

A Project entitled

**Impacts and Challenges of Integrating Play-Based Learning into Young
Children's Literacy Development in Hong Kong**

Submitted by

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submitted to The Education University of Hong Kong

for the degree of *Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education)*

in *April 2023*

Declaration

I, *ALCONABA LEXLI FLORES*, declare that this research report/ project report represents my own work under the supervision of *Dr. VALDEZ, Jana Patricia Millonado*, and that it has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

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Impacts and Challenges of Integrating Play-Based Learning into Young Children's Literacy Development in Hong Kong

Abstract

The education system in Hong Kong has been emphasizing on academic-based learning which fade-out the significance of play-based approach in kindergartens due to cultural constraints; Confucius Philosophy and the high requirements of primary school admission. The present study investigated the effectiveness of play-based approach in children's English listening; comprehension skills and explored parents' perspective towards academic-based and play-based approaches. A total of 55 participants involving 3 teachers, 26 children and 26 parents were recruited in this study. A mixed-methods research; quantitative was executed through within-subjects experimental design and survey questionnaire. The results revealed that there was a strong significant difference; $t(25) = -4.66$, $p = <.001$ in children's English listening assessment scores between the academic-based; $M=80$ and play-based interventions; $M=90$. The results from the survey questionnaire indicated that low social economic status (SES) parents claimed that play-based approach enhances children's active engagement while Middle SES parents conveyed that Covid19 has caused financial crisis, hindering children's opportunity to learn through play in international kindergartens. It was also found that (SES) parents were familiar of play-based approach compared to middle SES parents. Defects of the research study were also presented along with feasible and effective tactics to improve the sample size , learning environment and research design. It is hoped that this study will broaden future educators' and parents' horizons in compromising the importance of striking a balance of academic learning and play-based learning.

Keywords: cultural constraints , Confucius philosophy, primary school admission, academic-based learning, play-based approach, social-economic status

Introduction

How is play defined? Play comes in diverse forms in which children are found to be intrinsically motivated as in terms of the timespan , between 3% to 20% of the time were spent on play, however it was argued that the significance of play is being diminished due to the educational system and cultural constraints (Smith , 2013).

In the view of Hong Kong's current situation, there have been numerous obstacles faced by both kindergarten educators and parents. The underlying reason is due to the high requirements of primary school admission which results in a lack of play-based learning for young children (Wang , 2018). Therefore , the parents have been seeking and demanding for more of an academic teaching approach (teacher-directed) from teachers in order for their children to excel academically. However, it potentially creates a barrier for teachers in executing play-based activities in kindergartens.

In western context , specifically in the United States, play has been considered as the core and foundation of children's learning as it is believed that the approach positively contributes to their language development (Borst , 2021). Borst (2021) even emphasized the importance of school-parent-child collaborations when engaging in play activities to develop children's literacy skills ; reading , writing , speaking , listening. However , in comparison with Hong Kong , it was discovered that there is an absolute absence of play as although there is parental involvement and they value their children's learning especially English language , they tend to adopt an academic-based of guidance and support rather than integrating play into their teaching support (Forey , Besser & Sampson , 2015) which also is an issue that occurs today. Therefore , the association of the culture and the parenting style are some possible factors that affect the implementation and integration of play and children's play opportunities to further enrich their language development.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the effectiveness of play-based approach in children's English listening skills and to explore parents' perspective on academic-based and play-based approaches. To obtain in-sights on the significance of play and other related issues, a wide range of in-depth explanations along with evidence will be stated in the literature review.

Literature Review

Types of Play that Promote Children's Literacy Development

In 2017 , the Hong Kong Education Bureau has redefined the curriculum by providing adequate information on various types of play such as make-believe play and constructive play (Hong Kong Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide , 2017). Moreover, in comparison between the curriculum guide of 2006 and 2017 , it is found that the recent development is the application of I.T. advancement ; interactive wall , iPads which in fact, these devices are also utilized for play purposes and that digital play is essential to scaffold children's language learning (Westhuizen & Hannaway , 2021). The explanation on the significance of the diverse plays in children's literacy are as follows.

Make-Believe Play

Vygotsky states that the implementation and execution of imaginative play activities as a daily routine and practice will help children to develop their language skills through constant peer to peer social interactions (McLeod , 2020)., children who actively engaged in role play activities have shown significant improvements in their language skills as they have acquired extensive vocabulary and further enhanced their syntax skills (grammar – structured sentence pattern) at the same time. Besides that, Vygotsky (1987) has also addressed and highlighted the significance of 'private speech' which is a correlation between children's cognitive and language development and the children's practice of private speech usually occurs during their

time in pretend play sessions (McLeod , 2020). For instance , based on a study cited by Berk and Meyers (2013) , a mixed group of children aged 2 to 6 years were recruited in a pretend play and it was observed that regardless of their age , they were able to exhibit self-talks (private speech) during the task challenges. This then reveals that make-believe play is crucial for children’s daily literacy practice.

Constructive Play

According to the integrated ideas of Vygotsky and Piaget on the theory of constructivism , it mainly consists of two areas that include social and cognitive in which establishing constructive activities with collaborative tasks such as building blocks to promote the development of language through social interactions (McLeod , 2020). In particular , Mielonen and Paterson (2009) conducted a study on two 5-year-old girls and the results indicated that the collaboration of the children in the play activities such as the art activity and sensory play (sand and sticks) has helped them develop their writing and speaking skills. To further elaborate , it was observed that the child wrote a short message ‘Jamie , I love you.’ while the other child mimicked her peer and got her to write ‘Mommy’ and as they write, they even applied their phonetic knowledge of blending the sounds to create meanings of the terms (Mielonen and Paterson , 2009). With this study, based on Bandura’s theory of social learning (1977), there are changes in ones’ behaviour which also impacts language development through observations , imitations and peer influence (Cherry , 2021). Therefore, it is then proven that constructive play is one of the reliable approaches to enrich ones’ literacy skills by incorporating more interactive and collaborative tasks.

Digital Play

Nowadays , the trend in Hong Kong kindergartens is the utilization of various digital devices ; interactive walls , iPads , computers , tablets , etc. as it is believed that exposing children to the digital world will strengthen their learning development. In western context, according to a study conducted by Westhuizen and Hannaway (2021) , 3 teachers claimed that the use of digital devices are highly effective towards children’s language development as they’ve integrated it into mathematics as well. For instance , with the children’s digital experience , they were able to understand and acquire new vocabularies such as ‘longest’ and ‘shortest’ . As a result , the teachers valued the importance of digital play as it enables children to further develop their language through active participation and interaction.

Apart from that, in Hong Kong context, based on a study conducted by Leung and Hu (2019), the integration of digital toys; robots into the STEM curriculum and activities have positively impact children’s learning and holistic development. Throughout the children’s participation into the experimentations, it was discovered that children began to showcase active engagement, high self-esteem, enhancement of social-emotional skills; interaction, collaboration, and cognitive skills; creativity, problem-solving skills. Therefore, it is evident how the implementation and execution of digital play creates a positive learning environment.

Teacher Perspectives on the Integration of Play

According to Lam (2018) , Hong Kong teachers do encounter obstacles in implementing and integrating play into children’s learning. In particular , although there are trainings , the teachers did not gain practical skills on play-based learning which also caused a hassle for them in setting a playful learning environment due to insufficient space and the limited time duration affecting the slot for playtime. In addition , the kindergarten and parents did not value the importance of play-based learning as they were keen on academic-based learning. This then

has led the teachers to execute structured lesson plans with academic-based objectives and a teacher-directed approach was practiced which eliminated the presence of play.

Challenges of Play-Based Learning in Local and International Kindergartens

In comparison between local and International kindergartens , they do not experience the same issues of implementing and practising the play-based learning approach due to the social-cultural factor. In local kindergartens, according to Wu (2021) , it was found that teachers encouraged children to engage into more play-based activities and suggested to provide them the autonomy to choose their preferred types of play, however parents' expectations and beliefs mainly affected the effectiveness of the execution of play-based learning. In particular, parents believed that children need to be academically trained and educated for primary school transition and readiness and even doubted the effectiveness of play-based approach towards their learning development. Therefore, this has caused the approach to be unsuccessfully executed.

Moving onto international kindergartens in Hong Kong, it is stated that schools aim to strike a balance between both academic and play-based learning approach for children to acquire a quality learning education (Expat Living , 2022). For instance, Malvern College Pre-school Hong Kong (MCPS) inspired by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum offers a reggio-emilia approach in which the presence of play through the usage of natural objects and play integration in all learning areas are applied. With this method, MCPS believes that children's development in terms of social , cognitive and literacy competence will be enhanced. In addition, the school principal , Deidre Mcloskey of Mills International Preschool has promoted the significance of play-based and encouraged Hong Kong parents to divert their mindsets from an academic point of view to understanding the benefits of play-based learning as she believes that children engaging into play activities will not only cause positive outcomes

into their learning development; cognitive , communication skills but also to their self-development; identity , talents (TopSchoolHK, 2018).

In essence, comparatively, the main difference is that international preschools put a lot of value in play-based under the western belief while local kindergartens still encounter hardships in sincerely implementing a quality play-based learning due to Hong Kong parents' cultural belief of 'Confucius' philosophy (TopSchoolHK,2018). At this point, it is then evident that international preschools barely experience obstacles of implementing a quality play-based learning compared to local kindergartens.

Cultural Impact & Parental Involvement

Culturally, Hong Kong parents have been drawn to the belief of Confucius's philosophy and the belief is that children learn effectively through academic-based learning instead of play-based learning as Confucius expressed his view that applying play will interfere children's overall learning (Grieshaber , 2016). In this case , with the parents' attachment to the belief , it has led them to practice an authoritarian parenting style (tiger parents) which implies that they always ensure that their children must attain a large influx of achievements (Lin , 2019). In particular, parents expect for tons of worksheets , assessments and enrolling their children in various extra-curricular activities and tutorial classes however in response to Yip's (2019) advise , it is best to reduce such practices to enable children to obtain the autonomy to engage in play activities (Lin , 2019). As a result , it is a hindrance for kindergartens to successfully integrate play-based learning into children's learning development due to cultural constraints.

In fact , children are still 'obliged' to participate in numerous extra-curricular activities without understanding children's interests and preferences. According to Forey, Besser and Sampson (2015) , Hong Kong parents put a lot of importance on their children's learning of the English language as they are aware that it is highly beneficial for children to gain future success and

that it is interconnected to the society's prosperity. With their statement , up until today , parents prioritize children to learn the English language and most likely they would have them enrolled in English tutorials including phonics or any related language classes like drama or playgroups as they believe this practice will lead their children to excel.

On the other hand , parental involvement is crucial towards children's learning development as according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979) , within all the systems , the government , social services , families , schools and the society must build a strong relationship to strengthen children's learning development. However, Crawford (2020) emphasized that parent-child-school collaboration is vital as this practice helps boost children's social and language development. Moreover, it was reported that 84% of parents do value the significance of play but they tend to have misconceptions of how play should appropriately be integrated into children's learning (Chiu , 2018). Therefore, it is then evident that Hong Kong parents may still lack knowledge on the true means of play.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, 2 main theories; Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System (1977) , Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) were applied as both were highly inter-connected which influenced me into studying the importance of integrating digital play into children's listening; comprehension development. The theories and explanations are as follows.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System (1977) , it was developed to emphasize the significance of relationships amongst various parties within the systems (Mcleod, 2023). By means on the importance of relationships, it implies that parties such as the children themselves, schools, parents , social services , government do play an important role to achieve a certain goal. In this case, referring to my research study, in order to achieve the implementation and

effectiveness of play-based learning in Hong Kong kindergartens, it is crucial for the stakeholders within the community to work together by strengthening their collaboration. Therefore, the theory of the ecological system provides a great impact in achieving a successful play-based approach in the society.

Besides that, as digital play is still understudied in Hong Kong, there is theory that justified the benefits of incorporating digital play into children's learning development. Based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), equipping digital devices is essential for children so as to acquire extensive knowledge and to comprehend the significance of socio-cultural aspect (Stephen and Plowman, 2014). To further explain, it asserts that digital play offers a range of learning benefits for children such as the development of their cognitive skills; problem-solving, peer collaboration and communication. In other words, through the usage of digital devices, it aids children to assimilate new information and knowledge on certain topics. As a result, it has proven that digital play expands children's prior knowledge into understanding more of in-depth subjects.

Research Objectives

The aims and goals were formulated in order to supplement my research study and to acquire concrete results regarding on children's performance on listening skills; comprehension. The research objectives are presented below:

- 1.To examine the difference between children's English listening skills development under academic-based and play-based intervention
- 2.To identify potential factors affecting children's opportunity in learning through play
- 3.To investigate parents' perspective towards academic-based and play-based approaches

Research Questions & Hypothesis

Referring to the literature review, some results may vary in between the previous and present studies as not all evidences are based in the context of Hong Kong. The explanations are as follows.

According to the studies , it has proven that the various types of play such as constructive, make-believe and digital play have contributed a lot in enhancing children’s English literacy in terms of reading , writing , speaking and even integrated to early mathematics, however these studies were not mostly based in Hong Kong but in western countries. At this point, there can be possible changes of results when assessing children’s English literacy presently. According to Wang (2018), although children spend much of their time in school to learn English, the drawback is that most of the homework is focused on reading and writing. This then implies that there is a limitation in both speaking and listening practices and that parents must provide time to execute listening activities in order for children to effectively learn to communicate. Therefore, the research question was “Is there a significant difference between Children’s English listening skills under academic-based and play-based approach?”

Moreover, based on a study, it mainly identified that the socio-cultural factor is the complication of implementing a play-based learning approach, however it mostly occurs in local kindergartens but not in international preschools. Besides the socio-cultural factor , there also can be other factors affecting the implementation since Hong Kong experienced an economic downfall due to the recent and current pandemic of Covid19 we are facing today. In particular, based on my experience , my previous workplace that promoted play integrated learning has shut down just this year due to low enrolments which affects children’s opportunity to learn in a kindergarten that offers a play-based approach into the curriculum. In

this case, the research question was “What are the potential factors that affect children’s opportunity to learn through play?”

On the other hand, as of this generation, Hong Kong parents utilize gadgets such as iPads to have children watch educational videos as they believe it will enhance their listening and speaking skills. However, it is believed that there is a misuse of advanced technology and some may have misconceptions on the importance of digital play. Kindergartens may also have acquired technologies such as interactive walls and iPads but are still used for academic purposes. In this case, common types of plays like make-believe play and constructive play are usually executed but not digital play. In addition, since there’s a high requirement of primary school admission, parents focus more on children’s academic learning or enrol them in various extra-curricular activities such as phonics, math, STEM, etc. Therefore, the research question formulated to this problem was “What are the parents’ perspective towards academic-based and play-based approaches?”

With the reference to research questions 1 and 2, as both were based on the participants’ statements, no hypothesis were demonstrated in order to avoid biased opinions. Referring to research question 1 , the hypothesis is formulated below:

H1: There is a significant difference between Children’s English listening skills under academic-based and play-based approach.

Methodology

Participants

In this research study , originally, participants involving 3 teachers , 40 primary caregivers (including immediate carers; nannies , grandparents) that own children of ages 4-5 years (K2 Grade) from the kindergarten I am currently working in were invited to engage into the research study. However, only a total of 55 participants including 3 teachers , 26 children and 26 parents respectively were successfully recruited. All participants were given consent forms with explanations regarding the study. The children were observed and examined through the execution of both academic-based and play-based interventional activities while the teachers were invited during the experimental observations to fill in the observation checklist. Due to the potential health risks of Covid19, parents were not required to engage in face to face meetings to maintain social distancing, however they were invited to participate by filling in the hard copy survey questionnaire.

Instrument

As for the instrument , a mixed method research was demonstrated throughout this study. Quantitative research method: **(1) Literacy Development Observation Checklist.** With the support of fellow teachers, it was practiced during the experimentation (*see appendix 2 &3*) so as to measure (rating scales) the child's listening skills in terms of comprehensive listening , activeness and engagement. **(2) English Assessment Task.** A standardized test (*see appendix 4*) that contains 3 sections; drawing , identifying and circling the correct pictures, and colouring were utilized to examine and measure children's listening comprehension.

Qualitative Research Method:

(1) Survey Questionnaire (see appendix 1)

To provide supporting explanation on the quantitative results, a qualitative survey was conducted. It both contained closed-ended (Scale-based , Yes/No) and open-ended questions to measure the parents' opinions and judgments on the implementation and practice of play-based and academic-based towards their children's English literacy development.

Procedure

Consent forms were given out to the teachers and parents 2 weeks (mid-November) before the implementation, specifically before the month of December to have them better understand the overall rationale of the research study. The participants were also informed that their information and responses to be collected will not be disclosed and to be kept confidential only for the involved investigators so as to ensure their security and privacy. They were even informed in case if they have any queries regarding the study, they may contact the investigator for further information.

In the first week of the project implementation, surveys were distributed by hard copy upon the school's consent before presenting it to the parents. At the same time, they were informed that it can be completed within 15 minutes and the time duration of the survey completion will be within the month of December to provide them sufficient time. Moreover, the academic-based interventional English listening activity was performed for the group of 40 students respectively. By means of the whole group activity, the children were examined with the use of an assessment test which covers instructional questions for them to listen , follow and execute. For instance , the instructional questions such as “Say good morning to the teacher.” , “Clap your hands 3 times.” , “Sing a song.”, etc. were formulated. As for the small group, a standardized test (*see appendix 4*) which contains instructional questions such as circling the

images , drawing and colouring were presented. Each of the interventions will last for 20 minutes. During the assessments, I and my fellow colleagues have assessed the child's active engagement and comprehensive listening skills by filling in the observational checklist through a scale measurement from 1 = Poor to 3 = Very Good.

Moving on to the second week, the play-based interventional English listening activities were executed. Similarly to the academic-based activity , the children engaged into the charades game in which they needed to execute actions based on the actions. In the small group activity, combined play methods of a game called "Simon Says" "Spin the Bottle" and digital play with the usage of a tablet were carried out during the small group session. Peer interaction and collaboration amongst the children was observed whether they were able to listen and understand ones' instructions through utilising the device to draw out the images and if they were highly engaged in the activity. Each of the interventions lasted for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, another set of observational checklists was out given to my fellow teachers to again score out the children's comprehensive listening and engagement within the scale from 1 = Poor to 3 = Very Good. Besides the observational checklist, the standardized test was conducted again to comparatively measure the children's listening skills based on the academic-based and play-based interventions.

Finally, within the third week , it was reserved for the remaining experimentations on children if the first two weeks of the implementation cannot be fully covered due to the hectic schedule of the class. Once the implementations were accomplished, the survey results and observation checklists were then sorted and analysed respectively; play-based , academic-based.

Data Analytical Plan

With the collected data from the survey, the crosstab analysis method through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS) was equipped to effectively analyse the parents' responses to the questions. In this statistical method, it has enabled me to evaluate and understand the parents' perspectives of whether they prefer a play-based approach or academic-based approach towards children's literacy learning according to the results of the rating scales. As for the revealed results from the observational checklists, the dependent t-test statistical method which was also applied in the SPSS software which carried out to evaluate and compare the scores of children's listening skills, activeness and engagement in between play and academic-based activities. Overall, the methods used has provided a concrete result in whether children learn best through play or academic-based interventional activities.

Results

Quantitative Phase

In this quantitative study, the application of the dependent t-test reveals and explains the results of the children's listening skills through the standardized test between the academic-based approach and play-based approach. According to tables 1 and 2, it indicates that there was a significant difference in children's English listening assessment scores during the academic-based intervention (M=80.00, SD=22.63) and after (M=90.00, SD=13.56) the play-based intervention; $t(25) = -4.66, p = <.001$. With the revealed results, it implies that the play-based intervention is more effective as it is relatively higher compared to the mean score of the academic-based intervention. In other words, the higher the application of digital play, the higher the children's average score in English listening. Therefore, it is evident that there is a significant difference between academic-based and play-based interventions as it presents that

p value was less than .001 , reflecting a positive outcome when play-based intervention was executed.

Table 1 : The Mean and Standard Deviation of Children’s English Listening Assessment Average Score

Intervention	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic-Based	80.00	22.63
Play-Based	90.00	13.56

Note.

Academic-Based : (M=80.00 , SD=22.63)

Play-Based : (M=90.00 , SD=13.56)

Table 2 : Significant Difference of the t-test results on Children’s Engagement in Academic-Based and Play-Based Interventions

Intervention	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Academic-Based	-10.00000.	10.95445	-4.66	25	<.001

Note: t(25) = -4.66 , p=<.001

Low SES Parents' Perspective

In this section, parents were categorized mainly into 2 socio-economic status (SES) groups; Low and Middle based on their range of monthly income and job occupation. Through the survey questionnaire, the results reflected on the low SES parents' point of view on the implementation of academic-based and play-based interventions in children's English learning. 3 significant questions were mainly chosen to further investigate parents' perspective. In addition, a total of 7 parents were categorized as Low SES group. The results and findings are stated below.

With the reference to table 3 , within the questionnaire , the question was whether learning English language is highly important. Based on the results presented below, all parents with a cumulation of 100% have agreed that it is highly significant to learn English.

Table 3: Importance of Learning English Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	7	100.00	100.00	100.00

According to table 4, the parents have responded towards the closed-ended question to whether they are familiar with the play-based approach. Referring to the results below, 5 out of 7 parents with a cumulation of 71.4% are familiar with the intervention while 2 parents with a cumulation of 100% are clueless about the play-based approach.

Table 4: Parents' Familiarity on Play-Based Approach

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	5	71.4	71.4	71.4
	No	2	28.6	28.6	100.00
	Total	7	100.0	100.0	

With the presented results in table 5, all parents with a cumulation of 100% have responded that it is highly effective to strike a balance of academic-based and play-based approaches for children to learn English. This then implies that the more balanced the approaches are, the more effective it is for children to learn English.

Table 5: Effectiveness of Striking a Balance of Academic-Based and Play-Based Approaches

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	7	100.00	100.00	100.00

Middle SES Parents' Perspective

Moving on to the Middle SES parents' point of view, the actual questions mentioned above from the Low SES group were also demonstrated in this section. There were a total of 19 parents in the Middle SES group. The findings are as follows.

Regarding on the importance of learning English language, referring to table 6, all of the parents with a cumulation of 100% have agreed that it is also important to learn English language.

Table 6: Importance of Learning English Language

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	19	100.00	100.00	100.00

Whereas for table 7, 11 out of 19 parents with the cumulation of 57.9% were familiar of play-based approach while 8 of them with a cumulation of 57.9% were not familiar of the approach.

Table 7: Parents' Familiarity on Play-Based Approach

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Valid	Yes	11	57.9	57.9	57.9
	No	8	42.1	42.1	100.00
	Total	19	100.0	100.0	

Finally, based on table 8, all parents with the cumulation of 100% have also agreed that it is highly effective to strike a balance of academic-based and play-based approaches to further support children's language development.

Table 8: Effectiveness of Striking a Balance of Academic-Based and Play-Based Approaches

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	19	100.00	100.00	100.00

Qualitative Phase

In this section, a survey questionnaire was conducted and a total of 26 parents coming from low and middle socio economic status groups have expressed their views towards the question, “Were you ever interested on having your child study at an international pre-school that offers a play-based teaching approach?” The results of this qualitative study explain the impacts of the implementation of academic-based and play-based methods. Parents coming from Low Social Economic Status (SES) emphasized on children’s interest and active engagement through play while majority of parents coming from Middle Social Economic Status (SES) raised about financial concern.

1. Parents’ Perception; Interest and Active Engagement

What is active engagement? It simply refers to one being highly interested in a particular area. For instance, a child who is willing to learn, initiative, communicative and collaborative in such activities conducted by teachers.

In particular, upon two parents’ agreement towards the question, they have comparatively expressed the disparities of local schools and international school regarding on the teaching pedagogies in English learning. Based on the parents’ statement, they are much fond of the teaching method executed in international schools compared to local schools since it arouses children’s interest and increase their active engagement. Below are their responses:

“Yes, kids are less likely to lose interest in learning as (local schools mostly require kids to memorize a lot of knowledge which kids may not understand.) International schools focus more of self-learning and creativity.” (Low SES)

“Yes, because the teaching skills and methods could stimulate toddlers’ and kids’ interest to English, which can guide children to use their 5 senses to master this language instead of cramming for tests.” (Middle SES)

Apart from the parents’ statements above, a few parents have also shared a common view to why they are interested in having their children to study in an international school. Their opinions are as follows:

“Yes, I feel that English language lessons is better in international schools.” (Low SES)

“Yes, because play-based activities arouse children’s interest ...” (Middle SES)

“Yes, because teaching method is interesting and vivid, can attract children.” (Middle SES)

“Have interest, hoping the games can stimulate children’s interest” (Middle SES)

2. Financial Concern

To define the means of financial concern, it refers to a person who faces financial crisis due to insufficient income. In particular, not being able to cover all the expenses for the child’s needs at school.

Socio-economically, majority of parents that belong from both low and middle SES have also shared similar views regarding on the school fee in international schools. Although parents expressed that they were interested in having their children to learn through play-based approach, on the other hand, they also claimed that they did not have sufficient budget to enrol

their children in international schools due to the high range of school fee. Besides that, they even stated that Covid19 pandemic has caused financial burden. Here are some of their responses:

“Yes, I am interested but the school fee is expensive. Because of covid, I could not enroll my child. Covid created financial problem for us. One parent is only working.” (Middle SES)

“Yes, play is good in international school. But because of covid19 , no money for my child’s tuition fee because it is expensive.” (Middle SES)

“Yes, because play-based activities arouse children’s interest but not all families can afford because the school fee is high.” (Middle SES)

“Yes, because I wanted my child to have better interaction skills but we didn’t have the right budget to afford it.” (Middle SES)

Discussion

Effectiveness of Play-Based Approach

According to the revealed results on tables 1 and 2, it was hypothesized that there is a significant difference; $p < .001$ in children’s listening skills; comprehension under the intervention as the results presented a higher average mean score for play-based intervention; $M=90$ compared to academic-based intervention; $M=80$. With the results, in comparison between the 2 interventions executed, this then asserts that equipping play-based approach through digital play into children’s English listening development is highly effective. The positive outcome of play-based approach towards children’s listening development reflects

consistently well with the research study conducted by Leung and Hu (2019) and the description of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development in terms of cognitive development mentioned by Stephen and Plowman (2014). For instance, the application of digital play did reform children's behavioral and academic performances such as active engagement; peer collaboration, communication and their increased scores on the standardized test after the play-based intervention. Therefore, schools and parents should further be educated and encouraged to promote the significance of digital play so as to be established into the school curriculum and activities.

Factors Affecting Children's Play-Based Learning Opportunities

With the reference to the qualitative results and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System (1977), under the chronosystem, Covid19 pandemic has created a barrier in having parents to enroll their children in international kindergartens. In particular, although majority of parents coming from Middle SES group claimed that they preferred to have their children to learn through play in an international school, however their budget was insufficient due to the society's drastic economic downturn that was caused by the pandemic. At this point, it is proven how the environmental changes can negatively impact children's opportunity to learn through play that are mostly offered in international kindergartens.

Moving on to the exosystem; workplace, surprisingly, majority of Middle SES parents were unfamiliar of play-based approach compared to that of Low SES parents. In my perspective, it is believed that since Hong Kong is known as a cosmopolitan and business city, there's already an expectancy of long-working hours especially to those Middle SES families that earn a higher range of monthly income. Unfortunately, the long-working hours could disrupt the quality time between parents and children and by means of quality time is that parents are not able to attend

important school events such as workshops, seminar talks or meetings which may have covered topics on play-based approach. Whereas for Low SES parents, as some have stated that they are a “single parent” and “housewife”, it is then analyzed that they could have better quality time with their children which then reflects the higher amount of Low SES parents on their familiarity of play-based approach.

Furthermore, based on my experience, it was also discovered that in school-parent-child events like sports day, the care takers of the children were found to substitute the parents for their absence due to work commitments. Therefore, Middle SES parents may not be able to acquire significant information regarding the approach in which creates a hurdle for children to learn through play as academic-based learning is the focal point within the education system and the ideal approach in Hong Kong local kindergartens.

Ultimately, all parents regardless of their social economic status are in favor of striking a balance of academic-based and play-based however within the macrosystem; cultural belief, it is difficult to establish a proper play-based approach mainly due to cultural constraints; Confucius Philosophy. As a result, the children are bound to display obedience towards their parents by adopting an academic-based learning to achieve a prosperous life under the influence of Confucianism.

Limitations and Implications

Deficiency of Sample Size

In the process of conducting the research study, there were a few obstacles that was encountered which can be addressed with effective and feasible strategies. For instance, a complication was the insufficient sample size as only 26 out of 40 participants (parents and children) were

successfully recruited. In this case, in order to maximize the sample size, it is recommended to consistently communicate and collaborate with the class teachers to help contact parents to explain regarding the study so as to encourage them to participate. To add on, it is also advised to equip more of positive language into the survey questionnaire by explaining the benefits of the research study into their children's learning development. With this strategy, it will draw the participants' attention to engage into the study so as to better reflect on children's English listening; comprehension skills and parents' diverse views of academic-based and play-based approaches.

Learning Environment

In terms of the learning atmosphere, during the play-based intervention, some children coming from Low SES families were clueless on how the digital device; tablet should be utilized. Moreover, although interactive walls are installed in the classrooms, some are dysfunctional and that some classrooms do not even have interactive walls at all. The possible rationale behind this is due to the school's insufficient budget to purchase the device or to get them repaired. As educators, it is best to start implementing and practicing digital play into our teaching as this will lead children to gain exposure towards advanced technologies and to obtain extensive knowledge from the device.

Moreover, the time clash and insufficient space were a burden in executing a smooth operation of the interventions and class observations. For example, one classroom had 27 children and during Mandarin and English class, the white board was always utilized as a divider in order to conduct the lessons at the same time. This then created a noisy environment which affected children's concentration during the interventions and that teachers could not also perform the observations effectively. To avoid matters like this in the future study, it is suggested to

communicate with the school principal to kindly request for an available room so as to conduct the interventions and observations smoothly.

Research Design

Under the research design, within-subjects study experiment was demonstrated as it requires only less test participants. However, the drawback of it was that it only allowed the participants to engage in one specific test or activity which could potentially affect their behaviour and performance in other conditions. In particular, the same group of children were instructed to engage into both the academic-based and play-based activities and that some of the questions from the survey questionnaire were objective which restricted parents' personal statements regarding on both academic-based and play-based approaches. In order to gain concrete and stronger results in the future study, it's encouraged to equip between-subjects study experiment by assigning children into different groups of activities. As for the survey questionnaire, it is advisable to add questions such as "What do you think about academic-based and play-based approaches?" or "What are the advantages and disadvantages of academic-based and play-based methods?" rather than presenting questions which influence parents to respond according to the researcher's expected results. Therefore, practising these strategies will lead the outcome of the research study to be much solid , realistic and meaningful.

Conclusion

To conclude, as an early childhood educator, with quite a few years of teaching experiences and have gotten to know various children's family backgrounds, it is witnessed how children themselves have their own profound interests when it comes to learning , some prefer through academic-based , some through play-based or even both. Although the study indicated that play-based intervention was more effective compared to that of academic-based intervention,

we should still not neglect the importance of academic learning since it also contributes to enhancing children's future resilience. As a matter of fact, we educators and even parents must be open-minded by embracing and accepting the children's individual learning differences as it is believed that they should be given the control , ownership and autonomy to explore the world without boundaries so as to develop their sense of self-actualization; life aspirations. This then will result to having an enormous amount of happy children learning in a quality learning environment under a strong home-school-community collaboration.

(6,771 words)

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Appendix 1 : Survey Questionnaire (For Parents)

Survey: Parents' Perspective on Play-Based and Academic-Based Approach towards Children's English Literacy Development. 調查：家長對基於遊戲和基於學術的方法對兒童英語素養髮展的看法)

Dear parents,

Through this survey , questions such as your personal information , your child's English learning ability , interests and most importantly how you view play-based and academic-based approaches towards children's English literacy development will be presented.

Before participating in this survey, you will be required to sign the consent form upon your approval. It is ensured that your responses to the questions will only be provided to the investigator for research purposes and will strictly be kept confidential. In advance , I would like to express my gratitude by thanking you and highly appreciate for your engagement in this study.

親愛的父母， 通過這項調查， 您的個人信息、您孩子的英語學習能力、興趣以及最重要的是您如何看待兒童英語素養髮展的基於遊戲和基於學術的方法等問題將被提出。在參與本次調查之前， 您需要在同意後簽署同意書。確保您對問題的回答只會提供給調查人員用於研究目的， 並將嚴格保密。在此之前， 我想通過感謝您來表達我的謝意， 並非常感謝您參與這項研究。

1. Gender (性別):

- Male (男)
- Female (女)

2. What is your occupation? (你做什麼工作?)

3. What is your current range of monthly income?

(你目前的月收入範圍是多少)

- \$10,000 - \$15,000
- \$15,000 - \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$35,000
- \$35,000 - \$45,000

4. Do you think learning English language is highly important?

(你認為學習英語很重要嗎?)

- Yes (是)
- No (不)

5. Does your child try or like to interact with others in English? (您的孩子是否嘗試或喜歡用英語與他人互動?)

- Sometimes (有時)
- Often (經常)
- Always (總是)
- Never (絕不)

6. According to your child's listening skills, please rate it from poor to strong.

(請根據您孩子的聽力水平，從差到強進行評分。)

1 2 3 4 5

Poor 較差的 Very Strong 強的

7. Are you familiar with the play-based approach that some kindergartens such as International Preschools applied into their curriculum to educate children?

(您是否熟悉國際幼兒園等一些幼兒園在其課程中應用的以遊戲為基礎的方法來教育孩子?)

- Yes (是)
- No (不)

8. Which teaching strategy do you think children learn best when it comes to English language?
(Can choose more than 1)
(您認為孩子們在英語語言方面學得最好的教學策略是什麼?) (可以選擇1個以上)

- Homework (功課)
- Online Educational English Games (在線教育英語遊戲)
- Board Games (棋盤遊戲)
- YouTube Videos (YouTube視頻)
- All of the above (上述所有的)

9. Were you ever interested to have your child study at an International Preschool that offers a play-based teaching approach? Why or Why not? (您是否曾經有興趣讓您的孩子在提供以遊戲為基礎的教學方法的國際幼兒園學習? 為什麼或者為什麼不?)

10. How do you spend time with your child when learning English? (Can choose more than 1) (學習英語時, 您是如何陪伴孩子的?)(可以多選1個)

- Doing English Listening Practice Books (做英語聽力練習書)
- Reading stories (讀故事)
- Engaging in interactive games (e.g. digital games , board games) (參與互動遊戲 (例如數字遊戲、棋盤遊戲))
- Watching English cartoons (看英文動畫片)
- All of the above (上述所有的)

11.State out your child's interest in learning English language (e.g. homework, storytelling , board games , digital games , etc.).

(說明您孩子對學習英語的興趣 (例如家庭作業、講故事、棋盤遊戲、數字遊戲等)。

12. Rate the effectiveness of play-based approach towards children's English listening skills.
(評價以遊戲為基礎的方法對兒童英語聽力技能的有效性。)

1 2 3 4 5

Poor 較差的 Very Strong 強的

13. Rate the effectiveness of academic-based approach towards children's English listening skills.
(評估以學術為基礎的方法對兒童英語聽力技能的有效性。)

1 2 3 4 5

Poor 較差的 Very Strong 強的

14. Do you think it is effective to balance both play-based and academic-based methods to enrich children's literacy development?
(您認為以遊戲為基礎和以學術為基礎的方法平衡來豐富兒童的識字發展是否有效?)

- Yes (是)
- No (不)

15. In the future, if you would be invited to participate in a programme or a workshop regarding on play-based approach at school, will you be interested?

(將來, 如果你被邀請參加學校裡有關以遊戲為基礎的方法的計劃或工作坊, 你會感興趣嗎?)

- Yes (是)
- No (不)
- Maybe (也許)

Observation Checklist

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Read the criteria questions. Rate and put a tick in the boxes in the rating scale section (1= Poor, 2 = satisfactory, 3= Very Good) based on the child's performance.

Criteria	Rating Scale		
	1	2	3
Child's Behavioural Performance			
1.He/she listens and pays attention during the activity.			
2.He/she raises his/her hand to respond to the questions.			
3.He/she makes eye-contact to the teacher when answering.			
4.He/she is patient enough to wait for his/her turn to answer.			
5.Presents a high level of self-esteem.			
Instructional Questions (Written-Based)			
1.Able to follow teacher's to draw a tree and flowers under the tree.			

2.Able to use the correct crayon to color out the flower.			
3.Able to follow the teacher's instructions to draw a face.			
4.Listen to the teacher's instruction to circle the correct image.			
Instructional Questions (Action-Based)			
1.Able to clap his/her hands 3 times.			
2.Able to spin the bottle on the table.			
3.Able to sing a song.			
4.Able to place the red crayon on the table.			
5.Able to say “Good Morning” to the teacher.			

Observation Checklist

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Read the criteria questions. Rate and put a tick in the boxes in the rating scale section (1= Poor, 2 = satisfactory, 3= Very Good) based on the child's performance.

Criteria	Rating Scale		
	1	2	3
Child's Behavioural Performance			
1.He/she engages with others in the activity.			
2.He/she waits patiently in taking turns to spin the bottle.			
3.He/she makes eye-contact towards peers.			
4.He/she uses body gestures to interact with others.			
5.Presents a high level of self-esteem.			
Child's Listening Skills			
1.He/she understands peers' instructions.			

2.He/she listens and cooperates with others.			
3.He/ she observes his/her peers' body gestures to listen and understand the conversation.			
4.He/she communicates appropriately based on their conversation.			



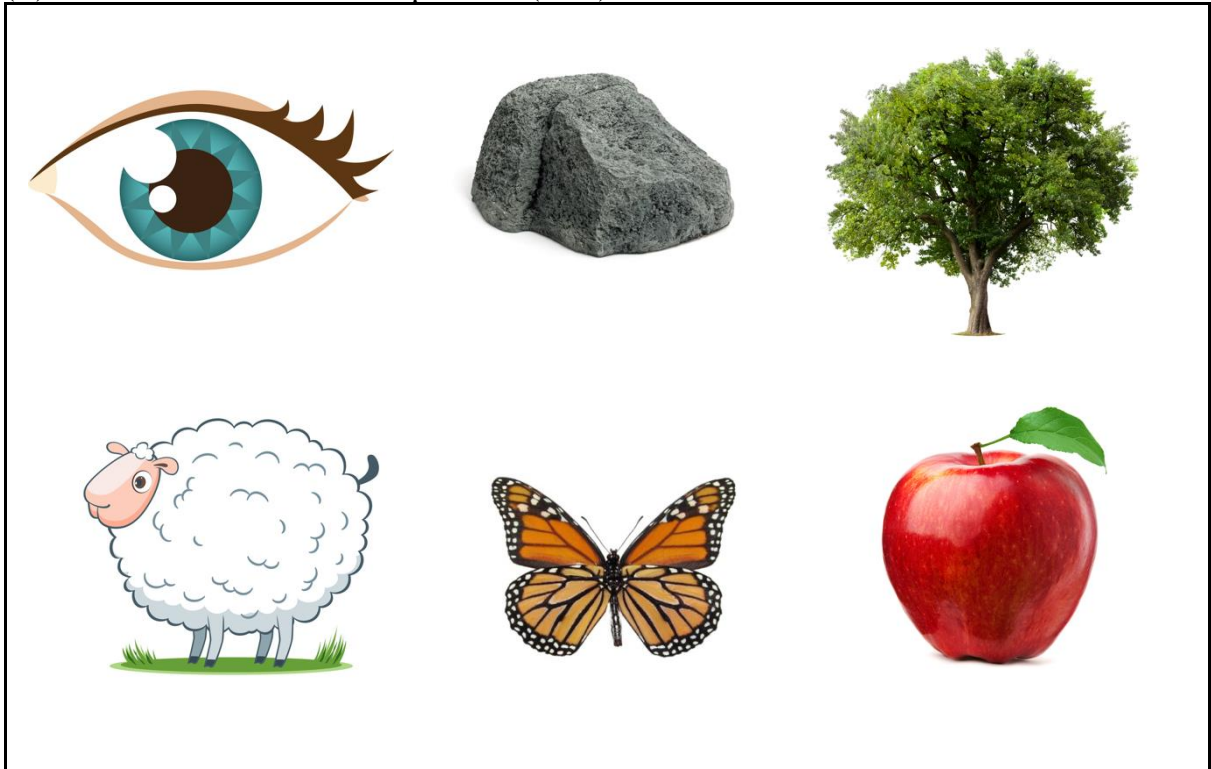
English Listening Assessment

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Marks: _____/100

(A) Listen to the teacher's instructions to draw pictures in the box. (40%)

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(B) Listen and circle the correct pictures. (30%)



(C) Listen to the teacher's instructions to use the correct crayon to colour the flower. (30%)

