At the same time, the 'prepared environment' is one of the most important elements of the Montessori method. "The person responsible for this environment is the adult, and they act as the link between the child and the environment, as they promote activities with the materials and space in which the child participates (Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñañiel, 2020, p.153).

Freedom, work and order are three very important elements in the Montessori curriculum. According to Montessori, freedom not only allows the child's needs to be met, it also allows the work to be in line with the child's interests and allows the child to concentrate on the work and achieve good order. The Montessori curriculum consists of daily living exercises, sensory training, muscle training and the acquisition of basic knowledge.

Firstly, sensory training occupies a particularly important place in the Montessori programme. Montessori designed a total of 16 sets

of teaching aids to help children develop their senses. "The materials stimulate the following senses: Tactile (through different textures). Visual (through shapes, sizes and colours). Thermic and baric (by materials of different temperature and weight). Auditory (using different tones and musical notes). Taste and smell (examining, for example, food and flowers). Stereognostic (recognizing objects by feeling their shape and other physical properties, without seeing them)" (Gasco-Txabarri & Zuazagoitia, 2022). Secondly, the daily living exercises aim to develop independence and autonomy, learn practical life skills and promote the development of attention, understanding, coordination, willpower and good life habits. Daily living exercises are both self-related and environment-related. Finally, there is muscle training and the acquisition of basic knowledge. Montessori muscle training helps children's development and health, their flexibility and coordination, as well as exercising their will and developing a spirit of cooperation. Montessori designed special equipment to help children with muscle training, such as climbing frames, springboards, rocking chairs and so on. Montessori believed that children should learn basic knowledge such as reading, writing and counting. When teaching arithmetic, in addition to using sensory tools, Montessori also designed a number of arithmetic teaching aids, such as counting sticks and spindle rods to help children understand 0-10. In reading and writing, the practice of writing always precedes the practice of reading. The children practise writing through tactile training. They also learn to recognise phonics, read words and understand sentences using Montessori designed alphabet teaching aids.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

In this study, two early childhood teachers in a Montessori kindergarten were selected to be interviewed.

Participants

Two early childhood teachers were selected for interviews. These two teachers are LI LUJIA and HUANG YIMAN, both of whom work at Little Smart Montessori Kindergarten in Taizhou. They have been working in this Montessori kindergarten since they graduated from university, LI LUJIA for ten years and HUANG YIMAN for five years.

Content of the interview

1. Aims, Goals, Objectives or Outcome Statements

(1) What kind of Montessori curriculum do you have in mind?

HUANG: I think Montessori class is such a curriculum that gives children freedom and respects their interests.

LI: I think that the Montessori course is a combine motion and static course. At the same time, I feel that the Montessori curriculum emphasises a strong sense of rules; firstly, each teaching aid has a specific way of playing, and secondly, the children have to put the teaching aids in their original place in order after the lesson.

(2) What do you think are the pedagogical goals of the Montessori curriculum ?

HUANG: I believe that the aim of the Montessori curriculum is to help children develop holistically and to develop both practical and problem-solving skills.

LI: I think the goal of the Montessori curriculum is that the child will be able to be more orderly as well as be able to co-operate with others.

2. Content, Domains or Subject Matter

(1) Do you know what areas the Montessori curriculum is divided into? Did you have any challenges with implementation?

HUANG: There are five main areas, daily living, sensory, maths, language and culture. Every child's needs are different and sometimes it is difficult to cater for all of them.

LI: There are five major areas in the Montessori curriculum, namely daily living, sensory, maths, language and culture. When the activity was going on, there were so many children

that I may not have been able to observe each child very well.

(2) What teaching aids do you use most often when implementing the Montessori curriculum? What are the reasons for this?

HUANG: I most often use aids in the sensory area, for example, the Pink Tower, because this aid helps children to recognise the concept of three-dimensional space and this aid is very helpful in the development of the child's mind.

LI: I most often use teaching aids in the area of maths, such as counting sticks, which develop children's mathematical skills and provide a solid foundation for future learning.

(3) How did you decide on the content of the event?

HUANG: I generally decide on activities based on the ability level of the majority of the children in my classroom.

LI: I will choose activities that take into account the child's developmental level and the child's interests.

3. Methods or Procedures

(1) What is your role when children are involved in Montessori curriculum? How do you teach the Montessori curriculum?

HUANG: I usually play the role of a conductor during the activity. I will teach the child the basic operation of the teaching aids and then let the child practise. If the child makes a mistake when practising, I will not tell her/him how to do it, but will use guiding words to guide her/him to find out the mistake by herself/himself. When the child still does not understand how to do it, I will demonstrate.

LI: I usually take the role of an observer and a guide when conducting activities. In terms of teaching and guidance, I usually demonstrate the operation to the children before giving them time to operate the teaching aids. When the children encounter operation problems, I usually encourage them to solve the problems by themselves before seeking help from the teacher or their peers.

4. Evaluations and Assessment

(1) How do you assess whether children are at the level they should be after training?

HUANG: In terms of assessment, I will judge whether they have reached the desired level by how well they handle the teaching aids. At the same time, I will record the children's performance each time, and if it is better than the last time, it means that there is progress.

LI: In terms of assessment, I will observe and record the children's performance in the activities and assess them according to their proficiency in using the teaching aids and their concentration in participating in the activities. However, sometimes different teaching aids are used so I will be flexible in my assessment.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview I have the following findings. Firstly, the Montessori curriculum advocates respecting the child, giving the child freedom, focusing on the child's interests and commitment to laying a solid foundation for the child's all-round development. Secondly, the Montessori curriculum includes a rich variety of areas, including training in practical skills, such as daily living skills, and training in basic knowledge, such as mathematics and language. Meanwhile, in the Montessori programme, the teacher plays the role of guide and observer, giving the children the time and space to solve problems on their own. Finally, due to the large number of children in a classroom, early childhood teachers are not able to cater for each child when selecting activities and assessments, and therefore some children's needs are sometimes not met, which is a challenge for programme implementation.

In conclusion, the Montessori programme, when properly implemented, is very beneficial to the overall development of young children. Early childhood teachers are also very supportive of the design of teaching aids and activities in the Montessori programme. However, it is sometimes difficult for early childhood teachers to achieve the desired results when implementing the Montessori programme due to the constraints of the conditions. Therefore, the relevant authorities, such as local

governments or kindergartens, should pay attention to this problem and actively solve it.

CONCLUSION

The Montessori curriculum was researched through literature and interviews with two Montessori kindergarten teachers from Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province, China. Firstly, the author found that the Montessori curriculum is a child-centred curriculum that starts with the interests and needs of the children and helps them to achieve holistic development. Secondly, the teacher plays the role of a guide in implementing the Montessori programme and the children are the protagonists of the programme.

However, there are still some problems and challenges in practicing the Montessori curriculum in real life, such as too many children for teachers to manage, which leads to implementing the Montessori curriculum with half the effort. But in this paper, only qualitative research such as literature and interviews have been used to explore the Montessori curriculum, which can be one-sided. Therefore, quantitative research can be used in future studies to explore the implementation status of the Montessori curriculum.

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