

Optimization Study of Game Activities for Early Childhood Teachers in the Context of High-Quality Development: A Case Study of Language Game Activities

Mei Tingxian^{1,2}, Gao Jie³, Tang Xing⁴, Loy Chee Luen^{5*}

¹Department of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia, ²College of Education Science Zhaotong College Yunnan, China, ³Institute of Humanities and Teacher Education, Wuyi University, Wuyishan 354300, Fujian, China, ⁴Educational Psychologist, Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia, ⁵Department of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i2/21427>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i2/21427

Published Online: 10 May 2024

Abstract

Since 2021, the Chinese government has successively issued a series of documents, such as "Opinions on Implementing the Action Plan for Enhancing the Quality of Basic Education in the New Era" and "Draft Law of the People's Republic of China on Preschool Education," emphasizing the high-quality development of preschool education. However, in practical application, the gamification of kindergarten curriculum teaching has not reached an ideal state under the background of high-quality preschool education development. This study, employing research methods including literature review and interviews, found issues such as insufficient professional competence among teachers, monotonous game design and organization, and low levels of children's participation. Therefore, through strategies such as conducting specialized training on game activities, updating teachers' perceptions, setting reasonable teaching objectives, and diversifying content selection, this study implements differentiated teaching to help teachers overcome challenges in game-based teaching, continuously enhance their professional competence, and achieve the high-quality development of preschool education.

Keywords: High-quality Development, Language Games, Professional Competence

Introduction

In July 2023, the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued the "Opinions on Implementing the Action Plan for Enhancing the Quality of Basic Education in the New Era," further emphasizing the need to "accelerate the construction of a high-quality basic education system with excellent nurturing in early childhood and excellent teaching in schools." In August 2023, the "Draft Law of the People's Republic of China on Preschool Education" was submitted for the first review at the Fifth Session of the Fourteenth National People's Congress Standing

Committee, aiming to promote the universal, accessible, safe, and high-quality development of preschool education through specialized legislation.

The "Outline of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Goals for 2035" proposed the construction of a high-quality, professionalized teacher workforce and raised higher requirements for the teaching and educating abilities of teachers in the new era. As an essential force to ensure the high-quality development of preschool education, preschool teachers must continuously learn and innovate, enhance their professional competence, and strive to become high-quality, professional, innovative teachers in the new era. The emphasis on the high-quality development of preschool education reiterates the importance of games. The concept of "game-based activities" has become the consensus among preschool education workers in China. However, in reality, the gamification of kindergarten curriculum faces challenges such as neglecting children, inadequate teacher capabilities, and weak professional competence, transitioning from teaching gamification to curriculum gamification, posing many challenges (Song Yu, 2022).

Problems in Language Game Activities

(1) Weak Professional Competence of Teachers, Difficulty in Organizing High-Quality Language Game Activities

Lin Chongde believes that the professional competence of teachers includes: professional ideals, level of knowledge, educational concepts, teaching monitoring ability, teaching behavior, and strategies (Lin Chongde, Shen Jiliang, Xin Tao, 1996). Ye Lan believes that the professional competence of teachers includes five dimensions: professional spirit, knowledge, ability, educational philosophy, and wisdom (Ye Lan, 1998). In this study, the professional competence of preschool teachers mainly refers to their ability to store knowledge of preschool education, professional skills, and educational concepts.

In the interview survey, it was found that when asked "What do you understand by language games? What types are there? Do you organize language games specifically?" most teachers gave vague answers, and some even answered irrelevantly. The following are some of the responses given by teachers during the interviews:

Teacher Z responded, "As far as I know, language games generally refer to tongue twisters, catchphrases, and singing nursery rhymes. I haven't really categorized them into specific types, so I'm not very clear."

Teacher W stated, "Most of the time, we integrate these activities into pre-meal activities or various aspects of daily life. Apart from when we focus on language teaching activities, we mostly conduct language games during transitional periods. I would have children play some finger games and sing nursery rhymes."

As a result, preschool teachers perceive nursery rhymes and songs as language game activities. The lack of understanding of the concept and connotation of language games among preschool teachers leads to unclear delineation of language games. Understanding and recognizing the essence of games is a prerequisite for designing and organizing high-quality games. However, the survey found that most preschool teachers lack professional dedication and self-drive, which are the spiritual driving forces that promote the continuous development of their professional competence.

Combined with insufficient professional knowledge reserves and inadequate post-learning motivation, preschool teachers lack creativity in language game design, resulting in

educational and entertaining deficiencies in game design. Even the setting of game objectives is unreasonable, and the implementation of games is not smooth. In terms of game guidance, teachers lack child-centered educational concepts. In actual game teaching, preschool teachers find it difficult to grasp the key points of guidance, unable to effectively guide children to participate in games, resolve conflicts, and foster cooperation. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the professional training and emotional literacy cultivation of preschool teachers, enhance their educational dedication and professional competence, in order to better guide children's game activities and improve the quality of game design and organization.

(2) Individual Differences in Children, Leading to Teachers' Difficulty in Controlling the Difficulty Level of Language Games

The "Guidelines for Preschool Education" states: "Respect the individual differences of children in development level, ability, experience, and learning methods, teach according to their aptitude, and strive to ensure that every child can achieve satisfaction and success." Children in the same grade have similar ages, and their physical and mental development patterns and characteristics are generally similar. However, each child is an individual with unique growth experiences, and their developmental speed varies, resulting in individual differences. Therefore, children develop at different rates in various aspects, with some progressing faster than others. If teachers only consider children who develop quickly, it may result in slower-developing children falling behind, but if teachers only cater to slower-developing children, faster-developing children may lose interest in the game activities due to lack of challenge.

This poses significant challenges and obstacles for preschool teachers, especially novice teachers. Teachers often find it difficult to control the depth of game output during game organization. Overly challenging game designs may lead to children's difficulties in understanding, hindering smooth implementation of the game. Conversely, overly simplistic and shallow content may prevent children from achieving the game objectives. This irreconcilable contradiction has become a major practical dilemma in the design and development of game activities for many teachers. Therefore, preschool teachers need to comprehensively understand and follow the laws of children's physical and mental development, and respect children's individual differences. Only by fully understanding the laws of children's physical and mental development can teachers adapt their teaching methods to each child's unique needs.

(3) Monotonous Design and Organization of Game Content, Failing to Stimulate Children's Interest

In the survey, it was found that some preschool teachers have insufficient understanding of game-based teaching, neglecting its impact on various aspects of children, resulting in mechanical and monotonous games that lack the ability to engage children actively. Some teachers excessively intervene in children's game behaviors due to safety and educational considerations, leading to mismatches between the game requirements and children's developmental needs, resulting in low levels of participation and effectiveness in games (Zhao Dongmei, 2024).

Most teachers indicated that their teaching needs to align with the kindergarten's curriculum plan, implying that they are required to select lesson plans and game content from fixed textbooks. Furthermore, many teachers have a limited grasp of children's characteristics and interests, lacking creativity and hesitating to select diverse game content. Organizing games based solely on textbook content, or even directly imitating others without any modification or reflection, results in a lack of game innovation. Currently, due to the large class sizes, with some classes having 40-50 children, teachers are overwhelmed with daily routines and the cultivation of children's self-care abilities, lacking the energy to observe and record children. Preschool teachers lack the ability to keenly observe children, leading to an inaccurate understanding of the developmental potential and interests of children in the class, resulting in activities often neglecting children's feelings (Zeng Mengyao, 2018). The repetition of monotonous language game content does not meet the needs of children's interests and is not conducive to achieving the language goals proposed in the "Guidelines for the Learning and Development of 3-6 Year-Old Children."

The research aims to enhance the quality of language game teaching for preschool children by conducting specialized game-themed training, updating teachers' perspectives, and enriching the methods and content of language game design and organization. Through differentiated teaching, the objective is to improve children's listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills, preparing them better for the learning environment in elementary school.

Research Objective

Through conducting specialized training on games, updating teachers' perspectives, and enriching the methods and content of language game design and organization, this study aims to achieve differentiated teaching, enhance the teaching quality of language games for preschool children, and help children improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills, thus preparing them better for elementary school learning and life.

Research Methodology

This study employs a combination of literature review, observational methods, and semi-structured interviews.

Strategies to Improve the Quality of Language Game Activities for Preschool Teachers

(1) Precision Training to Enhance Preschool Teachers' Ability in Organizing and Guiding Games

Lifelong learning is one of the basic requirements for kindergarten teachers according to the "Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial Implementation)" (2011). Implicit in this requirement is the notion that kindergarten teachers are lifelong learners. Guided by the concept of lifelong learning, preschool teachers can handle the increasingly diverse educational practices in kindergartens through continuous learning and research. In-service training is an effective practice in implementing the concept of lifelong learning. As a special form of education, in-service training possesses the purposes, planning, organization, and scientific nature of educational activities. Generally, based on the actual educational situation, kindergartens organize teacher training sessions to address identified issues or deficiencies or focus on specific themes (Sun Yongxia, Tian Wenwen, 2018).

In the interview survey, teachers generally expressed that they participate in various types of training during each semester break, but some of the training content is not what they need. Some teachers mentioned that they hope the training content can be flexibly adjusted according to the actual needs of preschool teachers. For example, in terms of cultivation, specialized training sessions can be added on the conceptual understanding and value of language games, the design and organization of language games, selection of language game materials, case analysis, etc. The training methods can include "observation and discussion" and "case study" approaches. Emphasizing practical activities such as observing and analyzing game cases as essential components of preschool teachers' professional competency development.

To promote the professional development of preschool teachers and improve the quality of early childhood education, it is necessary to conduct targeted specialized training based on the update of educational concepts. This helps preschool teachers to grasp more advanced educational concepts and enhance the quality of early childhood education. For example, regarding the currently popular game-based teaching in China, teachers need to establish a new perspective on games, learn and understand the classification of games, the relationships between different types of games, the value and rules of games, and have clear and accurate understanding and grasp of the role positioning of teachers in games. Only then can teachers truly improve their ability to organize and guide games.

(2) Establishing a New Teacher Perspective to Achieve Differentiated Teaching

Under the backdrop of high-quality preschool education development, the high demands on preschool teachers undoubtedly pose significant challenges to their inherent ways of thinking and working habits. Firstly, teachers must clarify the purpose of their development and truly integrate their professional development with children's development. This requires a transformation of their curriculum views, game views, and child views to truly activate and enhance the motivation for professional development. Secondly, teachers need to have a sense of being active participants in the reform process, rather than simply positioning themselves as "executors". Participating in the curriculum gamification as "participants" will enhance their awareness of professional development. Lastly, teachers should possess a certain level of self-efficacy, have a rational understanding of their own development status, make a calm value judgment on their professional development level, identify areas for improvement, set stage-specific goals, and gradually enhance their confidence in participating in reforms. Establishing a new teacher perspective requires teachers to build a framework in game-based teaching activities, carefully observe and flexibly teach, reject the "one-size-fits-all" approach, and enhance their awareness and observational skills towards children. Through observation, teachers can better understand the needs, interests, and developmental levels of each child, thereby mastering the characteristics of individual differences among children and implementing differentiated teaching (Chunzhen, 2024).

In differentiated teaching, teachers can continuously enrich the hierarchical structure of the "framework" according to the actual situation, making game activities variable, with varying difficulty levels, and a mix of simplicity and complexity. Especially in language game teaching, to achieve the goal of enhancing children's listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills, teachers should closely follow the requirements of the objectives, encourage children

to speak and imitate more, and implement differentiated teaching in game language. Following the differential laws of child development, when formulating language learning plans for children, it is necessary to combine the local development status and specific characteristics of children to ensure the effectiveness of the plans. Secondly, a good language game environment greatly assists in promoting children's language learning ability development. In the daily language game teaching process, teachers should be adept at creating a language environment, with game designs emphasizing children's listening and expression sections, and grasping the key and difficult points in teaching (Zhang Haifeng, 2015).

(3) Setting Language Game Teaching Objectives Reasonably and Diversifying Content Selection

The setting of language game teaching objectives must be child-centered, with a focus on language abilities, especially the cultivation of listening and expression skills. When setting language game teaching objectives, attention should be paid to children's real-life experiences, whether it is their family life experiences or kindergarten life experiences, which are invaluable for children. Preschool teachers should have the ability to propose clear and diverse teaching objectives, starting with children's age characteristics and using their knowledge base as the starting point for setting teaching objectives (He Jing, 2022). Additionally, the subject of the objectives should focus on the children, and the objectives should be clearly directed. Preschool teachers should clearly understand that the setting of objectives is to encourage children to actively participate in language game activities, and objectives should always be adjusted according to the actual developmental level of the children. For example, if it is observed that children in the class have low listening skills, then appropriate listening exercises can be added to the games, such as organizing auditory recognition games where children listen to different animal sounds and guess which animal it is. The "Outline" clearly states that the education content in kindergarten is comprehensive and needs to promote the development of children's emotions, attitudes, abilities, knowledge, skills, and other aspects from different perspectives. Therefore, the objectives of language game education activities should be appropriately integrated and permeated with other areas.

However, the choice of content is closely related to the setting of objectives. Overly generalized objectives are not conducive to the selection and implementation of activity content, which can hinder the implementation of language game activities and deviate from the activity objectives. The investigation found that the selection of game teaching materials in kindergartens is often outdated. When selecting language game content, especially, attention should be paid to children's own life experiences and characteristics, shifting the focus from the game activities themselves to the children themselves. Establishing a child-centered view of children. Only by fully engaging children in game participation can the game objectives be better achieved.

Conclusion and Discussion

In summary, in the context of high-quality preschool education, teachers need to continuously update their teaching philosophy, establish new educational perspectives, and focus on child-centered approaches while continually improving their professional competence. Only in this way can teachers highlight their strengths in the curriculum and

design and organize more diverse game activities that are in line with the developmental patterns and characteristics of children.

Especially in language game teaching activities, teachers need to strengthen their training and learning in language games and deeply understand their importance. Through the organization and implementation of language games, preschool teachers help children improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. This not only contributes to the development of children's language skills but also lays a solid foundation for their future adaptation to elementary school learning life.

Therefore, teachers should continuously explore innovative teaching methods, actively participate in professional training and learning, and constantly improve their educational levels and abilities. Only in this way can they better fulfill their educational responsibilities, promote the comprehensive development of children, and make greater contributions to the transition from preschool to primary education.

Contribution

This research fills a research gap in the field of language game teaching in kindergarten, providing significant contributions to educational practice. By exploring the effectiveness and implementation methods of language game teaching, this study offers strong support for enhancing the language game teaching of preschool teachers.

Firstly, the study delves into the importance of language games in children's learning, revealing their positive impact on children's listening, oral expression, reading comprehension, and writing abilities. This helps educators better understand the value and significance of language games in children's language development.

Secondly, the research findings provide practical teaching strategies and improvement suggestions for preschool teachers. Through designing and implementing game-based language teaching activities, teachers can stimulate children's learning interests, enhance their participation and concentration, and effectively promote the development of children's language abilities.

Overall, this research contributes to both the theoretical and practical aspects of language game teaching in kindergarten, providing strong support for enhancing children's language abilities and the quality of preschool education.

References

- Song, Y. (2022). The Realistic Dilemma and Optimization Path of Kindergarten Curriculum Gamification [J]. *Journal of Ningbo Institute of Education*.
- Lin, C. D., Shen, J. L., & Xin, T. (1996). The Composition of Teacher Quality and Its Training Approaches [J]. *Chinese Educational Sciences*.
- Ye, L. (1998). Preliminary Exploration of Teacher Professional Literacy in the New Century [J]. *Education Research and Experimentation*.
- Zhao, D. M. (2024). Exploration of Teaching Strategies for Preschool Education in the Perspective of Gamification [J]. *Preschool Education Forum*.

- Zeng, M. Y. (2018). Investigation and Research on the Teaching Ability of New Kindergarten Teachers [D]. Xi'an: Shaanxi Normal University.
- Huang, C. Z. (2024). Exploration of Strategies for Integrating Scaffold Teaching Concept into Mathematical Teaching Activities in Kindergartens [J]. Mathematics Teaching and Research.
- Zhang, H. F. (2015). How to Do Differentiated Teaching of Preschool Language [J]. Reading and Writing Magazine.
- He, J. (2022). Analysis of the Policy Basis for the Localization Development of Music Teaching Methods in China [J]. Journal of Hubei University of Engineering.