

**An Ethnographic Study on the Influence of Western Early Childhood Education  
Theories on Practice in Shanghai Public Preschools**

**Xi Ding**

**PhD**

**University of York  
Education**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents qualitative ethnographic research into the exploration of mechanisms that western early childhood education ideology, theories and approaches applied into Chinese specific educational context, taking Shanghai as the example. The aim of this research is to explore the framework describing how imported ideologies, educational theories and approaches are reshaped and reorganised by various kinds of elements into Shanghai public kindergartens. In order to provide background information for this research, three interconnected literature bases are analysed: (1). the history and development of early childhood education (ECE) and curriculum in China, while the curriculum is the key element in ECE; (2). the privilege imported western ECE theories and approaches in use; (3). review of existing research exploring the western educational ideologies and approaches in China. The methodological approach undertaken in this research is ethnographic research. Data obtained from documentary analysis, semi-structured interview and non-participants observation were triangulated to determine the framework. Evidence suggests that imported western education ideologies, theories and approaches are applied into practice through two main ways. The first method was through documentary guidance from national-level policies, regulations and guidance to local-level guidance including practical teaching reference books and guidance, then school-level focusing on headteachers and class teacher's practice. The second method was conveyed through teachers training, including official and school-providing training. The theoretical framework and interrelated findings were discussed in this thesis.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The importance of the early years for individual and societal outcomes has been well demonstrated by empirical studies in the field of early childhood education (ECE) (Farrell, Kagan & Tisdall, 2015; Heckman, 2011; Spodek & Saracho, 2014). As countries and families invest more attention and resources to ECE (Farrell, Kagan & Tisdall, 2015), this field has become a rapidly expanding research area. When it comes to the development of ECE in China, it has been an unpredictable period in recent years, alongside rapid changes in social and economic development (Feng, 2016).

Contemporary ECE in China is becoming increasingly diverse in its forms and its educational approaches, reflecting an increasingly open and diversified society (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). In the longer term, the development of ECE in China has gone through a century-long development process with revolutionary changes in society (Li, Yang & Chen, 2016). Since the beginning of the 1900s, reforms of Early Childhood Education (ECE) have been strongly influenced by western educational ideas. In addition, China's switch from a one-child policy to a two-child policy since 2015 has further raised demands for high-quality and diverse early childhood education provision (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Li, Yang & Chen, 2016). This leads to questions relating to how to maintain or improve the quality of early childhood education and care whilst satisfying increasing demand.

### **1.1. Rationale for the study**

Although an emphasis on the process of activities and children's social and cognitive development have been widely accepted in Chinese education, it remains uncertain how to move from a model of imitation to innovation when importing early childhood educational theories and approaches in practice. Researcher's interests in early years education have focused on issues relating to teacher education which includes teachers' training, the quality of ECE in rural areas, educational policies, innovations in curriculum and specific pedagogies (Feng, 2016). Policymakers have highlighted weak points in ECE in China which deserve further research. For example, the issuing of the *kindergarten teacher professional standards (2012)*, *Kindergarten staff allocation standards (Provisional, 2013)* and *the Kindergarten director professional standards (2015)* have highlighted the need for training teaching staff and the related work force in ECE. In addition, the Chinese government has approved a budget for investigating and improving the quality of early childhood education in rural areas

with the aim of narrowing the gap between education in rural areas, compared to urban areas in China (Li & Chen, 2019).

Aside from these research areas, there has also been a focus on curriculum related research. Existing research argues imported western theories, approaches, and ideology were applied into Chinese specific context throughout the history of the development of Chinese early childhood education history (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Lau, 2012; Tobin, et al, 2009; Li & Chen, 2019). Indeed, there appear to be three intertwining threads shaping Chinese-specific early childhood education, Chinese traditional culture and policies, western culture and ideology, and Chinese local community culture (Yang & Li, 2019; Qi & Melhuish, 2016). Research by Yang and Li (2017 and 2019) developed a framework describing curriculum innovation at the intersection between western derived theory and the Chinese specific social-cultural context. Consequently, social change and culture (including values and beliefs) have been shown to have a great impact on curriculum innovation in China. However, there is little research focusing on exploring how western ideologies, theories and approaches are reshaped by the local context in practice. It is hoped that conducting such research will enable teachers to better understand how they apply imported theories and approaches into (in this thesis) Shanghai educational practice. Primarily, empirical data into this field of study is currently lacking. Therefore, this research collected and analysed data (using documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation) with the aim to provide explicit data, and thereby contributing to the research in this field.

This research aims at exploring the ECE theory-practice reshaping process in Shanghai public kindergartens. In doing so, there are two main principal aims:

1. To identify and explore current early childhood education in participating settings to provide a foundation for exploring western ideology as applied in practice through the curriculum.
2. To develop a framework to describe the way in which such ideologies are reshaped in practice, through exploring the main factors which influence such a reshaping of theory and ideology.

The contribution of this thesis is to provide empirical data describing current early childhood education in Shanghai public kindergartens, exploring elements and processes at play in

shaping the use of imported western ECE theories in practice, thereby filling gaps that exist in current research.

Meeting these two aims will enable recommendations to be made regarding future use of imported ECE theories, possible innovations in the curriculum in China and possible changes in current ECE teacher training.

## **1.2. The early childhood education model in Shanghai**

Shanghai is located on the east-coast of China. It hosts what is called the ‘Shanghai Model’ in education (Huang, 2020). The research in this thesis targets Shanghai due to its unique role and pattern in early childhood education in China. This section provides further information about the ‘Shanghai Model’.

Since students from Shanghai achieved highly regarded outcomes in the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) and TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) research in 2009, Shanghai’s basic education system has drawn attention from all around the world (Huang, 2020; Yang & Ran & Zhang, 2020). However, in education, Shanghai has long been considered a pioneer and leader in Chinese development, and in education, particularly through its role as a port, open to the outside world. The unique spirit of the city is described as:

*‘Shanghai is willing to learn new things and good at adapting to new changes, and the relatively loose social and cultural environment in Shanghai make it a fertile land for the emergence and development of new ideas, new theories and new things in education’* (Huang, 2020).

Reviewing the history of Shanghai’s education development, imported western educational ideology emerged during different periods. In the 1920s, John Dewey’s educational concepts were introduced, applied by Tao Xingzhi in Shanghai; In 1986, educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom gave a lecture in Shanghai, introducing his ideas. Both historically and currently, therefore, Shanghai was described as a western city in China which western educational philosophies and approaches were largely implemented in practice. Comparing with other cities such as Shenzhen, there is a lack for empirical research of related topic in

Shanghai. In conclusion, Shanghai is an appropriate place to explore the implementation of western educational philosophies and approaches in practice.

### **1.3. Research questions**

This research consists of an ethnographic study of public preschool care in Shanghai, an urban city in China. To investigate the aims stated above, three research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy, and surroundings?
2. What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?
3. How are western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?

The first research question is designed to understand the current practice in Shanghai public preschools. The second question seeks to investigate whether, and what kinds, of western ideologies are applied in practice. The third question is designed to understand how imported western early childhood education theories are reshaped and reorganised into practice. In doing so it builds on the previous two questions to ultimately enable a framework of factors influencing practice to be developed.

### **1.4. Overview of the thesis structure**

This chapter provides an overview of the background information behind this thesis, including the rationale for conducting this study in Shanghai. Chapter 2 forms the literature review for this thesis. Drawing on some of the issues in this Introduction it addresses three key areas deemed pertinent to the research, identifying the existing debates and gaps in the literature this thesis seeks to contribute to. Chapter 3 presents and explains the methodology adopted for this research, which is principally an ethnographic study. The following three chapters present the main findings from the analysis of the data, by data source. Chapter 4 presents findings from the documentary analysis, Chapter 5, findings from the interview data and Chapter 6, presents the findings from the non-participatory observations. In doing so each chapter cuts across the three central research questions. The final chapter, Chapter 7 brings these different data sources together, and triangulates the key findings, to provide a

more integrated discussion of each research question. This then presents the framework developed from these findings describing the processes that shape the translation of theories and approaches into practice and forms the conclusion of the whole thesis.

### **1.5. Contribution of this study to imported theories and curriculum design in educational practice.**

Shanghai has always played the role of pioneer in revolution and evolution in different fields, as well as educational practice. Research relating to the history of the development of ECE in China argues that ECE in China has long imported and integrated early childhood theories and approaches from elsewhere with the local culture and traditional pedagogical approaches. Alongside this, the Chinese government currently emphasises a need for school-based curriculum innovation. This study provides rich and in-depth descriptive data on current ECE practice in Shanghai, focusing on the ways in which imported theories have been tailored in public ECE settings. The findings of this study could support class teachers in their professional development and their own work on curriculum and pedagogy innovation. Furthermore, recommendations made at the end of this thesis have the potential to aid practitioners and policy makers understand the barriers and facilitators to implementing theory and pedagogical practice in public preschools.

## **Chapter 2 Review of Early Childhood Education development, curriculum reforms in China, and western educational ideologies**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This study explores the mechanisms of how western imported educational theories, ideologies, and approaches interplay within the Chinese socio-cultural context. Given that, it is widely argued that imported western educational ideologies and approaches formed the seeds of early childhood education in China. It is important to understand why western educational ideologies and approaches can influence the ECE in China. The review of history of ECE development within the Chinese specific context enables a better understanding of the causes in different periods. It can be seen that the strong western educational ideologies have provided the examples for China to form its own education pattern. The review of historical development of ECE in China has indicated that Chinese education has attempted to explore the pathway to develop its own education. It has experienced several stages finding out that the hybrid of western education and Chinese traditional values and beliefs was the trend. Reviewing of western ideologies spread in China contributes to the exploration of mechanisms raised in this study.

With the rising issues in values in exploration of western educational ideologies and approaches in China (Zhao, 2018), it is also worth reviewing the necessity of exploring the localisation of western educational ideologies and approaches in Chinese socio-cultural context. In terms of which western educational philosophies and approaches will be review in this research, John Dewey's philosophy, Jean Piaget and Vygotsky cognitive development theories would be reviewed, as well specific educational approach Project-based learning. From the review, it can be understood the importance and influence from John Dewey on ECE development. It is essential and worthy to explore the key concepts from John Dewey. The observation and interview data also revealed that the Project-based learning approach was implemented in two participating preschools, which is grounded in John Dewey's philosophy. The interview data has shown the related themes to Jean Piaget and Vygotsky's cognitive development theories. In addition, comparing with other specific models such as Montessori and Reggio, this study focus on public preschools and such models were quite popular with private settings. In this case, this study, exploring the public preschools will focus on John

Dewey, Jean Piaget and Vygotsky' philosophies and specific Project-based learning approach. In sequence, this chapter will include three parts:

1. The first section will focus on reviewing the historical development of ECE in China, aiming at revealing why would western education ideologies can impact the ECE in China.
2. The second section will present the current research relating to exploring applying western educational ideologies and approaches in China.
3. The last section will review John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Vygotsky's theory, as well as the 'Project-based' learning approach.

## **2.2 Review of the historical development of Chinese early childhood education**

The overall purpose of this section is to explore relevant literature on the development of early childhood education and approaches in China, including early childhood education curriculum reforms and developments and the influence of western ideologies on these. The focus is on the interplay between imported western education ideologies and approaches into practice within the Chinese context, historically and within more recent years. In general, this section focuses on the wider development of ECE in China since the 1900s before focusing on the subsequent reforms and curriculum developments since the evolution period.

### **2.2.1 The rudimentary stage of ECE in China (before 1949)**

Early childhood education, officially known as preschool education in China, refers to full-day programs that prepare children aged from three to six years old for primary education (Zhu & Zhang, 2018). It is argued that the ECE curriculum and practice in China has always been shaped by the Chinese specific cultural context alongside global imported theories and ideologies (Li & Chen, 2016). In this thesis, when referring to the curriculum this is envisaged as a 'series of planned events intended for students to learn knowledge, skills, and values and organised to be carried out by administrators and teachers' (Cuban, 1993, p.221). This section briefly reviews the development of Chinese ECE policies and curriculums since the beginning of the 1900s through a critical analysis of the related literature. It is structured into four main periods of time reflecting significant turning points in ECE within the Chinese socio-cultural context.

#### ***The 1900s: the influence from Japan***

It has been generally agreed that ECE emerged in China when the first kindergarten was established in Wuhan in 1903. At this time the curriculum and mode of instruction were entirely imported from China's neighbour, Japan (Li & Chen, 2017; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). It has been argued by scholars that, unlike many Western countries who established ECE to cater for the working classes entering the workforce, the first kindergarten emerged in China primarily to cater to privileged sectors of society (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). This was because, at that time in its history, China considered Japan as a successful model to learn from. This was primarily for political reasons as Japan was China's most powerful neighbour. Japan was regarded as 'more civilised' than China and had already learned from more powerful western countries. In contrast, China had suffered a series of defeats in the Sino-Japanese wars (Li et al., 2016; Hou, 016). Ruth Hayhoe explains that '*Japan seemed to offer a pattern of political reform towards a constitutional monarchy with the preservation of Confucian values.*' (Hayhow, 1989). It has been explained that conservative in the Qing court were '*attracted to how Japan had moderately introduced western institutions while still maintaining the imperial authority and the cultural supremacy of the Confucian tradition*' (Hayhoe & Bastid, 1987). It can be concluded that defeat in the war caused the Qing court to learn from Japan, not only due to the political pressure but also as a result from the need of society. Consequently, the ideology of 'Learning from Japan' became a dominant theme in the late Qing dynasty. As described above, an adjunct of this was that the Japanese curriculum and Japanese teachers were directly imported into China to provide ECE provision (Li et al., 2016). It can be concluded that the beginning of ECE in China was set up by external forces catering to the privileged social sectors. In addition, the learning from Japan can be assumed to be the reason for adopting such an approach. The Qing court hoped that a strongly supported model (Japan) would be useful to help them reverse their misfortunes in the 1900.

Initially, child-care, and early childhood programs in China were also provided by charitable organisations, with church kindergartens beginning to be set up. These adopted a primarily religious curriculum and, being established by Western missionaries, encompassed predominantly western educational ideologies. Such forms of early childhood education programs have been imported by the strong influence from western countries. Alongside this, however, the Chinese government was beginning to take more responsibility for funding preschool education, which, as indicated above, by taking on a Japanese model was, in effect, again, using learning from the West.



Consequently, it could be argued that, from its earliest stages, a truly Chinese model of ECE has not been formed. This stage of ECE in China can be reviewed as the rudimentary period. The being defeated in the war and eager to learn from other stronger countries to reverse government domination can be recognized to be the reason for enabling imported educational ideologies impacting Chinese ECE. However, the development of the ECE curriculum in China underwent four waves of reforms, in the 1920s-1930s, the 1950s and the 1980s, the 2010 to the present (Jiang & Zhang & Zhao & Zheng, 2021). In each of these phases the influence of external ideologies and internal context can be seen to coexist to varying degrees.

#### *From 1920s-1930s: the influence from western countries*

Following the establishment of early ECE, shaped by Japan and Western ideologies, the first reform wave has been identified as beginning in 1912 with the May 4 Movement. The features of this period were 'Learning from the United States' or 'Americanisation'. During this period, political, cultural, and educational forms in China were sharply influenced by the 'New Culture' movement, with European and American models superseding the previous 'Japan model'. The education paradigm changed with social and cultural changes. There was a strong need for China to find the new way to revolution. The strong western countries model has been learnt at this stage. It can be argued that in this period, there was still the request for exploring a new model which was suitable for social changes in China. The strong and influential western countries have been the model for China to learn from. May 4 movement advocated learning from western countries with the twin ideologies of 'democracy' and 'science'. The older, more feudal society was rejected in favour of the promotion of a new cultural and social system (Wang, 2017; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). In other words, China experienced drastic social and cultural changes, and 'Americanisation', including within the education system (Qi & Melhuish, 2017). Under these circumstances, western educational theories and approaches were imported into Chinese ECE including the theories of John Dewey, Maria Montessori and 'Project-based' learning approaches, which largely replaced the 'Japan model' in education (for more details on these theories see the section 2.4).

These imported western theories and ideologies led to national-level education system reforms in educational forms, ideology, and curriculum. For example, in 1922, the educational system modelled itself on the US educational system; with six years of elementary education followed by three years of junior high school, followed by three years of high school education. This education system is still in use in China today (Zhu & Wang, 2005). Chinese educators such

as Tao XingZhi, Chen HeQin and Zhang XueMen, largely influenced by John Dewey's progressive education ideologies, also initiated ECE curriculum experiments, aimed at promoting the spread of ECE in rural and disadvantaged areas (Li et al, 2016). It can be argued that the 'learning from America' model was advocated during this period and John Dewey's progressive educational theories and practice were imported. From then onwards, American style kindergartens were popular in China since they advocated mainstream educational ideology: the progressive educational ideologies (Li, 2009; Xu, 2015). Several other ECE curriculum models, approaches and ideologies were also important, including the ones from Italy and Germany, such as Frobel and Montessori.

Consequently, it can be concluded that since its initial stages (from the 1900 to 1949), Chinese ECE has been firmly rooted as an imported paradigm. Through such enormous social and political transformations, it can also be seen that education is, perhaps inevitably, influenced by social and cultural changes. Learning from other strong countries has been the choice at this period. Due to the enormous social changes, there was a strong need to find the new pathway suitable for China. It can be argued that this is the reason for the trend for learning from westerns. However, researchers have also argued that such imported educational theories and approaches from western countries did not fit easily into Chinese changeable and specific socio-cultural conditions with no localization process occurring into practice (Zhu, 2008; Chen & Li & Wang, 2015). It can be argued that, since then, Chinese education has undergone a circuitous pathway to discover and innovate within their educational system in order to adopt more Chinese-specific characteristics.

## **2.2 The evolution of education: the development of ECE since 1949**

This section briefly reviews the development of Chinese ECE policies and curriculums across the next three periods through a critical analysis of the related literature: the 1950s and the 1980s, and the 2010 to the present. It describes the modernisation process in China which can be understood as a concerted effort by the ruling powers within China to provide technological, economic and social reform generally aimed at bringing China's development in line with the progress it considered to have taken place in the west. Such a perspective can be assumed as the learning from western trends continues in China. In doing so it reflects existing scholarship which posits these time periods as major waves of reform in ECE in China (Jiang & Zhang &

Zhao & Zheng, 2021), whilst providing a wider context and background for ECE curriculum in the present.

### *The 1949-1978: the influence from Soviet Union*

The second reform wave was after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, which advocated the 'Learn from the Soviet Union' model. During this period, there was an increasing demand for kindergartens for working families as women were increasingly engaged in paid employment (Zhu & Wang, 2005). Hence, at this time early years settings had both educational and social welfare objectives (Feng, 2017). The establishment of the People's republic of China has introduced rapid changes and reforms in the education model due to the change to the political system and the movement of China to a socialist state. During this period, the politics, economics, culture, education, and other aspects of the country were all deeply influenced by the former Soviet Union (Huo, 2017) and as a result, in the 1950s and 1960s, the new socialist government abandoned all other curricula, including Dewey's educational theories which were criticised as serving capitalist political ideas and were therefore deemed unsuited to a socialist country. The Montessori curriculum, and unit-based integrated curricula that had been created by pioneers Chen Heqin and Zhang Xuemen were also considered inappropriate by the new government (Li & Chen, 2017). In conclusion, the close relationship with the Soviet Union has led to the change of education model in China. Instead, a subject-based curriculum was adopted as the 'only politically correct curriculum in the world', with an emphasis on subject learning, knowledge and skills acquisition and classroom teaching, imported from its socialist partner as well as role model, the Soviet Union (Li, 2009). In conclusion, the Soviet Union pattern has been described as 'direct direction' and 'comprehensive instruction' (Huo, 2015). The Cultural Revolution (1966-1967), a particularly tumultuous period in Chinese history, is often regarded as the 'dark age' of, among other things, ECE in China (Li & Chen, 2017), that dramatically disrupted earlier progress. The curriculum was reconstituted, with subjects such as physics, chemistry, history, geography and literature replaced by courses in industrial skills and other practical matters. Kindergartens were closed down, children were sent home with no opportunities for early education, and qualified teachers were sent to rural or remote areas for re-education through labour (Li, 2009). It can be described that during this period, political ideology and the social environment were predominant in the choice and development of education.

### *The 1980s: the influence of 'Opening up' Policy*

The Ministry of Education issued guidelines on kindergarten education (draft) in 1979, keeping the subject based curriculum adopted by the Soviet Union. Later, in 1982, the national textbooks for the curriculum were introduced that instructed kindergartens and teachers to adopt the ‘subject-based’ approach. Such an approach was suggested by teachers to deliver subjects in a teacher-centred and subject-centred way, rather than a more play-based, children centred and life experience-based approach that flourished in the early 1900s, advocated by the progressive education ideologies.

National leaders in China perceived education as integral to economic development, as advocated by Deng Xiaoping, and education needed to be oriented toward modernisation, the world and the future (Goldman, Kumar, & Liu, 2008). The word ‘globalisation’ can be used to describe the trend in China since the issue of ‘Opening up’ policy, which also caused the trend of applying western educational ideologies and approaches in China. At the same time, the flourishing of the market economy affected China's educational development, and a market-oriented approach emerged in the educational sphere. The state's call for decentralisation and diversification of educational services created ample room for the growth of private education. As a result, private schools and colleges became more popular, challenging the conventional public and private boundaries in the Chinese education sector (Mok & Wat, 1998; Wu, 2013). In this case, the subject-based curriculum adopted by the Soviet Union was no longer relevant to the socio-economic context at that time. Three significant issues that happened around the 1990s exert great influence on the turning point in early childhood education. In 1981, the Kindergarten Education Outline -Trial Draft was issued. This outline advocated kindergartens conduct educational practice through games, sports activities, classes, observation, work, entertainment and daily life. Later, the government decided to learn, once again, from America due to the great success the US was perceived to have achieved in the 1980s. The *‘Kindergarten Work and Regulations and Procedures’* regulation was also issued in 1989 reflects the aims of this reform that ECE should be oriented towards the world, to the future and to modernization (Zhu & Zhang, 2018). The regulations were educating through kinds of activities using games as the basic activity and varied forms of activities to lead children to take the main roles in the education process, filling the gap not mentioned in the outline. It can be found that the learning from the Soviet-Union model has shifted into the new period.

During this period, western educational approaches and ideologies were again imported into China, including Dewey, Montessori, Bruner, Jean Piaget, and Vygotsky and brought to the

fore by Chinese educators (Zhu & Zhang, 2018). However, the rapid shift into new models of education resulting in teachers not being able to implement these progressive educational ideas and approaches in practice (Qi & Melhuish, 2017; Li & Chen, 2017). In order to solve this issue, the Ministry of Education released the supplementary Guidelines for Kindergarten Education Practice - Trial Version in 2001. Since the reform policy was issued, early childhood education related regulations and guidelines were written to guide the education to better follow the wider changes within society. It is obvious that the policies and regulations issued correspond to national-level social changes. When society shifted to a market economy-based society, education institutions likewise could not avoid transforming using market economy-based models. This document, much influenced by western educational ideologies and approaches, marked a turning point in the development of ECE in China. Liu and Feng (2005) indicate that this wave of ECE reform in Mainland China brought about five main changes: *'(1) respect towards children, (2) active learning and (3) teaching for individual learning needs; (4) emphasising play-based teaching and learning; (5) teaching and learning through daily life in kindergartens.* This period of educational ideology has been described as a model of 'learning from the West', alongside the impact of wider social changes. It is believed by eastern countries that western education has the advantages in cultivating creative, innovative, confident, and entrepreneurial individuals (Gao, 2003; Gao, 2015; West-Knights, 2017; Zhao, 2014). The evidence that influential technological innovations which impart human beings to society happens in western countries explains the reason for 'learning from the west' phenomena. In other words, under the influence of social change, the education system and model in China aimed to take western approaches and, again, adopt them within the Chinese ECE.

To conclude, since the 'Opening up' policy has been issued, the socio, economic and political context in China has gone through tremendous changes. Researcher Huo (2016) has concluded that the dominance of the subject based curriculum learning from the Soviet Union was not suitable for the early childhood model in China. In other words, the focus of curriculum shifts from the 'subject', 'teachers' and 'results' to the 'children', 'dynamic daily activities' and 'education process' (Shi, 2003). It has also shown the quick shift from Soviet Union model to adaptation of western educational ideologies and approaches in the early childhood education of China has caused the teachers' difficulty in teaching practice. It is also be argued that the education model has changed along with the socio-economic and political changes in China.

Education reforms are continuing in China and different forms of the ECE curriculum and models have been trialled. School-based curricula (SBC) have been implemented in western countries, advocating a decentralisation model and increasing school autonomy (Li, 2005). Entering the new millennium, China began to import SBC, advocating three levels of administering the ECE curriculum: the national level, the local level, and the school-based level (Li, 2005). Such administrative educational systems are encouraged by the Guidelines. Reviewing the development of educational curriculum in ECE forms the foundation of this research that current ECE practice varies in different preschools, and consequently it is worth exploring how western theories are applied in different contexts. It is also the main research aim of this study.

As a result of the influence of SBC, schools and teachers have gained control over the curriculum as delivered within their settings. However, this was within a context where there was little existing experience within the profession in designing a curriculum, given the former centralised curriculum model. Teachers and schools were found to be incapable of fully implementing a decentralised model. In this case, it was natural for schools and teachers to refer to learning from other kindergartens or other countries (Li, 2006; Zhu, 2011). For instance, in Shanghai, a theme-based curriculum was applied in practice, which advocated daily activities organised in different themes (Zhu, 2018; Shanghai Education Committee, 2002). In general, however, at that time, the main problem was the gap between advanced imported ideas and existing kindergarten practice.

This review of changes in ECE in China, organised in three waves demonstrates what has been written elsewhere; that imported theories and ideology development have always influenced reforms in ECE curriculum, but in such a way as to create a ‘pendulum’ effect. This ‘pendulum’ effect describes the way in which educational reforms in China swing back and forth, from one polar to another one (Wei & Yang, 2019). Such phenomena also correspond to the research conducted by Huo (2016) which concluded that the curriculum reforms in China experienced the pathway from ‘imitation to innovation’. Under these circumstances, research has explored curriculum innovation in China, however, few studies have explored the process by which western ideologies have shaped and been translated into practice. This is, therefore, worthy of further examination and forms one of the central aims of this thesis.

Since the 1980s the Chinese government has introduced a number of reforms to improve quality in ECEC. However, at the same time as these changes and improvements at policy level,

public services were dramatically reduced (Zhou, 2011) with an increase in private services to fill the subsequent gap. This led to public complaints, covered widely in social media, urging the government to introduce measures to include the private sector, but at the same time to develop affordable ECEC services (Liu 2010, Pang 2010).

It has been argued that the influence of Western culture in ECE since the ‘reform and opening-up’ policy resulted in a subject-based curriculum model deemed inappropriate within the context of the rapid development of Chinese society (Li & Chen, 2017). It has been suggested that imported western education ideologies and approaches are not compatible with traditional Chinese values which emphasise conformity, respecting authority and child discipline (Li et al., 2011). For instance, traditional Chinese teaching and learning focused on training, knowledge acquisition through memorisation, the children’s efforts and academic achievements which are contrary to the goals embedded within the new regulations (Education Bureau, 1989, 1996, 2001), namely children’s individual interests and their freedoms, as well as child- initiated and process-oriented activities (Sun & Rao, 2017). The inappropriateness issue in importing western educational approaches and ideologies into China, it has been concluded by researchers, is the conflict between deep-rooted socialist education and capitalist education (Gu, 2007). Problems were seen to have arisen from a surface-learning of liberal western educational ideology which, lacking a full understanding, means such theories are not appropriately applied in the Chinese context (Huo, 2017). These imported western ideologies have, therefore, challenged the educational system in China until today.

#### *The 2010 to the present: influence from the national innovation strategy*

In 2010, the government, after extensive consultations, published the National Plans for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), which has been regarded as a watershed moment for ECE in China since it set new targets for education and ECEC. Since then, the development of ECE has become a priority within the government’s agenda. Accessibility to early years settings, children’s wellbeing, building teacher capacity, improving the teacher-child ratio, and raising quality in teachers’ standards (through the introduction of minimum qualifications), all levels of government should be responsibilities for preschool education at further time, and regulating and managing the private sector, formed the multifaceted approach to improving ECE within this medium-and long-term plan (Bullough & Palaiologou, 2019). Such changes in policies have been critiqued by many researchers that it was an important development aiming at providing diverse programmes for children and

parents. To ensure the targets set in the plan, the government introduced the Three-Year Action Plan (2014-2016). This plan required each county to develop a three-year plan to raise quality in early childhood education by identifying at a local level the conditions and challenges.

To summarise, the Chinese government introduced a number of policies to strongly promote the development of preschool education. However, several challenges meant that the early childhood education developed slowly and in a patchy way (Qi & Melhuish, 2017), being an amalgamation of different imported ideologies and practices (Li & Chen, 2017). Since 2010, amounts of research (e.g., Pan et al, 2018; Li & Chen, 2017; Yang & Li, 2019) review the development of early childhood education, showing the curriculum that derives from a hybrid of different cultures is one of the key themes. Tracing the development of ECE in China, it indicates the trends of learning of advanced educational strategies from western countries. Research in recent years has focused on critiquing the current curriculum and its cultural appropriateness. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, for example, ECE practice has been criticised for borrowing from western countries without taking into consideration the rich Chinese cultural context (Zhu, 2015). It has been argued by researchers that there are three main influences in shaping ECEC during this period, that are mirrored in the context and content of the curriculum: Western ideals (with an emphasis on Dewey, Jean Piaget and progressive education), the Soviet Union (with the preference of a subject based curriculum) and Chinese traditional value and culture. All three have been argued to have impacted on the development of what many researchers call a Chinese Hybrid Culture in ECEC (Wang & Spodek 2000; Zhu & Wang 2005; Li 2005, Zhu and Zhang 2008, Zhu 2015, Yang 2016, Li, Yang and Chen 2016, Li and Chen 2017, Yang and Li 2018 a and b).

Whilst it has been argued that directly learning from western education ideologies is no longer sufficient for China, the reasons why western education ideologies and approaches have been adopted and their appropriateness or otherwise have been explored due to the differences in culture and education systems in the West and in China. Research suggests that different cultural backgrounds and educational beliefs lead to the adaptation of western education ideologies and approaches (Li and Chen 2017, p. 1476; Yang and Li 2019). However, researchers have also argued the inappropriateness of importing western education ideologies and approaches in China due to the different cultures, different systems and different developing conditions. It has also been recognised by other researchers that culture plays a role outside the formal arrangement of schooling. It affects the behaviours of students, teachers,



school leaders, and parents, resulting in implicit curricula or hidden curricula (Gatto, 2002; Wren, 1999) and shadow education (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre, & Wiseman, 2001; Bray, 1999).

Zhao (2018) has argued that China prefers to learn from western education especially the United States and the United Kingdom due to their excellent performance, particularly in the scientific arena for example in their patents, Nobel Prize winners and influential technological breakthroughs. This suggests that it is reasonable for China to learn from such countries, given that such successes are directly attributed to their education systems. However, the researcher can also argue that such results are not directly derived from the education system but rather from the interactions between the education and culture of the respective systems. In particular, different cultural perspectives lead to different understandings of the form and sequence of knowledge and skills children should receive at certain ages (Zhao, 2018). There is no doubt that western education ideologies follow the same paradigm as that which China follows: equipping children with the same set of predetermined knowledge and skills. However, the implementation is drastically different from that in China due to the differences between different countries in both cultural and political contexts.

It can be concluded from the historical development of education, as outlined above, that education in China has experienced a process of experiencing learning from other countries. The western education has influenced the ECE in China at different stages. The review of the historical development of ECE in China shows that the great achievements made by western countries in technologies and education has caused the trend of learning from the west in China. From the beginning of 1949, China has been eager to explore the pathway to find and improve the education program quality, which is suitable for Chinese children. Learning from western countries has been the approach. Issues have also been raised relating to the appropriateness of China developing its own paradigm of education. The rudimentary stage began in the 1900s and the model of ECE was directly imported from other countries serving the privileged sectors in society. When China entered the second stage, the education system and paradigm changed along with the political and social changes, towards the former Soviet Union. During the modern period, early childhood education developed into various school-based models, to differing extents, also influenced by imported western education ideologies. In addition, three important documents (the governmental guidelines issued in 1989 and 2001, and national plans in 2010) indicate the influence of social changes and government power on educational practice.

In general, the former research has concluded that the current ECE model in China has been the hybrid of three kinds of culture: the western culture, Chinese traditional values, and culture, as well as the Soviet Union model. At the same time, it also reveals that international education approaches and ideologies borrowing models are not suitable for China. In this case, there is no doubt that China is now advocating innovation in education. While acknowledging the successful and positive ECE progress resulting from the curriculum reform, the critiques mainly focus on the issue of culturally appropriating western educational ideas and forming the Chinese featured education models is the key topic. Under this circumstance, this study would focus on the implementation of imported western educational ideologies and approaches in the Chinese context.

### **2.3 Models and frameworks describing theory-practice in ECE in China**

Reviewing the development of ECE, researchers have concluded several components shaping ECE reforms in China, which mainly are social changes, political pressure, and cultural collision and fusion from the macro-level perspective. Many scholars such as Zhu (2008), Zhu and Zhang (2018), Qi and Meliush (2017), Yang and Li (2017) and (2019), Li and Chen (2016), Zhu and Wang (2005) have explored the cultural influence in Chinese educational development. Former research concludes these basic factors for causing and influencing education development and reforms in China. Researchers have found out that during the development of ECE in China, western ideologies have been one of the key factors in Chinese education. Several studies explore the relationship between western ideology and curriculum development. However, there is little research providing broad and deep data to examine findings emerging from historical review. In addition, although mechanisms explaining different factors influencing curriculum and educational practice, socio-cultural perspectives on educational practice, there is little focus on exploring specific how western ideologies intertwine and are shaped by growing Chinese specific socio-cultural factors.

In this section, it would review frameworks and models explored by former researchers. It starts with the article written by Qi and Melhuish in 2017 showing that

*‘The conceptual framework for this paper rests on ideas that ECEC development in China was much influenced by (1) its social, political and economic development; (2) interests and demands of the public; and (3) international influences.’*

From this research, it provides the framework describing interconnected factors in influencing ECE development in China. Judging from its framework, it can be noticed that during different periods, the ECE in China follows different cause-effect patterns. The top-level of elements are social, political and economic development; interest and demands of the public and the international influences. Based on these elements, policies are issued to guide the educational practice, while the practice provides reflections for revised policies. It focused on the national and international factors.

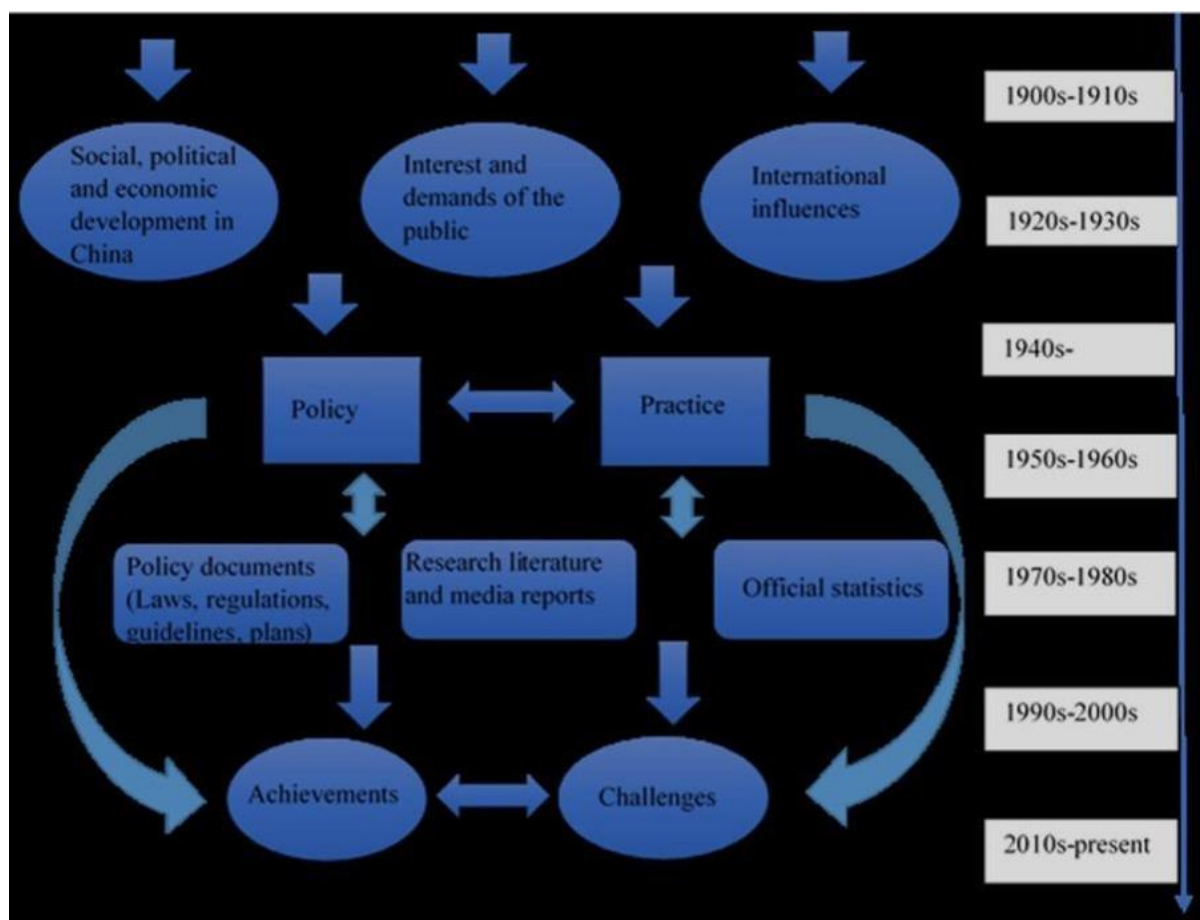


Figure 2.1 Analytical framework described in the research 'Early childhood education and care in China: history, current trends, and challenges' (Qi & Melhuish, 2017)

This research is based on the review of related literature and policies on ECE with no empirical data and deep description of curriculum, pointing out social, political and economic factors. In terms of other factors describing curriculum innovation models, the culture is the most frequently mentioned element. Research conducted by Yang and Li in Shenzhen and Hong

Kong in 2017 showed the comprehensive and inclusive framework for curriculum innovation based on culture and social difference. In this research, it also describe how the curriculum was constructed within the multi-level contexts, which was influenced by former researches.

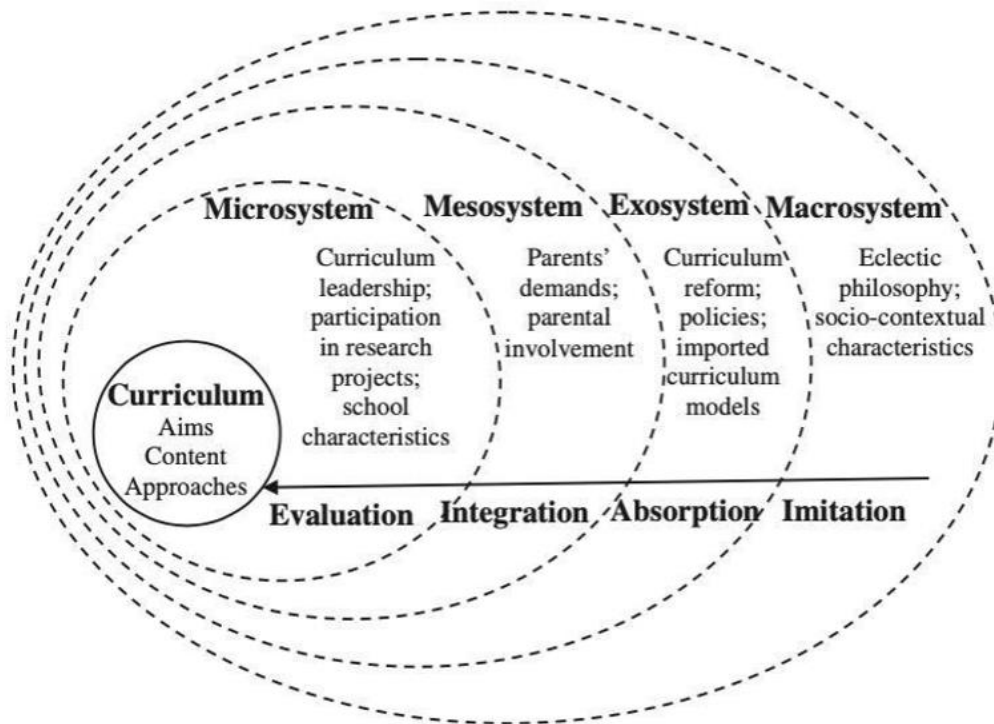


Figure 2.2 Framework describing the curriculum in research (extracted from Yang (2018))

Based on the theoretical framework, it shows that the curriculum in the chosen setting experiences four steps from imitation to evaluation, reshaped by four levels of elements: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The analyses were based on three kinds of data: interview, teachers' weekly plans and observation of daily activities. Given methodology in this research, the representativeness of findings cannot be applied into other situations. However, it demonstrates the process of curriculum constructed in specific situations, basing the theoretical foundation for this research. The study conducted by Yang and Li (2018) explored the Shenzhen and Hong Kong curriculum construction through case study. It also finds that the curriculum is the balancing system hybridising Eastern and Western curricula, under the guidance from Chinese philosophy. This study focuses on the private settings, so that the framework may change when analysing public settings. These elements in different levels relating to the private settings have not been examined. In the current study,

the gap would be filled by focusing on the public settings in Shanghai, attempting to figure out elements describing public settings.

In terms of socio-cultural mechanisms in ECE curriculum has also been explained by Yang (2019), demonstrating the cultural narrative rather than as technological rationality growing out of binary logic and quality discourse. He has described cultural explanation and meaning making as the key focus in curriculum designing. A framework describing the mechanism of socio-cultural perspective in ECE curriculum has been provided by him.

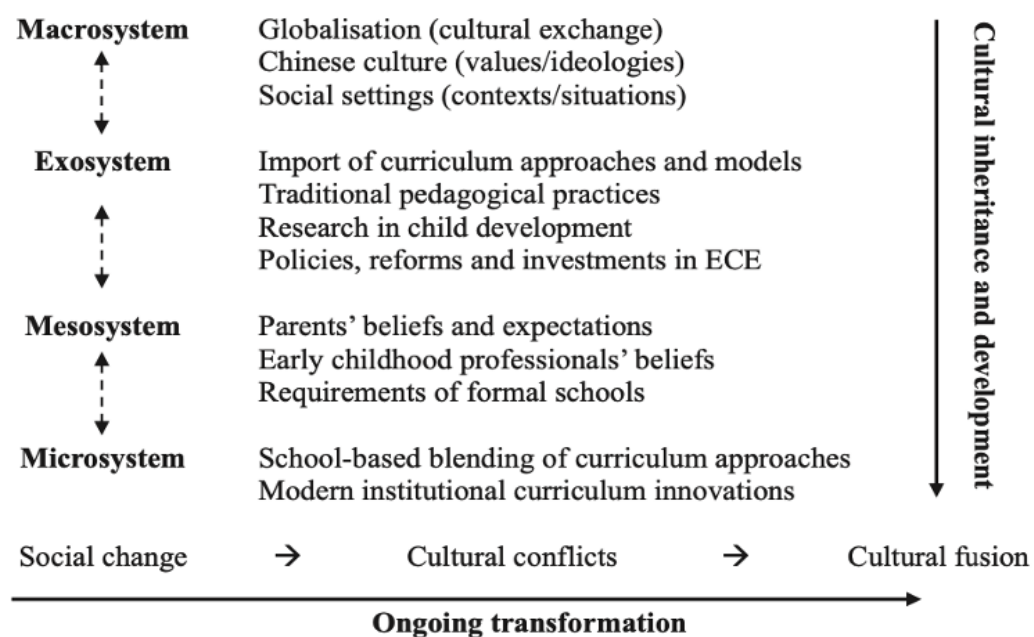


Figure 2.3 Understanding the sociocultural mechanism of early childhood curriculum.

From his finding, it exemplifies the use of Bronfenbrenner's framework into research. Again, this framework was drawn on private case study. The representation in public settings, even in different contexts, needs to be examined. As to this study, it provides the example of exploring socio cultural mechanisms in curriculum designing. Since, the research proposed this project to examine the way of applying western educational ideologies and approaches in educational practice (including curriculum) in Shanghai public settings. The socio-cultural element in curriculum designing is the foundation to perform this study.

Based on these related studies, it can be found out that in specific contexts, there is the descriptive process of applying western ideologies and approaches into shaping by kinds of

determinants. In other words, western ideologies and approaches are applied in the Chinese educational context. This is the foundation for further exploration of western ideologies and approaches being shaped and tailored in other contexts. Apart from these two studies, other researchers also found out that many sociocultural factors exert great influence on Chinese ECE curriculum and pedagogy such as policies, cultural beliefs, and local communities' environment (Chan & Rao, 2010; Rao, Ng, & Pearson, 2010). All these factors approve complex interactions among elements and curriculum and pedagogy. The perspective of 'culture' has been highlighted. However, the interplays from other elements such as political and economic status, different communities and teachers' perception with western ideologies in performing educational practice have not been analysed. In addition, few of them explore the specific situation in Shanghai, from the perspectives of shaping western ideologies and approaches into formulation of school-based curriculum. It is the research gap which contributes to this study.

#### **2.4 Review of western education ideologies and implications**

From the review of the historical development of Chinese ECE, educational curriculum and reforms, it can be concluded that western ideologies have resided in China and intertwined with the Chinese local ECE curriculum since the 1920s. The ideologies imported, however, were influenced by different levels of elements such as political relations with other countries, societal requirements, local socio-cultural environment and teachers' personal educational beliefs. In order to fully understand how western education was reshaped by these different determinants in specific context, it is worth exploring the main concepts of imported western theories, providing a foundation for explaining how western ECE theories and approaches are applied in educational practice.

Existing reviews of ECE development in China, suggest that some ideologies and approaches to education are more prevalent in China, in particular, John Dewey's progressive education theory, Jean Piaget's and Vygotsky's cognitive theory. The 'Project-based' learning approach has been widely used in Shanghai, which is also worth exploring the meaning and application of this approach. It helps the researcher to explore how this approach was transferred in participating settings. Consequently, this section summarises the main concepts of these theories and approaches and their application in education.

### 2.4.1 Review of Dewey's philosophy of Education

John Dewey is widely regarded as a social reformer (Morgan K. Williams, 2017), and large portions of his work relates to education. He firmly held the belief that the fundamental objective of education was to bring about social reform, wherein a democratic educational approach would equip children to become culturally aware, open-minded individuals who actively and constructively contribute to society (Piedra, 2018). Dewey rejected authoritarian structures and consequently, traditional teaching methods in schools. He believed in 'progressive education' and advocated for reforms in pedagogical aspects of teaching and the school curriculum. In general, Dewey's educational philosophy was concluded by Sikandar in 2015 to contain these main aspects: Dewey's philosophy of education and experience; Dewey's philosophy of curriculum and pedagogy.

#### *2.4.1.1 Philosophy of education*

John Dewey's book '*Democracy and Education*' expresses his beliefs surrounding education as paving the way for social reform. In other words, education for all at a high level serves as the foundation for democracy as a form of life. Living together in modern society demands public exchange and it is impossible to achieve without educated citizens. For Dewey, democracy means equipping citizens with the ability to take on the responsibility to make informed, intelligent choices and decisions leading to the public good (Stobie, 2016). To conclude, Dewey believed democracy stands for the right of human-beings to the freedom of choice. He also stated that democracy is not just a political system but an ethical ideal with active informed participation by its citizens. Established beliefs and theories should be critically questioned and revised in the light of new developments and therefore pragmatically evolve to meet changing needs. The moral purpose of education lies in the recognition that for democracy to function effectively, citizens must be informed, knowledgeable, and educated. Thus, it is imperative that classroom teachers and schools assume the responsibility of fostering character development alongside imparting knowledge and skills (Stobie, 2016).

Dewey stressed that education has to prepare students for an uncertain future and, therefore, a high priority should be given to developing effective habits and the ability to adapt and to learn how to learn. In addition, Dewey insisted that education should focus on the student's interest rather than that of the instructor or subject. Dewey's influence on education was evident in his theory about social learning; he believed that school should be representative of a social environment and that students learn best when in natural social settings (Flinders & Thornton,

2013). There seems to be two general assumptions about his theory: the individual and social aspects of education. As to the individual aspect, Dewey said that '*Education is a constant re-organizing or reconstructing definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind*' (Dewey, 1939, pp112). The kind of society that Dewey wanted was a democracy (David, 2008). In this case, it can be inferred that Dewey's definition of education has relied on the kind of society and on the experience of teachers. In general, it can also be concluded as 'learning by doing' in education.

#### *2.4.1.2 Philosophy of education and experience*

Dewey proposed a new educational theory, which highlighted the link between a child's experience and his life, which was advocated by Dewey as the aim of education (Sikandar, 2015). Dewey also believed that there was a strong correlation between interaction with the environment and continuity in education within a child's experience. It is highlighted by Dewey that continuity and interaction mean all experiences including the past and present are carried forward. It is through such interactions that children gain their life experience from society (Sikandar, 2015). When this link exists, the environments are the fields in which situations and conditions interact with people and create personal life-long experiences. In terms of environment definition, it refers to the situations and conditions that interact with personal needs and interests, creating individual experience (Dewey, 1938). It was believed by Dewey that young children should have interactions with their surroundings, which included people, and physical environments. It is mentioned by Dewey that continuity and interaction means all experiences including the past and present are carried forward.

In terms of children and education, these experiences specifically are given value and direction by teachers (Monkey, 2013). Therefore, teaching should be based on children's experiences, leading them to participate in learning activities willingly. These activities should allow children the freedom to think, react and lead in playing games and activities. In this case, such learning experiences should have clear learning objectives, fully understanding of environments, and knowledge of what children have suggested for educators.

Apart from highlighting the importance of experience, Dewey also advocated learning by doing, as well as being closely connected to community, that is to say, school was a kind of community for children. Since it offered children hands-on and collaborative learning experiences, helping children to fully acquire new knowledge and skills. As Dewey expressed, '*Education is not*



*preparation for life; education is life itself.*' (John Dewey, 1916, p239). This statement encapsulates two of his main opinions. One is that education is not a sterile activity in which the child is a bucket to be filled. On the contrary, children should be at the core of activities, which should be relevant to their own experience. The other is Dewey's view that both teachers and children should treat education as a life-long process.

John Dewey's concepts about experience and education can be described as 'education means social life', 'education means growth and development' and 'education means reconstruction of experience'. These three ideas are interconnected with each other.

### *Principles of curriculum*

The laboratory school Dewey established was regarded as the centre of progressive education, which also inspired his curriculum work. His work *'The Child and the Curriculum'* explains how Dewey transferred large amounts of personal experience and facts towards a more publicly defensible theoretical understanding. Dewey insisted on the role teachers should play during teaching time and emphasised the importance of observing children and documenting these observations. As Simpson and Jackson (2003) described, Dewey holds the view that the child and the curriculum are two interconnected elements, and his starting point is *'a child creates his own experience through the transaction with the surrounding environment'*. The traditional concept of a curriculum is a set of systematised information which has been packed with different subjects, independent of children's experiences (Leshkovska & Spaseva, 2016). However, Dewey did not deny the need for systematised information, rather he criticised the separation of children's individual experience with the curriculum. It can be concluded that Dewey thinks the children and the curriculum build together form unity in the education process, along with class teachers. That is to say, the curriculum was the study of the *'children's experience'* and the *'subject matter'* (Simpson & Jackson, 2003). It can be concluded that the accomplishment of the process of transition lies with the teacher's guidance. A curriculum contributes to a child's learning when it relates to the existing experience, providing stimulation and guidance. Dewey thought that the connection of subject content and flexible classes could allow children to follow their own interests. Teachers are told to notice that basic skills including reading and writing should not be taught by subject, but taught from the children's need to master them through the process of achieving new goals. In this way, it emphasises the importance of the children's own peace with their own individual motivation.

### *Principles of pedagogy*

John Dewey believed that the learning process was socially constructed, and brain-based pedagogy should place children as the centre of learning, rather than the curriculum and teachers. In this section, teachers' role and Dewey's philosophy about pedagogy will be discussed. Teachers have always been acknowledged to be one of the most important parts of the education process since children need the guidance and the understanding of experience and development. It was also believed by Dewey that children need assistance from teachers in making sense of their world. In other words, interpretation and guidance of children are the two crucial tasks of teachers, tasks that require considerable effort and engagement (Leshkovska & Spaseva, 2016).

As Dewey described in 1974, he felt that it is essential for teachers to understand the characteristics of, and differences in, the former experiences of children, as well as the nature of each child. In this case, observation of each child was necessary and teachers should also determine what kinds of experiences children would be interested in and ready for. From his perspective, children's demands and interests are the two core elements in education (Mooney, 2013). In other words, children's interests and needs drive teachers' instruction (Dewey, 1938). Dewey proposed that children would understand knowledge and skills best when they were involved in the curriculum designing. In other words, children would learn actively as the syllabus is designed according to their needs and preferences of learning. In addition, he proposed that the learning process should also be related to children's prior knowledge, combining new concepts with real-life experiences.

Apart from teachers, Dewey also emphasised that schools and classrooms should be representative of real-life situations, allowing children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings (Guttek, 2014). Schools and classrooms should be real life. When it comes to how children learn, Dewey held a 'child-centred' approach to children's learning. The school and classroom were seen as the social entity for children to learn and problem-solve together as a community, rather than taking teachers-imposed knowledge models and teacher-directed activities (Schiro, 2013). Therefore, it is of great importance that teachers' guidance and appropriate intervention is an integral part of the education process.

### *Educational implications of John Dewey in early childhood education practice*

From this review of the philosophy of John Dewey, it has been concluded that his philosophy described the individual learning best from his experience, linking learning with environment. Even today, Dewey's ideas are relevant to current thinking about how children learn and think and develop. Dewey's theoretical work focused on primary fields within philosophy, such as aesthetics (beauty), ontology (existence), and epistemology (knowledge). However, much of his work was influential on early childhood education practices such as curriculum planning and teachers' pedagogy. When it comes to the educational implications, it can be said that Dewey held the view that children should 'learn by doing' and that the teachers' role was to encourage experimentation and 'child-centred' ideology thought (Allan, 2018). Specifically, Dewey believed that experienced adults played a central role in children's learning. In detail, Dewey's idea is that it is the teachers' role *'to use their superior knowledge to help children make sense of the world. He [Dewey] thought that information coming from an experienced other was more useful to children than something they stumbled upon by themselves.'* (Allana, 2018).

Dewey's philosophy has made a lasting influence on education, including early childhood education. After his death, some of his ideas and philosophies, although looking very different, are being used to promote student engagement in classrooms through the use of technology as example. In China, Chen Heqin and Tao Xingzhi, the Chinese educators, have created the Chinese educational model based on John Dewey's educational philosophy. Tao Xingzhi has advocated the 'teaching, learning and doing' model, which emphasised that 'teaching, learning and doing is the same thing, while the doing is the centre of teaching and learning. His pedagogy has implemented John Dewey's educational ideologies into Chinese society (Zou & Zhang, 2023). It has been reviewed that Tao's pedagogy has insisted on the learner-centred ideology, which contributed to cultivating children's interests in session. Educator Chen Heqin also learnt from John Dewey and localised Dewey's ideologies in China (Xu, 2003; Wang & Tang, 2002; Li, 2009). Chen has advocated 'living education', which described that education should respect children's development process. He also believed that education should be linked to the society and be implemented through games for children. 'Teaching in doing, learning in doing, and progress in doing' is his pedagogy, and a teacher should be the guide in teaching. It can be seen that his philosophy was also largely influenced by John Dewey. It can be concluded that localisation of John Dewey's philosophy in China has started since the beginning of 1920.

The educational approaches 'Reggio Emilia' and 'Project-based' learning was also influenced by John Dewey (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). Lindsay (2015) compared the Reggio Emilia approach and John Dewey's philosophy, arguing that the Reggio Emilia approach is greatly influenced by John Dewey's ideas. The key tenets of the Reggio Emilia approach emphasise the notion of children's right as citizens; strengthening community participation; treating children as capable and co-constructors of knowledge; treats educators as the researchers and co-learners in the learning process; the role of environment such as teachers in learning process; the project-based methodology (Edwards, et al., 2012; Rinaldi, 2013). John Dewey espoused the concept of learning through doing, which included the play-based, hands-on activity and project-based approaches in terms of curriculum provision. His ideas covered the aspects of cognitive growth and experience, democratic education, active role of teachers as the key components of the environment around children, and the importance of community context. Consequently, the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education can be seen to be rooted in John Dewey's educational philosophy, his perspectives on aesthetics, and his beliefs in democracy.

#### *Application of John Dewey: The project-based learning approach*

The Project-based learning approach which is believed to be founded in John Dewey's philosophy. Project-based learning (PBL) is a teaching strategy that provides students with real life skills (Wahbeh et al., 2021). It is believed to fit with social constructivist theory. From the perspective of Kilpatrick (2012), PBL usually includes a set of meaningful activities in a social environment focusing on specific content or themes. For instance, PBL advocates the principles of 'learning by doing', experimenting, teamwork, social skills and collaboration. To conclude, the 'Project-based' learning and Reggio Emilia are both influenced by John Dewey's idea: highlighting the interaction between environment and children and 'learning by doing'.

In this study, the 'Project-based' learning approach has been used in participating settings. In order to explore the application of this approach in Shanghai, it is worthy to explore the meaning and original concept of 'Project-based' learning. As reviewed in previous section, the PBL is rooted in John Dewey's experiential learning. Such reviews enable the researcher to better understand this educational approach, basing the foundation for analysing the reshaped 'Project-based' learning by Chinese class teachers in specific context.

Based on the research that the PBL approach derives from the progressive educational ideologies, inspired by John Dewey (Peterson, 2012). It has experienced several formalisations

of the model. The original key concept of this approach is the ‘activity undertaken by students that really interested them’ (Ravitch, 2000). It can be understood that this approach centres on student’s interests and is led by students themselves. Then, the PBL is theorised into an approach that aims at enhancing students' motivation in learning, mastering conceptual knowledge, and improving their problem-solving abilities (Condliffe et al., 2017). It can be seen that from the educational expectations of PBL, it contributes to the similar children’s developmental objectives in Chinese educational regulations and guidelines. In order to guide people to know what they should do when applying PBL in educational practice, researchers have developed several components for the principles (Thomas, 2000; Grant, 2002; Krajcik & Shin, 2014).

#### *Motivated by driving questions*

Researchers emphasised that the PBL model should be motivated by one driving question which refers to one designed question leading students and teachers to elaborate through completing the project (Krajcik & Shin, 2014; Naaman, 2006). Teachers and students would revisit the question through doing the project, attempting to answer the driving question. It is believed to be crucial to achieve a deeper understanding of the learning goals of the course.

#### *Significant learning expectations*

Researchers believed that in each learning case adopting the PBL approach should design the targeting learning goals for students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008). Specifically, the learning goals encompass, but are not limited to, concepts of knowledge, understanding of subjects and academic disciplines, as well as critical thinking, cooperating abilities and cognition of rules (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2015a).

#### *Single project to organise learning*

One integral element of organising PBL is planning the project for students in which learning takes place. Researchers argued that it is the process through learning instead of the culmination of learning in classrooms. This is the distinguishing feature that defines PBL rather than other instructional approaches (Thomas, 2000).

Judging from these organising principles for PBL in practice, it can be seen that PBL can be used for integration with existing curriculum in any educational setting. It can be a single project for the process of learning specific educational objectives in subjects or any academic disciplines. There is no targeting students’ age in this approach. However, it indicates the

constructive abilities in such an approach since it requires students to construct things, they learnt during the process to answer core questions targeting educational goals. It emphasises on student's constructive abilities. In sequence, the implementation of PBL is another key issue for teachers in organising activities and sessions in their educational practice. Researchers also concluded several points for teachers implementing PBL in practice: encourage students' to be engaged in designing the project; use scaffolds (teachers, peers, materials and technology can served as scaffolds) to guide students; encourage collaborative learning in process (Grant, 2002; Krajcik & Shin, 2014; Chambers, 2000).

From such reviews of PBL in education practice, it shows that students are in charge of the main learning process from the designing to performing project while teachers take the role of encouraging, guiding and assessment after project completion. It requires well-developed constructive abilities for students which may not be suitable for children in early years. In this research, two participating settings chose such an educational approach but applied in two different ways due to class teachers' different understandings of the PBL. From the review of former educational philosophy, the 'Project-Based Learning', Dewey's progressive educational philosophy, Piaget's cognitive development theory, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory are interconnected in their focus on active, experiential learning, student-centeredness, social interaction, and the construction of knowledge. PBL aligns with these educational approaches and theories by providing a framework for meaningful, collaborative learning experiences that promote cognitive development, critical thinking, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts.

To conclude, the Project-based learning is the children-centered approach, showing the necessary for providing scaffolding such as materials, environment intervention for children. Such an approach starting from one single project, was driven by questions while learning expectations set by children were important.

#### *Conclusion and critical review of John Dewey's philosophy on education*

The review of Dewey's philosophy pointing out that education means social life while schools represent society, advocating child-centered ideology. Such a philosophy emphasised the importance of experience in education, learning by doing, the influence from the environment, the role of teachers and integration of curriculum. In early childhood education, these concepts can be applied by creating learning activities that are relevant to children's real world problems,

phenomena or experiences, foster a student-centered classroom. It can also help students understand the connections between learning and real world, engaging and that support children to apply their knowledge and skills into solving authentic problems.

Dewey pointed out that *'true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself'* (Dewey, 1987). He believed that children can learn best from continuous interactions with their environments (Mooney, 2013). Both teachers' role and experience have been highlighted in Dewey's opinions. It was also described that *'the school life should grow gradually out of the home life... It is the business of the school to deepen and extend children's sense of values and knowledge...'* (Dewey, 1938). This statement explained the role of schools and teachers. To conclude, there are several words that have been repeated many times throughout the whole section such as 'experience', 'teacher's guidance' and 'the individual and society'. When critically evaluating his theories, researchers must delve into the substantive implications of these terms. From a personal vantage point, Dewey's educational objectives invariably gravitate towards society. However, it is also an issue requiring discussion in modern societies (Zou & Zhang, 2023). When taking consideration of how Dewey's theories can be transferred in China, it is necessary to go back for review at what situation he created these theories. Dewey's theories have existed for over century and the world educational aims and societal environment has already changed. Dewey has always chased for 'democracy society', in stark contrast to China; distinctive cultural and environmental backdrop (Tu, 2012). As described above, if there is no democracy, there would be no Dewey's aim of education. It can be argued that there is no fixed education suitable for various kinds of society (Mooney, 2012). It is necessary to rethink whether Dewey's theory is suitable for Chinese education aims. In addition, progressive education provided the new pedagogical paradigm for both educators and teachers so that what roles that teachers should play may be different in today's society. Reviewing Dewey's theories provides researchers with insights of interrelations between society, education, children, and teachers. There are different models of curriculum being used in China so that it is also essential for teachers to choose the appropriate model for children. What kind of criteria are important for importing and applying pedagogy should be rethought before making decisions.

#### 2.4.2 Review of Jean Piaget and cognitive development theory

Jean Piaget is doubtless the most prolific writer and theorist on the development of the child. He is one of the most famous psychologists over the past centuries. Although Piaget is a

psychologist, and it may well be argued that as such his discussions of cognitive development have little in common with philosophy, it is probably true that philosophy and psychology are twin disciplines with strong influences on each other (J.Mallon, 1976). Nonetheless, Piaget's theory of cognitive development has created our overall view of how children think in their early years (Mookey, 2013). Among many critical reviews of Piaget's theory, it would be a mistake to dismiss or deny all his theories because of flaws in his methodology. This section introduces some basic concepts of his theory, to understand his theories more clearly, and explain how his early interest in biology influenced his theories. Most importantly, it briefly describes his theories about the developmental process: how the child moves from one stage to another and what factors in his environment are relevant. To understand his theories, it is also necessary to explore some basic components of Piaget's cognitive development theories, including 'Schema', 'Assimilation and Accommodation' and 'Equilibration'.

#### *Schema, assimilation and accommodation*

For Piaget, the behavioural parallel of structure in biology is the schema. According to Piaget (1952, p.7), schema was 'a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning.'. In a simple way, schema can be explained as a reliable response to a stimulus (Baldwin, 1967). As Baldwin described that schema not only represents various acts in different circumstances but also include overt motor behaviour patterns and internalised thought processes. It means that schema covers physical and psychological processes. For other people, such as Wadsworth, he suggests (2004) that schema can be thought of as being like 'index cards' filed in the brain, 'each one telling an individual how to react to incoming stimuli or information.'. In conclusion, to Piaget, schema represents the organised pattern of thought that helps individuals understand and interpret the world around them. That adapts and it is also a response at a reflex level and a way of organising knowledge. Each block of schema is connected to others, representing different aspects of the world.

As to adaptations, Piaget (1952) described it like 'assimilation and accommodation describe the adaptation process'. Broadly speaking, assimilation describes the human being's capability to handle new situations with their present stock of mechanisms; accommodation represents the process of change through which one becomes able to manage the situations that at first is difficult to handle. Other people like Gale (2001) also explained that assimilation describes a process of taking in new information and incorporating it into existing patterns. Conversely, accommodation is a process of changing the existing patterns into a new system. However,



accommodation cannot begin unless the individual tries to handle the new situation so that there is a challenge. Assimilation and accommodation are not isolated processes, they are connected to each other. Combining two processes together leads to one result-adaptation. In this case, Jean Piaget believed that children can achieve the balance between assimilation and accommodation which is achieved through a mechanism called equilibration. As children progress through the stages of cognitive development, it is important to maintain a balance between applying previous knowledge (assimilation) and changing behaviour to account for new knowledge (accommodation). Equilibration helps explain how children are able to move from one stage of thought into the next. In general, Piaget believed human development adapted to the physical and social environment through two basic processes: assimilation and accommodation.

#### *Four stages in cognitive development*

In studying the cognitive development of children and adolescents, Piaget identified four major stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational. Piaget believed all children pass through these phases to advance to the next level of cognitive development (Wood & Smith & Grossniklaus, 2001). Usually, Piaget set four stages: (1) sensorimotor period-from birth to two years; (2) preoperational period-from two to seven/eight years; (3) concrete operations period-from seven/eight to eleven; (4) formal operations period--beginning at age eleven. Piaget believed that all children experience the same process, however, these stages are not exactly the same for each child. The ages at which children progress through the stages are averages--they vary with the environment and background of individual children. At any given time, a child may exhibit behaviours characteristic of more than one stage (Baldwin, 1967).

The first stage, the sensorimotor period begins at birth and lasts until 18 months-2 years of age. The schemas of this period are sensorimotor patterns. According to Piaget (1952), the most important feature of this period is that the child is acquiring skills and knowledge through behaviour without any cognitive representation. At this period, as Cherry (2018) stated, the major acquisition is that infants know that things continue to exist even though they cannot be seen, which Piaget described as object permanence. Object permanence occurs at 7-9 months, demonstrating that memory is developing (Wood & Smith & Grossniklaus, 2001). It can be understood as '*objects remain in the environment even when they cannot be seen or perceived by other senses*' (Moreno, 2010). The second indication is this stage is deferred imitation which

was defined by Jean Piaget at the end of sensorimotor stage, meaning imitation (Martin et al., 2010). Deferred imitation is ‘the ability to reproduce a modelled activity that has been witnessed at some point in the past’ (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). At the end of this stage, children image and represent symbols relatively (Martin et al., 2010). Children at this age have a strong preference for imitating what they observe.

The second stage is the preoperational period, which starts from two to seven or eight years old. Children begin to develop their symbolic ability such as using pictures presenting the physical world (Bjorklund & Blasi, 2012). During this stage children begin to use language; memory and imagination are also developed. In the preoperational stage, children engage in make-believe and can understand and express relationships between the past and the future. More complex concepts, such as cause and effect relationships, have not been learned. Intelligence is egocentric and intuitive, not logical (Cherry, 2018).

The third stage is the concrete-operational period which starts from age seven to eleven. At this period, children’s behaviour and formal thought become much more stable and reasonable. Their thinking becomes more logical and organised, but still very concrete. As Jean Piaget (1950) pointed out in his theory of cognitive development, children’s ideas about time and space are sometimes inconsistent at this stage, but a basic logic is present that governs their cognitive operations. Children can learn rules easily, but they may have trouble understanding the logical implications of those rules in unusual situations (Cherry, 2018).

The last stage begins at age eleven. At this point, a child can understand the basic rules of causal thinking and scientific experimentation (Baldwin, 1967). Adolescents can think about multiple variables in systematic ways, can formulate hypotheses, and can think about abstract relationships and concepts (Wood & Smith & Grossniklaus, 2001).

### *Influences of Jean Piaget on educational practice*

Piaget’s cognitive development theory has had a significant impact on the field of teaching and learning (Case, 1998), although he did not explicitly relate his theory to education. Firstly, it sheds light on the concept of developmentally appropriate education, which is education that is appropriate for student’s physical and cognitive development abilities, as well as their social and emotional needs (Elkind, 1989). For example, the discovery learning based strongly in Jean Piaget’s theory, which advocated the idea that children learn best through doing and actively exploring, have been argued to be the central tenets in the primary curriculum in the

UK (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022). According to Piaget (1958), two basic processes: assimilation and accommodation require active learners since problem solving skills should be discovered instead of being taught. It also indicates that the learning process should be student centred, and teachers should be the facilitator rather than adopting the cramming style in the teaching process. Such implications impact the teaching and learning style for schools.

Apart from these implications, scholars such as Berk (2001) expressed four aspects of Jean Piaget's theory. Berk concludes Piaget's theory: emphasised on children's self-initiated and active involvement in learning activities; reduced educational practices aiming at making children think like adults; suggest the acceptance of individual differences in developmental progress; focus on children's thinking not just the results. Such statements are similar to those made by scholars Pakpahan and Saragih who expressed that Jean Piaget's theory suggests teaching should focus on process instead of the end product; adopting active methods requiring rediscovering and reconstructing in activities; using collaborative as well as individual activities so that children can learn from each other.

It can be concluded that Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, which describes the developmental stages of children and the two basic processes in learning, enables educators to better understand features of children at different stages and the way adults' approach early childhood education.

#### *Conclusion and critical review of Jean Piaget cognitive theory*

Jean Piaget's theory is based on four stages or periods. He believed that children progress through four stages in certain orders, at differing rates. For core related concepts in cognitive process which were schemas, assimilating, accommodating and equilibrium were raised. Balance between each concept is vital for understanding cognitive development. The application of Jean Piaget cognitive development theories centers on designing instructional strategies aligning with each stage of development. The four core concepts guided teachers' performance. Although Piaget's theories have had a great impact on developmental psychology, his notions have not been fully accepted without critique. Piaget's theory has some shortcomings, including overestimating the ability of adolescence and underestimating an infant's capacity. Piaget also neglected cultural and social interaction factors in the development of children's cognition and thinking ability. Cognitive development occurs at several stages during childhood. As a result, cognitive development studies the nature of child development in terms of how they gain conscious control over their intellect and behaviour.

Piaget's contributions, particularly in regard to the process of education among children and transferring cognition into psychology, have had a significant effect on the science of child development. In this study, the culture context has been emphasised. The application of Piaget's cognitive theory will contribute to the issue: Piaget neglected cultural and social interaction factors.

#### 2.4.3 Review of Vygotsky's cognitive development theory

Vygotsky is perhaps best known for his cognitive theories on development. Many educators think that his impact on the development of education in the United States was overshadowed by the huge popularity of Piaget's theories (Andrad & May 2004), which were enthusiastically embraced in preschool in the 1960s and continue to guide many classroom practises today (Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has significant applications in education, as it emphasises the role of social interaction, cultural context, and the importance of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). At the beginning, when the People's Republic of China was founded, education theories from the Soviet Union had a great impact on early childhood education in China and until now, his early childhood education theories have still been taught in college. In this case, it is worth reviewing Vygotsky's theories. His ideas have perennially sparked controversy due to his specific perspective to the study of the child. His work has shown that social and cognitive development work together and build on each other. He objected to the analysis of children's abilities based on intelligence tests (Mookey, 2013). It can be concluded that the major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) states: 'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)'. This pertains equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, to the formation of concepts, and to the development of will. (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 106). In general, as Kozulin (1990) indicates, Vygotsky's primary objective 'was to identify specifically human aspects of behaviour and cognition' (p. 4) via genetic analysis methodology (Moll, 2014). Vygotsky's theory is one of the foundations of constructivism. It asserts three major themes regarding social interaction, language development, and the zone of proximal development. This section will focus on describing these three concepts.

#### *The Zone of Proximal Development*

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was developed by Vygotsky during the late 1920s and elaborated progressively until his death in 1934 (Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010). Vygotsky defined the ZPD as ‘the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (1978, p. 86). That is to say, from Vygotsky’s understanding, ZPD is a concept describing the distance between the difficult task the child can do alone and the difficult task the child can do with help. This idea emphasises the importance of working together when individuals learn. Other people, not only adults, but also anyone that has already acquired the desired skills or new concepts, can help the learner to develop this ability. So, it can be understood that there are two levels in the ZPD: the actual development level and the level of potential development (Chaiklin, 2003). The former represents the upper limit of tasks that the child can perform alone, and the latter means the upper limit that the child can do with the assistance of a more capable individual. However, how to reach the potential level is another notion in his theory. ‘Scaffolding’ is the word that Vygotsky used to describe helping the child to ‘reach’ a new concept or skill by giving support (1978). Educators can provide scaffolding, which refers to temporary support and guidance, to help students bridge the gap between their current abilities and the learning tasks. Scaffolding can involve modelling, questioning, providing prompts, and breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps. It is widely believed that the socio-cultural theory of the mind and the concept of ZPD form the basis of the notion of scaffolding (Berk, 2001; Daniels, 2001; Wells, 2001). In order to scaffold children well, as Mookey (2013) said, it is important for teachers or adults to be keen observers. By careful observation, teachers or adults can plan the curriculum accordingly, encouraging children’s emerging abilities.

### *Social interactions*

Vygotsky assumed that the conversation between teachers, parents or other peers around children can convey to children the way their culture interprets and responds to the world. One aim of his work was in explaining the role of dialogue in structuring recognition and viewed the origin of cognitive functions as a product of social interaction (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). ‘*Human learning means a specific social nature and a process through which children enter gradually in the intellectual life of people surrounding them*’ (Vygotsky, 1934).

Lantolf (2000) described Vygotsky's a sociocultural environment as confronting children with a diverse set of tasks and questions. In the early stages, children are dependent on adults, especially their parents. They learn by adults instructing them what to do or not to do and how to do it. Such a process is mainly performed through language. As Topçiu & Myftiu (2015) stated, Vygotsky declared in 1978 that the child receives knowledge initially through the contacts and interactions with people, and then assimilates this knowledge by adding personal values to it. That is to say, adults interact with children, they show the meanings they attach to objects, events and experiences so that the thinking and language or other abilities of children can be developed during these processes. It is a similar process happening in schools. Children learn mainly from what teachers say and transform this knowledge during the learning process. Vygotsky stated that children's cognitive development is not only affected by their physical environment, but also by their social surroundings and interactions (Mookey, 2013).

#### *Language development and learning*

In Vygotsky's context, he conveys the message that language is the way that knowledge, skills or new concepts are delivered to children. As Mookey stated in 2013, Vygotsky believed that children's talking, not only conversation, is the important point for adults to clarify. It can help adults find out what children know and what they are confused about. What children think can be shown through their communication even when they are several months old. When they are young, they may cry because of hunger or discomfort. The older they get, the more kinds of language they can use to express themselves. Conversation, to some degree, can promote the learning of children and it also reflects the importance of interactive experience (1978). So, Vygotsky insists that encouraging conversations should be the focus in developing children's cognitive abilities.

#### *Play in early childhood education*

In Vygotsky's theory, play is an essential part of early childhood education. He believed that play promotes cognitive, social, and emotional development, which refers to the symbolic play (Karpov, 2003). Vygotsky asserted that play ought to encompass the incorporation of certain elements, namely: the establishment of an imaginative scenario; assuming and enacting designated roles; and adhering to a set of rules that are determined by the specific roles involved (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). It can be explained that in his theory, role-playing and imaginary situations are basic elements in planning play in preschools, while each imaginary situation should include roles and rules. Roles are the characters children play and rules are the

behaviours allowed by either role or play scenario. Roles are often explicit and can be seen through the children's behaviour. In the beginning, rules are often hidden in the play (i.e., they cannot be observed easily), but later the rules become explicit and are negotiated by the children. Further, when playing, children place constraints on their own behaviour, which marks the beginning of self-regulation (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Vygotsky believed that make-believe play provides children with chances to experience the world of adults. He believed that through role play, children can decontextualize meaning when the object is not present or evident (Smidt, 2009).

To conclude, play is believed to be the leading activity in preschools for children aged 3-6 years by Vygotsky. Vygotsky described play as follows:

*Though the play-development relationship can be compared to the instruction-development relationship, play provides a much wider background for changes in needs and consciousness. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives—all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. The child moves forward essentially through play activity. Only in this sense can play be considered a leading activity that determines the child's development. (pp. 102–103)*

Children act out synopses of their role models actions. In sequence, a model of reality which requires symbolic abilities has been generated. Children can learn to use objects through role play, enabling children to be equipped with an understanding of the external world. In this study, the 'Role play' has been mentioned and it has close relation to Vygotsky's theory. The 'Role play' has been considered by teachers to be influential on children's cognition and citizenship development.

#### *Educational implications of Vygotsky's theory in practice*

As a constructivist, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is applied in learning and teaching strategies such as modelling, feedback, questioning, instructing, and cognitive structuring (Debra & Dorette, 2005). These detailed strategies scaffold student learning from assistance by others to self-learning toward the goal of development. The most frequently mentioned in educational practice is the ZPD and scaffolding. Assisted performance is a term that is usually adopted in the ZPD. Drew has described that Vygotsky's ZPD has been applied to educational settings more so than in any other domain. The teacher's job is to identify each

student's level of ability, and then help them improve gradually, step by step, until they can master the task independently. Scholars such as Zohreh and Farzaneh in 2014 used the ZPD and scaffolding to guide writing and language learning. According to the ZPD and scaffolding meaning, they examined the writing abilities in different groups of students. The results showed that students with more instruction strategy made remarkable progress in writing. This research, from the perspective of results, proves the positive influence of understanding ZPD and scaffolding in teaching.

#### *Conclusion and comparison between Vygotsky and Jean Piaget cognitive development*

In this section, it would focus on the comparison between these two cognitive theories. Vygotsky proposed the Sociocultural Theory of Development, which became a major influence in the field of psychology. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Development theory describes student learning as a social process, which facilitates a child's potential for learning through social interactions and their culture. Vygotsky stated that '*learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organised, specifically human psychological function*' (McLeod, 2018). This suggests that social learning tends to precede cognitive development. Just like Piaget, Vygotsky believed that there were problems regarding children's range of learning. Thus, Vygotsky proposed the principle of the zone of proximal development. In contrast with Piaget, Vygotsky believed that through proper assistance and encouragement, children are able to perform a task that Piaget would consider to be out of the child's mental capabilities. The zone of proximal development refers to what the child can perform when given proper assistance. Vygotsky believed the role of education to provide children with experiences to socially interact with each other will allow the children to acquire the cultural values in society, thereby encouraging their individual learning through his theory of the zone of proximal development.

Ultimately, both psychologists have significantly contributed to the field for children's cognitive development. Piaget proposed that children progress through a universal stage of cognitive development through maturation, discovery practices, and some social transmissions of assimilation and accommodation. Vygotsky's theory emphasised the importance of culture and language of one's cognitive development. While both Piaget and Vygotsky may provide a distinctive approach to cognitive development theory that differs from each other, both theories offer reasonable approaches on how to teach certain material, concerning the ways in which children's process of thinking develops into adulthood. When both theories are used in



conjunction with one another, there is an endless scope to help children develop critical thinking skills as well as cognitive awareness for a well-rounded method to learn.

To conclude, Vygotsky's cognitive development theories focus on the influence from social interaction and environments. The symbolic play was the representative activity for children to develop their cognitive abilities. Two important concepts were raised: ZPD and scaffolding. Understanding of these two concepts help educator exert appropriate intervention in practice. The socio-cultural impact also influences educators' implementation of practice.

### **Summary**

This chapter has explored the related literature to the western educational ideologies and approaches. The review of historical development in China has explained why western educational ideologies can influence Chinese ECE and the necessity of localisation of importing western educational ideologies and approaches in China. At different stages of education development in China, it strongly shows that China has a preference to explore the appropriate way to develop its own model of education. The great achievements made by western countries have caused the China's learning from them. Globalisation has contributed to the infusion of western educational ideologies with Chinese traditional values and culture. At the same time, the inappropriateness of directly importing western educational ideologies in specific context, and lack of professional guidance in preschools, teachers found it was difficult to conduct educational practice. Former research has argued the socio-cultural influence in implementation of western educational ideologies in China.

Literature indicates the research gaps in current ECE practice in China that based on the implementation of school-based curriculum in different places, the localization and innovation of curriculum is one of the key issues for teachers. From the literature, it can be concluded that learning from advanced western educational ideologies and approaches has still been the trend in China, which were believed to be important at improving ECE qualities. In this case, it is worth exploring the implementation of a high-quality early childhood education (ECE) model that combines advanced Western educational philosophies while being tailored to local contexts.

Research has explored the mechanism of socio-culture in curriculum innovation, focusing on the meaning-making of western educational ideologies and approaches in practice. However, there is the lack of exploring the implementation of western educational ideologies and

approaches. Exploring other determinants intertwined with socio-culture in practical perspectives in Shanghai plays an important role in the issue raised above. In this case, it is worth providing empirical data exploring the framework describing applying western educational ideologies and approaches into practice.

Based on this aim, this study has three research question:

Research question 1: What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy and surroundings?

Research question 2: What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?

Research question 3: How are western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?

Reviewing key concepts in prevailing western imported ideologies in China enables researchers to explore the second and the third research question, targeting application of imported ideologies and approaches into Shanghai public ECE practice.

In order to make comparison between western educational philosophies and Shanghai local educational practice, in this part, the table listed the key concepts of four educational philosophies, contributing to the data analysis.

Table 2.1 Key concepts of western educational ideologies and application

Concepts of four western educational philosophies	Translate ideologies and approaches into practice
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John Dewey	Education means social life while schools represent society emphasised on experience in education; advocated child-centred approach; experiential learning.	Provide opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning where students engage with real-world problems, phenomena, or experiences; Foster a student-centred classroom environment that values students' interests, questions, and ideas; Help students understand the connections between their learning and real-world issues or challenges. Provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to solve authentic problems or contribute to their communities, etc..
Jean Piaget	Raised four stages of children's cognitive development process, in fixed orders but with individual difference; four core concepts in cognitive process which were schemas, assimilating, accommodating and equilibrium. Balance between each concept is vital for understanding cognitive development.	Designing learning experiences and instructional strategies that align with each stage of development; Note that not all students progress through the stages at the same pace, and they may exhibit characteristics from different stages simultaneously. Teachers should provide learning opportunities and instructional approaches to accommodate individual differences and support students' cognitive development.

Lev Vygotsky	Cognitive abilities develop in social interaction and environments, which begins with outside activities, then transferring into the inside world; tools and symbols are vital for cognitive development; cognitive ability changes with social activities changes; raises the zone of proximal development.	Understand the concepts of ZPD and scaffolding, exert appropriate intervention in educational practice; Observation of children is highlighted in his socio-cultural theories. The importance of providing opportunities for interaction, as well as scaffolding.
The 'Project-based Learning'		
Project-based learning	Children-centred approach, providing certain materials and environment; motivated by driving questions; learning expectations are vital; starting from single case to organising whole projects	

## Chapter 3 Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to identify, explain and justify the research methods undertaken in this research, and the ways in which they address the research questions central to this thesis. As described in the introduction chapter, there are two main aims of this study, along with three research questions. The aims are as follows:

To identify and explore the current early childhood education programs in chosen settings in order to set the foundation for exploring western ideologies as applied into practice.

To develop a framework to describe the theory-practice reshaping process by identifying the key elements influencing the ways in which theory is adopted and adapted in ECE.

As indicated in Chapter 2, there are current gaps in the literature, namely, lacking empirical research exploring the mechanism of applying educational western ideologies and approaches into different contexts. Given this gap in the research, this thesis seeks to answer the following three research questions:

1. What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy, and surroundings?
2. What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?
3. How are western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to answer these questions. It addresses several issues, including researcher stance, research design, choice of ethnographic approach, data collection methods, sampling, ethics, validity and reliability and data analysis procedures. This chapter concludes by reflecting on the ethical considerations involved in undertaking this research.

### **3.1 Researcher Paradigm**

This section presents the researchers' ontology and epistemology perspectives in this study since these inform the methodological approach adopted in this research. This study has a particular focus on exploring how imported western early childhood education (ECE) theories are applied in practice in the Chinese specific social cultural context. It can be described that the ontology shown in this study is social constructivist. From the researcher's perspective, education has no fixed meaning unless it has been aligned with a specific socio-cultural context.

In order to do so it takes a constructivist stance by which it takes as the starting point that *'people actively and ironically seek out, select and construct their own views, worlds and learning, and these processes are rooted in socio-cultural contexts and interactions'* (Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2018, p9-p10). The emphasis is on the collaborative nature of learning and the importance of cultural and social context, along with how teachers interpret knowledge to children. Alongside this the researcher also takes an interpretivist epistemology stance, by which it is meant that participants interpret situations through their own eyes and act on those interpretations. Fundamentally, interpretivists endeavour to explore the meanings that phenomena hold for participants in their everyday settings (Chaiklin, 2003). Thus, in this research, participants' actions require interpretation and understanding within the context of ECE programs in China. It can be understood that this approach has adopted 'two eyed' seeing, which is similar to Marshall's view of point (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2015). One eye seeing is through Chinese traditional values and culture, exploring the relation between Chinese context and educational development. Another eye seeing in through western epistemology, ethnographic approach to conducting the research in Chinese cultural context. This research takes both a social constructivist and an interpretivist stance in both analysing and interpreting the data.

This social constructivist and interpretivist stance also means that the researcher's own experiences and interpretations add an additional lens to the understanding and analysis of the research data. In order to be aware of this possibility the researcher was a non-participant observer in settings and whilst she has an interest in early childhood education, has not been an early years' practitioner. The socio-cultural context in this study has been explained in the following section. This analysis took an abductive approach (see analysis section for further

details) which acknowledges the influence of previous reading around the subject area to ensure that the analysis was firmly rooted within current research around early childhood education practices.

The section discussing the socio-ecological framework has been deleted.

### **3.2. Ethnographic research approach**

This research also takes an ethnographic approach to study the phenomenon of applying western educational philosophy and approaches within ECE in Shanghai, China. This section will explain the reason for choosing to conduct ethnographic research, elaborating on the specificities of ethnographic methodology.

Defining what is meant by ethnographic research is complicated, as different people have defined this differently. However, for the purposes of this research an ethnographic approach was interpreted as involving pursuing shared understandings and meanings of the lifeworld (the daily existence) of societies and groupings through research undertaken over a period of time (Howell, 2015). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) state, the ethnographic approach is a largely observation-based approach which seeks to create a vivid and analytical reconstruction of the target groups. Traditionally, ethnographies have been used in anthropology to explore exotic, foreign cultures (Yon, 2003) in an attempt to generate an in-depth understanding of the life of the cultural ‘other’ (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). While modern-day social ethnographies have ‘extended contact with a given community’, paid attention to the ‘description of local particularities’, focused on an ‘individual’s perspectives and interpretations of their world’ and are often concerned with the ‘refinement of theory’. This study adopts this latter approach to ethnography in order to explore western educational philosophy and approaches as applied in the Chinese context within ECE which in itself is taken as a ‘community’ of practice.

It can be concluded that there are several key elements that characterise an ethnographic approach. For instance, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) and Denscombe (2014) indicated elements of an ethnographic approach, such as ‘data are elicited and gathered’, ‘amounts of time in the field’, ‘meanings based on the phenomena’, and ‘data collected from the naturalistic setting’. Other researchers, such as Hitchcock and Hughes (1989), also suggest that the ethnographic approach should result in ‘the production of descriptive cultural

knowledge’, the ‘production of a list of features in a group or culture’ and a ‘description and analysis of patterns of social interaction’. Bryman (2008) notes that researchers in settings should collect descriptive notes and analytical comments, giving explanations to what is observed in a setting, group or community. It can be concluded that an ethnographic approach is a descriptive, analytical and explanatory study of the culture, values, beliefs and practices of one or more groups (Crewell, 2012; Bhatti, 2012; Denscombe, 2014). It can be a suitable design for either a small or a large group and does not preclude the use of relevant quantitative data (Hamersley, 2006).

In the current research, the researcher chose an ethnographic approach in order to study the mechanisms underlying the phenomenon of applying imported western educational ideologies and approaches in Shanghai public settings. An ethnographic approach was deemed to be appropriate, given that the research questions focused on gathering data from naturalistic settings (i.e., kindergartens) in order to explore what ECE looks like in practice. It can be argued that teachers may not be quite aware of the actual educational practice in participating settings. The documentary analysis would also show the intended educational practice. In this case, the ethnographic approach which can explore the educational practice in specific socio-cultural contexts is adopted to gather empirical data describing the actual educational practice in preschools. Consequently, this study addresses complex questions in socio-historical, cultural contexts of modern China. This approach enables the researcher to gain a rich and contextualised understanding of daily activities and teachers’ implementation of planned curriculum in educational practice, which of nuances not available to projects based on only documents, interviews or questionnaires data. The ethnographic approach in this research provides empirical data exploring the western educational theories and approaches such as John Dewey’s philosophy, Jean Piaget and Vygotsky’s cognitive development theories applied in a specific context which includes different cultural, economic and community environments. Finally, this thesis explores how teachers’ personal educational beliefs, background and experiences can influence the applications of imported theories and approaches in the Shanghai educational context. To relate this conceptualisation to this study, ethnographic research allows the researcher to explore whether culture, political, local community, and teachers’ values and educational experience impact the application of theories and approaches.



However, the ethnographic approach has been criticised due to ‘*how far out to go in order to understand a situation or how far in to go in focusing on a situation*’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Furthermore, researchers need to be aware of achieving a balance between objective observation and their own interpretation of these actions. Researchers using this approach usually spend large amounts of time in the field which means that there are large amounts of data collected for analysis. Rich and empirical data can give a detailed and direct description of specific situations. Analysis can provide a fresh eye to the obvious and ordinary behaviour and catch the diversity and variability of social interactions. Social facts can be recorded through some observational techniques, acquiring data in real-life settings. In other words, claims of amounts of data and interpretations of descriptive findings enables the reader to understand researcher subjectivity relevant to data presented and emergent findings. In the case of this research the empirical data is designed to fill the research gaps in the Shanghai specific research context.

Reviewing the related literature in the previous chapter indicated that cultural background, political influence and personal beliefs are among a number of factors that shape imported western theories and approaches applied into current ECE practises in Shanghai. The ethnographic approach can provide a descriptive analytical process to approaching these questions. Usually, ethnography uses data gathered from naturalistic settings. This approach, as adopted for this research, is felt to make the research findings from this study more representative of the wider experience. In order to answer ‘what’ and ‘how’ research questions, it is important to understand more widely the descriptive cultural knowledge of a specific situation. In this research, the ‘situation’ was ECE programs in Shanghai. The ethnographic approach adopted in this research was felt to be the most effective way to elicit socio-cultural knowledge from participants (i.e., teachers and children), rendering their social interaction and behaviour more comprehensible. In addition, adopting ethnographic approach as the methodology provided an opportunity to discover discrepancies between what participants might have said and what actually took place. Observing this gap first-hand, over time, allowed the researcher to fully examine and discuss the contradictions and inconsistencies which emerged. Moreover, the researcher also found spending an extended period of time in the ethnographic field very helpful when it came to letting people's voices emerge naturally and to observing their lives in these Shanghai ECE communities in China.

### **3.3. Sampling and recruitment**

This section focuses on the sampling choice and recruitment process, including the sampling of settings, classes and teachers sample choice for this study. In Chapter 2, it was seen that for over a century, China has studied foreign education systems, and has gone through different stages such as learning from the West, learning from the United States, learning from the Soviet Union and all-round learning from foreign countries. Shanghai was at the forefront of learning, digesting and absorbing the advanced educational concepts and educational experimental spirit from abroad. Therefore, Shanghai was deemed to be an ideal location for exploring the application of western educational ideologies and approaches in the Chinese context. In addition, the researcher also had access to Shanghai public kindergartens which was a secondary reason for choosing this location.

In the present study, three sites in Shanghai were invited to participate in the research. According to Marcus (1995), multi-sited ethnography satisfies the need for a method to analytically explore transnational processes, groups of people in motion, and ideas that extend over multiple locations. The current study aimed to develop an understanding of the implications of western educational phenomenon, with a focus not on an individual case, but on a wider phenomenon that extends across Shanghai. The three sites in Shanghai are all public settings, representing public early preschool models.

Public ECE settings were chosen to participate in the research, as opposed to private settings for a number of reasons. Primarily, all public settings share similar features; there are fewer differential factors across public as opposed to private settings. For example, public settings are all required to follow the same local pedagogy guidance book; they all have governmental financial support; all class teachers have to take a level test every five years; and they do not have entrance exams or other requirements for children's enrolment. In contrast, private settings differ more within the ECE sector. For example, they choose their own curriculum instead of using the local guidance books, and some adopt other countries' educational guidance, for example some preschools import the Early Years Foundation Stage from England. Consequently, private settings were felt to have too much variability for meaningful comparison across settings and given their potential 'wholesale adoption' of overseas curricular, have less relevance to the research questions relating as they do to adoption *and* adaptation. Finally, according to governmental regulations and five-year plans (as described

in Chapter 2), public preschools' coverage rate should reach 80% of all early years' provision in China by 2020 (Thirteenth Five-Year Plans in China, 2016).

### 3.3.1 Purposive sampling

In terms of sampling choice, there are two main methods of sampling, which are probability samples and non-probability samples (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). It is of great importance for research to decide which sampling method to choose. Probability sampling, such as simple random sampling, centres on the idea of representing the wider population, and is often used in quantitative research. In detail, every member of the wider population has an equal chance to be involved; the inclusion or exclusion from the sample is a matter of chance. A non-probability sample is explained as researchers targeting a particular population or group, which is not representative of the whole population. It usually focuses on small scale research. A purposive sample is one where the researcher has purposely selected a particular section of the wider unit to include or exclude from the sample (Bryman, 2016). In this qualitative research, with the aim of exploring the application of theories in educational practice, it is more appropriate to adopt a non-probability sampling method. Considering features in purposive sampling, researchers usually handpick samples to be included in their projects, meeting their particular needs. This study aims at exploring the educational practice in public schools. In this case, the principle of purposive sampling would focus on the public preschools.

It has been described that purposive sampling enables the researcher to achieve greater depth outcomes compared to probability sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2017). When it comes to the sampling choice in this project, it was informed by the three research questions. Two levels of sampling were adopted to gather descriptive data in this project: sampling of context and sampling of participants. Easy accessibility to settings was one reason for choosing PuTuo district in Shanghai as the site in this project. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted in recruitment, which includes head teachers-class, and teachers-children's units in public settings in the PuTuo district. Snowball sampling is a specific kind of purposive sampling strategy, as this method can be used to sample a population where accessibility is difficult (Heckathorn, 2002). In this study, access to children and observation of teaching processes can be barriers to recruitment due to parental reluctance to have their children participate in research and teacher concerns about possible disruption to classroom routines and being

observed during teaching. Consequently, snowball sampling was felt to be the most effective approach for this research. As a result, the researcher contacted the head teacher in the first setting. The other two settings were recruited through the initial headteacher's contacts. They subsequently gave consent for their setting to participate. In general, this ethnographic research focuses on small-scale settings in a particular city (Shanghai), exploring the process describing imported theories and approaches adopted in Shanghai educational practice. In this case, it requires deep descriptive data while Shanghai is the particular city in this research so that it is more appropriate to opt for purposive sampling in this research.

### 3.3.2 The sampling size

There are no clear rules on sample size for qualitative studies; sample size should be informed by the purpose of the research (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). As to three public settings, it was the quality over quantity or generalisability that was deemed most appropriate in order to answer the research questions. In this study, three kindergartens were invited to participate. Three settings could provide some generalisability given that they were all public settings, had similar curriculum structures and government funding in Shanghai. An in-depth understanding of the mechanisms of applying western educational ideologies and approaches within this small-scale sample was deemed appropriate and could pave the way for future research exploring the mechanisms in a wider sample or in other contexts. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) and Geerte (1993) suggest that the sample size in qualitative research should not be so small as to prevent theoretical saturation. Thus, considering the ethnographic approach adopted in this study, three public settings were chosen.

This study focuses on exploring western educational ideologies in public settings. In general, two weeks were spent in each kindergarten, totalling six weeks across all three settings in order to collect data. In each setting, 5–6-year-old children were targeted, because it was anticipated that this age group were more likely to have a mixture of more session content, teaching aims and individual activities were planned for this age group. In addition, headteachers also suggested the choice of children aged 5-6 years old since parents were expected to be more willing to let their children participate. Three public settings, one class per setting (n=3 settings), two teachers in each class, per setting (n=6 teachers) and one headteacher per setting (n=3 headteachers) were involved in the research. However, due to the parent's consent, observation in the first setting includes only parts of children (n=8), for

collecting data on daily activities. The detailed numbers of classes and number of children in each class per setting will be introduced in the following chapter.

### 3.3.3 Recruitment

In detail, the sampling process began by contacting headteachers and explaining the whole project to them. The sample was a snowball sample ie. using initial contacts of the researcher (Headteacher Ye), and then using new contacts gained through the initial contact. In exchange for participation, the researcher agreed to share her final thesis with each setting and engage in further communication regarding the main findings. The headteachers indicated that they hoped that this project could promote their understanding and give some suggestions about how to adopt western ECE theories in their own settings. When it comes to class teacher recruitment, in the first setting, class teachers were interested in this project and they volunteered to participate in this study, based on whether or not the teacher felt that they had the time to let the researcher enter their class and were willing to be observed and to be interviewed. In this second and third setting, class teachers were suggested and contacted by their headteachers, being persuaded to participate. In addition, before undertaking the observation, it was necessary to meet with headteachers and class teachers, explaining what the researcher would do in class. In addition, the headteacher and class teacher helped the researcher to introduce this project to all the parents. During the introductory meeting, the researcher asked the headteachers to identify which class was available for the research. Considering the general arrangements in each setting and the feasibility of the research, the choice of class was decided by each headteacher.

It was necessary to obtain parental consent to their child participating in this study. Before entering each setting, the researcher sent consent forms to headteachers and class teachers. In terms of parental consent, the class teacher and headteacher informed the parent committee first, and then the parent leader, along with class teachers, introduced this research and the researcher prepared an information sheet for each parent. The researcher called parents who expressed concerns to explain the research more thoroughly and ask them to consent to their child being involved in the study. Thus, a total of three classes of children's parents, which were around 200 parents, were invited to sign the consent form. There were 64 children whose parents/carer agreed for them to be involved in this study.

In the document's sample choice, three kinds of documents were selected: the National Learning and Development Guidelines for 3–6-year-old children; the ‘Learning’ reference books; teachers’ weekly plan in three settings. Choices of the three kinds of documents are based on the interviews of headteachers in the pilot study (see below).

As to the choice of ‘learning’ reference book, instead of other books, it is due to the seldom use of other books in planning educational practice, as described by class teachers and headteachers in chosen settings. In order to make comparisons among three kinds of documents, seeking existence of gaps, similarity and difference, samples of content in the ‘learning’ reference books and teachers’ weekly plans would focus on the period that the researcher is visiting. As to the national guidelines, it would focus on the whole book, analysing the documentary guidance on suggested educational practice.

When it comes to the sample choice of observation data, two weeks of observation data focusing on the four kinds of daily activities in each setting would be sampled, including sports activities, learning session periods, playing games periods and lunch periods. Choices of these four periods have covered the main daily activities in kindergarten. Observation of these periods would provide the researcher with the picture of daily activities, materials, environment and teachers’ role in chosen settings. Findings emerging from these observation data, on the one hand, targeting the research question: how the educational practice looks in chosen settings, on the other hand, providing the triangle data to explore the gaps among documentary guidance, teachers’ perception of educational guidance and the educational practice in three settings. The three chosen settings in this study are described in more detail in the following chapter. Information is given regarding head teachers and class teachers, along with the surrounding district in which schools are suited.

### **3.4 Data collection**

This section begins by explaining the three data collection methods used, documentary analysis, semi-structured interview and non-participant observation and the reasons for these research design choices. Table 3.1 provides a summary of these methods and the sample used. Table 3.2 shows the method used to answer each of the main research questions for this study.

**Table 3.1 Method and chosen participants/documents.**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Participants/Documents</b>
Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official ECE guidance for 3-6 years old children</li> <li>• Teacher’s daily/weekly teaching arrangements</li> <li>• Shanghai local pedagogy guidance (4 books which cover the four aspects of ECE practice in Shanghai)</li> </ul>
Semi-structured interviews	One headteacher and two class teachers in each setting (three headteachers and six teachers in total)
Non-participant observations	One class in each setting (3 settings) video observations for each setting (approximately 40 in total)

**Table 3.2 Methods and addressed research questions.**

<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Method</b>		
	<b>Documentary Analysis</b>	<b>Semi-structured Interview</b>	<b>Observation</b>
1. How ECE practises, including setting environment, pedagogy, curriculum design and daily activities are shaped in the Chinese specific social context	✓	✓	✓

2. To what extent have western theories were applied in public educational practice	✓	✓	✓
3. How these imported theories and approaches were tailored in practice		✓	✓

### 3.4.1 Documentary analysis

In order to describe how teachers, conduct educational practice, it is necessary to explore how it is suggested in governmental educational documents and guidance. Through review in the literature, it is clear that educational practice in China is greatly influenced by governmental regulations and guidance. In sequence, contributions can be made through comparing information between documentary guidance in practice and actual teachers' practice.

In terms of document's sample choice, three kinds of documents were selected: the National Learning and Development Guidelines for 3-6 year old children; the 'Learning' reference books; teachers' weekly plan in three settings. Choices of the three kinds of documents are based on the interviews of headteachers in the pilot study (see below) and literature review. Educational policy and national ECE guidance are recognized as major sources for teachers' practice in China so that the National Guidelines has been chosen to be the samples for data analysis. Documentary analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around a topic (Bowen, 2009). It is an efficient and effective way of gathering data because documents are manageable and practical resources. Also, documents are stable, 'non-reactive' data sources, meaning that they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or by the research process (Bowen, 2009). In addition, it can provide background information and a broad coverage of data, which can be helpful in contextualising research within a particular subject or field, along with providing details that informants may have forgotten. It can aid the researcher to track change and development.



In this research, documentary analysis was adopted in order to understand the designed ECE aims, curriculum and pedagogy were at a national, local level, and individual setting level. In order to collect data describing educational practice suggested in different levels of documents, the Shanghai ‘learning’ local reference books and teacher’ weekly plan have also been chosen. The documentary analysis was also used to frame the observation and interview data, in particular whether the designed ECE aims, curriculum and suggestions were put into practice. The main documents analysed were the National Guidelines for ECE practice, the local Shanghai reference books and teachers’ weekly session plans, each of which is discussed below.

The national guidance is issued by the Department of Education in China, and is divided into five aspects: health and sports, language, society, science and art. Each section sets the aims of child development and provides advice for teachers on how to meet those aims. This, therefore, provides the context by which actual practice can be compared and interpreted. Analysis of the guidance focused on understanding the aims and advice provided, in order to explore any possible gaps between the policy and what teachers actually do within settings. In addition, data gathered from the guidance was also analysed to understand the application of ECE theories in China. The analysis of this data provided the researcher with information relating to how the curriculum and ECE aims were planned for 5–6-year-old children and allowed for these to be analysed for content drawing on western ECE theories.

Four local pedagogy guidance books, based on the national ECE guidance, provide detailed examples and explanations of pedagogy for teachers. The guidance books contain teaching aims, and guides to teaching content organised by topic. In this respect they resemble a step-by-step guide for teachers to plan their own sessions. In terms of choice of content in local pedagogy books, the ‘learning’ reference book has been chosen which teachers mainly refer to when planning daily activities (as explained in the pilot study). The content in the ‘learning’ reference book has been chosen to correspond to the session researcher’s field trip (the data collection periods).

Teachers’ daily and weekly session plans include the teaching aims, content and methods they planned to conduct in each session. Usually, teachers prepare these arrangements in advance and, twice a week, all class teachers and headteachers hold meetings to discuss how

to plan their sessions. Analysis of these documents were categorised by the teacher, along with their interview content. This data was used to provide the researcher with an understanding of how the teacher transferred the policy or the advice to practise, which produced descriptive findings about the extent that teachers made changes on the documentary guidance. The content choice of this document has also been decided to correspond to the data collection periods activities.

### 3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data-collection exercise (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Hochschild (2009) notes that an interview can explore issues in depth, to see how and why people frame their ideas in the ways they do. Interviews have been used as a principal means to gather information relating to what a person is thinking, knows, likes, values and believes (Tuckman, 1972). Compared with other methods, the interviewer can answer questions concerning both the purpose of the interview and any misunderstandings experienced by the interviewee, as the same questions have different meanings for different people. There are many kinds of interviews such as standard interviews, in-depth interviews and ethnographic interviews (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). In this research, a semi-structured interview approach was undertaken due to the need to investigate the values, beliefs and motives behind teachers and headteachers' behaviour and experiences, in order to fully explore the research questions of this study (Foddy, 1993). Wengraf (2001) argues that compared with other interview methods, the semi-structured interview has an advantage in its relative flexibility.

To develop a contextualised and in-depth understanding of practice within settings, interviews were conducted with teachers and headteachers in each setting. The head teacher interviews aimed to understand their motivations and expectations for ECE in their setting. The teacher interviews aimed to explore teaching experience, personal beliefs and challenges when they designed and implemented the ECE programme in their setting. In this research, teachers are the core of conducting ECE practice in settings so that it was of great importance to understand their opinions, values and educational beliefs, especially within the context of a social constructivist approach.

The research objectives, research questions and session observations conducted by the researcher determined the questions asked during the interview. Based on these research

findings, interview questions were planned to cover the following aspects: teachers' background; their understanding of western theories and policies; and the rationale for their daily teaching arrangements. The background of the sampled staff is given in the next chapter, including their teaching experience, education training and qualifications. This gave the basis for understanding their behaviour and daily teaching arrangements. The second research question aims at exploring how western ECE theories were adopted in China, so a second focus of the interview questions was the extent to which teachers knew or understood these theories. 'What' and 'how' teachers understand these theories was posited as having a direct influence on their daily practice. Interviews with the headteachers aimed to explore their understanding and the rationale behind the ECE in their setting and the reasons for this. This kind of data gave the researcher information about personal beliefs about ECE and basic information of specific setting situations. Interviews with class teachers provided the researcher with detailed information of their teaching aims, preferred methods or pattern and beliefs, and understanding of western theories in ECE practice. Employing semi-structured interviews following on from the non-participant observations allowed the researcher to gain understanding regarding participants' observed actions and their personal opinions and beliefs in practice based on those observations.

Thus, the researcher conducted several semi-structured interviews with headteachers and class teachers in three chosen settings (3 semi-structured interviews with three head teachers and 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted with class teachers). Before the interview began, the researcher introduced this study to teachers and headteachers in detail, aiming to make their research aims clearer. Questions about their background, personal beliefs and understandings of policies and curriculum were arranged in their break time in the first week. In order to have a brief and general picture of each setting situation, the interview with headteachers was arranged before those with the class teachers. Apart from the setting situation, the curriculum chosen for their particular setting was also discussed with the headteacher to understand their rationale.<sup>1</sup> Several short interviews were undertaken with class teachers when they were available before sessions to know what they planned to do in the subsequent session and why (lasting for around 3-5 minutes each time, in total of 12 short interviews). After each session, some questions about specific behaviours observed within the

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, headteachers in China are responsible for choosing the curriculum to be delivered in their setting.

session were also asked to understand the rationale behind them. Sometimes, class teachers were too busy before and after the session, so these interview questions were not asked at each timepoint. The main headteacher and teacher interview schedules are presented in Appendix A.

### 3.4.3 Non-participant observations

Observation data enables the researcher to access interactions in a social context and to yield systematic records of these in many forms and contexts, to complement other kinds of data collected (Simpson and Tuson, 2003). In order to answer the research questions posed in this study, it was vital that the researcher could observe the session in as naturalistic a context as possible (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). Observation helps the researcher to gather data from the physical environment and interactional setting. There are other attractions to using observation for this study, for instance as Robson notes (2002), what people say may differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check. In this research, in order to know what ECE practice actually looks like in settings, it was deemed important to observe it. Although teachers planned ‘teaching aims’, ‘teaching content’ and ‘questions used’ before each session, it was also valuable to know how they really conducted sessions with the children in a real-time scenario. Observation also enables the researcher to look at participant’s daily behaviour, which they may take for granted. From this perspective, it provided information for this study which could not be gathered from the interviews. In this research, observation also helped the researcher to collect information from each setting relating to the setting environment, real-time daily arrangements, and the number of students in each class.

The observations were non-participant in nature due to the researcher maintaining non-engagement in any kind of activity whilst observing. The key aim of the observation was to watch the pattern of ECE practice as participant observation could lead to a change in ordinary practice. Therefore, non-participant observation in which the researcher took an inactive role in the setting discourse was felt to be the most appropriate. It also enabled the researcher to stay more objective during observation.

Non-participant observation was conducted in each setting to observe the daily sessions, in particular what occurred in each activity, including the interactions between teachers and children. A two-week observation period was spent in each setting; a total of seven weeks in

ECE programs in Shanghai, China. Daily activities were the majority part of the ECE practice so this was the focus for data collection. In order to ensure detailed information was captured, the researcher video-recorded these sessions, as well as taking notes. Each session lasted for about 30 minutes, based on the Chinese Education Department requirements. In each setting, there were morning exercising sessions, 'learning' sessions or 'Role Play' periods, free time playing periods, outdoor activities and individual learning periods. Occasionally, some periods such as outdoor activities in the afternoon and individual learning would be cut off to around 20 minutes or only one session would be conducted. Thus, a total of 2.5 hours of videorecording and taking notes were spent each day in each setting.

In terms of solving research questions and seeking existence of gaps among documentary guided educational practice, interview-described educational practice and observed educational practice, the theme of the observation would be 'the organisation and content of daily activity', 'environment, tools and material' and 'teachers' behaviour'. In specific, the 'pretend play' session, according to the teachers' guidance, children could choose their own roles to play, and they have to decide how to play this game with their peers. Teachers were suggested to design arrangements for the children based on the governmental guidance, however, teachers arranged the after-play communication time which were mainly about children's experience exchange and teachers' comments about their performance. In this case, the observation of this kind of daily activity focused on how children organised this play, the teacher's role and bi-influences from teachers and children. The 'learning session' period, usually covered different aspects of learning so that the focus of this kind of activities was 'whether the teaching aims has been achieved', 'what content was taught', 'how teachers organise and perform the session', 'whether content and steps has been followed', 'how the teacher made response to children's reaction'. The 'individual activity' was planned to meet different children's needs and interests and the teacher should let children choose what they prefer to do in this session. The observation focused on the process of the individual which means what children really did, the teacher's role and the interventions the teacher was involved in during this period.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethics has been defined as 'a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others' (Cavan, 1977). That is to say, researchers have to take into account the effects of their research on

participants and settings. This section explores the ethical considerations that pertain to this particular research, and their influence on the overall methodology (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). It begins by exploring the specific ethical considerations when conducting research with teachers and children in ECE settings. The issues of informed consent and voluntary participation are then addressed. Finally, confidentiality and anonymity are investigated. In all three settings, six teachers and three head teachers agreed, and 64 children's parents signed the consent form, agreeing to allow their child to participate in this research.

#### Ethics of working in settings and with children

Deciding to involve teachers and 5–6-year-old children in this research raised particular ethical considerations, specifically when conducting non-participant observations, as children were being observed. The debate surrounding children holding a 'vulnerable' position in society is a major current influence on the ethics of conducting research with children (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). There have been two major perspectives of the nature of childhood. The way in which a researcher views the nature of childhood and the status of children in society, that is, how vulnerable they are in relation to adults, influences their approach to conducting research involving children (Punch, 2002). The extent to which children are viewed as similar or different from adults has implications for the whole of the research methodological approach, including 'design, methods, ethics, participation and analysis' (Punch, 2002).

Considering the research aims, the focus is on the process or the pattern of practice. Thus, the focus was on the daily routine of teachers rather than on the children. However, children are the core of ECE practice in all settings, which means the research also had effects on them. Cohen notes (2018) that ethics in educational research affects not only those directly involved in the study (in this case, head teachers and teachers) but those who may be affected by the research taking place (in this case, children). By conducting research within a setting, children would inevitably be affected by an incursion into their space and, potentially, disruption to their routines caused by having another adult in the room. Therefore, it was necessary to inform parents of the research, its nature and its purpose. In order to ensure the quality of research and the requirement of parents, no child's name or face have been included in the final thesis. Consequently, children's images have been anonymised when included in the final thesis by using photoshop to conceal their faces. In addition, in each class the researcher attempted to record the session from the angle at which children's faces

would not be recorded as much as the researcher can. As a researcher, it is necessary to consider minimising disruption in natural settings, as well as respecting teachers' wishes and convenience in terms of observation and interview. Thus, a total of three classes of children's parents, which were around 200 parents, were invited to sign the consent form. There were 64 children agreed by their parents to be involved in this study.

As to the ethical considerations with adults in this research (teachers and headteachers), the focus was on respecting their rights including their privacy. As Robson (1993) indicates it is important not to withhold information about the true nature of research. The researcher briefly introduced the aims, scope and design of the whole research and what was planned to be conducted in the participating settings to them. Headteachers and class teachers were assured that no negative outcomes were anticipated if they chose to participate or answer any questions in this research. Consequently, no setting's name, address, headteacher or teachers' names are included in this research.

#### Informed consent and voluntary participation

Before undertaking video-recording during daily activities, it was necessary to meet with each class teacher, explaining what the researcher would do in class. In addition, the headteacher and class teacher helped the researcher to introduce this project to all the parents. During the introductory meeting, the researcher asked headteachers and class teachers to volunteer which class was available for the research. Considering the usual daily arrangements in each setting and the feasibility of the research, the choice of class was volunteered by class teachers. In each setting, one 5-6 year old class was chosen because the class teachers explicitly expressed an interest in participating in the project. Parents' response was considered to be another factor influencing choosing the sampled classes. Class teachers were introduced to the researcher by the head teachers.

In this study, the groups that the researcher needed to get consent from were: teachers, head teachers and parents. The principle of informed consent concerns autonomy, and it arises from the participant's right to freedom and self-determination (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Informed consent, as Howe and Moses (1999) stated, is a cornerstone of ethical behaviour, as it respects the right of individuals to exert control over their lives and to make decisions for themselves. There are particular difficulties with gaining the informed consent and voluntary participation of children since they were not capable of understanding this

research and the consequences. Therefore, parental consent was also required. Thus, in order to ensure parents' understanding, the researcher prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents. The class teacher also explained the research to parents. The researcher clearly focused on the 'what the researcher would do' in the setting, which was the most important question for parents. In addition, given the principle of reciprocity, the researcher indicated that once the thesis is completed, she would share the findings with teachers in each setting, which parents should also have access to. In the first setting, a number of parents did not consent for children to be included in this research. As a result, the observations that took place did not include their children. The researcher had telephoned parents to explain the research and request consent but, based on the voluntary principle, any data related to their children has not been used in this research.

Before contacting parents, it was necessary for teachers to introduce the researcher to the parents. As described above, teachers were interested in this project and volunteered to participate in this research. They had the opportunity to raise questions regarding the research and fully informed consent. The information sheet provided for teachers, head teachers and parents included: the aims of the research; what the researcher would do in each setting; what the researcher would do with the collected data and the way in which they can withdraw their/their child's data.<sup>2</sup>

The consent form for teachers, head teachers and parents mainly included agreement to allow the researcher to enter the setting and observe sessions in which their children participated. It also included the agreement of using anonymised teacher or child images and data pertinent to them in the final thesis. A total of six teachers, three headteachers and 64 children (whose parents consented to their child's participation) were involved in this study.

The (translated) consent and information forms can be found in Appendix B.

### Confidentiality and anonymity

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity are particularly important in undertaking ethical research involving children and parents (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). As described by

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<sup>2</sup> Participants were given up to two weeks after data collection to withdraw their data from inclusion in the study.



BERA, 'The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research' (BERA, 2018). Researchers must recognize the participants' entitlement to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, unless they or their guardians or responsible others, specifically and willingly waive that right. In this research, the researcher would ensure all the participants kept their names anonymous so that, respecting their requirement, no names would be mentioned. Any individual participating in a research study has a reasonable expectation that privacy will be guaranteed. Consequently, no identifying information about the individual should be revealed in written or other communication. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were given to settings and all participants. As well as faces, all identifying features including school badges have been anonymised to protect anonymity.

In terms of confidentiality, the researcher has to achieve the balance between the quality of research and respect for all the participants. All the data collection procedures were conducted with the agreement of parents, teachers and headteachers. The researcher was obligated to ensure that the participants were treated with respect throughout the research process (BERA, 2011).

#### Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval from the Department of Education Ethics Committee, University of York (2018).

### **3.6 Data analysis-thematic analysis**

Among the techniques of qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis is a popular method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of theme meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2016). In this study, thematic analysis is employed for data analysis, aiming at identifying common thematic elements across all the data gathered in the field, so as to describe what was happening in the data. The coding and theme- forming process of triangulated data explained and described the educational practice at the preschool level, and focused on the determinants influencing the formation of educational practice at different levels emerging from data. Through the coding process, it has been found out that extracts could not detailed cover meanings emerging from data. In this case, summarising key points from data was used in the coding and theme-formation process. In other words, the analysis

of three kinds of data includes the findings of elements such as culture, community, teachers' viewpoints, governmental guidance, etc. Elements like these were analysed and presented by themes which were organised by the different levels from the national-level to the preschool-level. The different focus of this study is the exploration of educational practice and western ideologies and approaches.

Unlike other qualitative methodologies, thematic analysis is more like a method rather than methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can also be described that thematic analysis is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. It has been noted that many researchers do not provide detailed descriptions of how thematic analysis has been applied in their research. Under these circumstances, it therefore became difficult for other researchers to evaluate and employ thematic analysis in their own research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to rectify this, researchers Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six steps in conducting a thematic analysis. This six-step approach was adopted in this study as it provides a clear and usable framework for conducting a thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

### Abductive approach

Braun and Clarke (2006) generally recommend an inductive approach for interviews since they believed that 'by this way, it is codes fit data rather than the data fitting codes (Charmaz, 1983, p.112). However, in this study, an abductive approach is adopted. Abductive research is neither data-driven nor hypothesis-driven but conducts parallel and equal engagement with empirical data and extant theoretical understanding (Atkinson et al., 2003; Hurley et al., 2021; Kelle, 1997; Rinehart, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This takes into account the belief that researchers cannot avoid bringing their pre-understanding and knowledge from previous studies into their own research, especially following a literature review (as is the case in this study). The abductive approach acknowledges that phenomenon and takes it into account during the analysis phase. Adopting an abductive approach arguably also enables the researcher to better develop their understanding of the data, based on previous research. Chapter 2 reviewed previous research exploring the elements such as culture, decision-maker's meaning making of western ideologies in shaping the formation of localised early childhood education programs in China. Coding process in this study was also influenced by the findings reviewed in chapter 2. Coder imposes codes not only to focus on teachers' interpretations and documents meaning making. Findings from the literature review were consequently drawn upon when developing the coding frame.

### 3.6.1 Steps for thematic analysis

The six-phase guide has been applied in this study, as the framework for conducting thematic analysis (see the Table. 3.3)

Table 3.3: Braun & Clarke’s six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis

Step1 : Familiarising yourself with your data
Step 2: Generating initial codes
Step 3: Searching for themes
Step 4: Reviewing themes
Step 5: Defining and renaming themes
Step 6: Write the report

The description of applying the framework in thematic data analysis and presentation would be stated as below (see the Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 (Detailed Steps for Thematic Analysis)

Steps	Procedure in Each Step that the researcher has followed	Details
Step 1	Familiarising yourself with your data: this step included proofreading each interview transcription while listening to each recording, re-reading the gathered documents and notes of observations. The researcher read the data holistically, as well as noting down initial ideas and emerging themes.	At this stage, the researcher developed a general sense of what daily educational practice looks like in three settings; suggestions for teaching and environment; teachers’ understanding of educational theories and daily practice.

Step 2	<p>Generate initial codes: in the second step, the researcher started to organise and gather data in a systematic fashion across the three kinds of data. The sequence of generating codes starting through the documents, interviews, and observation. The researcher analysed the transcripts and documents line-by-line and generated initial codes by coding relevant features in the data.</p>	<p>At this stage, the researcher attached labels to segments of data that depicted what each segment was about. Open coding was used which means the researcher did not have pre-set codes but developed and modified codes as she worked through the coding process. Some of these codes were identified as influenced by the review of literature (e.g., key concepts of western educational ideologies in practice), while others were emergent (e.g., suggestions for provided environment and material). In other words, the codes were generated abductively. The researcher also refined the codes. Should two codes be too similar, the researcher merged or rearranged them. As a result, a total of 78 codes were generated. The researcher tried to move between ‘parts and the whole’ of the data (Coffey, 1999) and to avoid the risk of losing the context of three kinds of data. During the process, the researcher also referred to the original data when conducting analysis of different parts of codes.</p>
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<p>Step 3</p>	<p>Search for themes: the researcher searched for themes by examining codes emerging from step 2.</p>	<p>At this stage, the research noted the various themes and subthemes that had emerged within the initial codes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is a pattern that captures significant data relevant to the prespecified research aims and questions. In other words, themes were categorised by their significance. In this study, the researcher examined the codes emerging from step 2, capturing some of them representing similar descriptions to the three research questions. In terms of the research questions, themes focus on the ‘organising and planning of daily activities’, ‘procedures of conducting daily activities’, ‘understanding of early childhood education’, ‘teachers-believed reasons for conducting daily activities’, ‘understanding and application of western early childhood education ideologies and approaches in their educational practices’, etc. In addition, the literature review chapter better enabled the researcher to explore key concepts of western educational ideologies, since key concepts and relations to educational practice have been concluded, found within three types of data analysed. It means the key concepts drawn from Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Vygotsky have influenced the codes in theme formation. At the end of this phase, codes had been reorganised into broader themes that targeted the three research questions.</p>
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Step 4	<p>Review themes by checking if they worked in relation to the coded frame and the entire data. This phase involves the modification and development of the preliminary themes identified in step 3.</p>	<p>During this process, the researcher highlighted quotations illuminating the themes for subsequent use in the text. In the process of reviewing themes, it was useful for the researcher to rethink whether these themes were useful for answering the three research questions. The themes were categorised into different levels of systems suggested by the framework. The researcher read the relevant data within each segment of the themes, considering whether the data supported the particular theme.</p>
Step 5	<p>Define the names of the themes through ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis told and to generate clear definitions and names for each theme.</p>	<p>This is the final refinement of themes and the researcher aimed at identifying the essence of ‘what each theme is about’ (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006, p.92). At this stage, the researcher reviewed the original field notes, documents, and interview transcripts to ensure themes reflected the original data in their original context and avoided missing any important information. In addition, the researcher rethought the content and meaning of each theme, as well as any possible subthemes and how they interact and relate to each other.</p>

Step 6	Write the thesis: the researcher engaged in the process of writing up and produced the finding chapters.	At this stage, the researcher started by working with the relevant literature review since the socio-ecological framework guided the organisation of the triangulated data, suggesting the thesis writing.
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### **3.7 Pilot Study**

The pilot study of the current research was the first step in the practical application of exploring how ECE practices were conducted in China. A pilot study is a mini-version of a full-scale project, or a trial-run done in preparation of the complete study to ensure it is viable. In this project, it served as a specific pre-testing of research questions and instruments, including the methodological approach and methods. This section reviews the procedures of the pilot study in one public setting in China and presents the specific recommendations pertinent to this research.

A single case study approach was undertaken in the pilot study in order to investigate the appropriateness of the research questions, methodological approach and methodology. One headteacher, who used to be an acquaintance of the researcher, was willing to participate in this pilot. That is to say, one setting and the headteacher were purposefully sampled for the pilot study. The school was located in the PuTuo District in Shanghai, China (i.e. in the same area of Shanghai as the main study). There are three levels which define the quality of ECE programs in Shanghai and this specific setting is in the middle level. The main data collection method used in this pilot study was a semi-structured interview. The interview questions were designed to explore whether non-participant observation was practical; whether video-recording sessions were feasible; whether documentary analysis was necessary and whether or not the planned interview questions for sampled staff were appropriate.

As explained above, the interview questions in the pilot study aimed at exploring whether the methods were appropriate so that the questions were asked around the key elements of the ECE program such as the daily arrangement, curriculum, teacher’s role and responsibility and how the session was planned. The questions asked and the issues addressed are presented in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5 Interview questions in pilot study**

Interview questions	Addressed questions
<p>Could you tell me about the daily arrangement in this setting?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which part of the session could be observed?</li> <li>• How long does the observation last?</li> <li>• Whether non-participant observation is appropriate</li> </ul>
<p>Could you tell me the curriculum adopted in this setting? and do you know about other public settings?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide the interview questions about curriculum choice</li> <li>• Decide whether or not to adopt document analysis and what need to be analysed</li> <li>• Whether the observation and documentary analysis were also suitable for other settings</li> </ul>
<p>Could you tell me about the type of training teachers receive, including underlying ECE theories?</p>	<p>Adjust the interview questions for teacher personal background</p>
<p>Could you tell me the parents’ role in this ECE program?</p>	<p>Whether or not to add interview questions about parents’ role</p>
<p>Could you tell me more about the role of this play/individual activity/learning session?</p>	<p>Get a clearer understanding of detailed information of how individual sessions are organised and why</p>



Several key findings were made, which have influenced the methodological design of this research, especially data collection methods. Firstly, general knowledge about the daily arrangements in an ECE setting provided the researcher with some context in which to discuss this with other settings. It also helped the researcher to decide that non-participant observation was practical and based on the session length, videorecording was planned to help perform the observation. Then, understanding of the curriculum enabled the researcher to identify the four local ECE practice guidebooks, and then only ‘learning’ pedagogy books for documentary analysis. In addition to the National ECE guidance, all public settings in Shanghai are required to follow the curriculum contained within Shanghai local reference books, while the ‘learning’ pedagogy book was frequently used. In terms of the document's choice, the interview of the headteacher, she expressed that *‘In the public settings in Shanghai, we basically follow the Shanghai local reference books and teachers need to learn the national guidelines. Based on the guidance of the national guidelines, teachers have made teaching plans...’*. Consequently, documentary analysis was deemed necessary in order to understand the educational practice suggested and described in these documents. In order to understand the setting environment, which helps the researcher to arrange the non-participant observation, the researcher observed the classroom and the outdoor activity space.

The interview with the headteacher about parents’ role, as well as whether include parents’ viewpoints in educational planning, in ECE practice provided her personal perspective for examining the framework raised in the previous chapter, which assumed that parents’ demand was a less influenced factor influencing ECE practice in Shanghai by interviewing teachers with related questions.

In terms of the data collection method, considering the session time explained by the headteacher, video-recording observation was adopted by the researcher to gather data about session and daily activities content. Consequently, the data gained from the pilot study provided important information relating to ECE practice in one public setting and raised questions regarding the applicability of these findings to other settings. This, therefore, helped frame the wider research.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored and justified the methodological process undertaken by the researcher in completing the ethnographic approach research for this doctoral study. This chapter began by explaining the researcher's research stance and theoretical perspective. The ethnographic approach that was adopted in this study was then explored and justified, leading to an introduction of the sampling and recruitment strategies adopted. Then, it moved to discussing the research methods chosen in this study. Ethical considerations pertinent to this thesis were then explored. A pilot study undertaken in this study was discussed, which included the aims and the resulting changes to the research questions and methodology of this study. Finally, a description of the data analysis technique employed in this research was provided.

## **Chapter 4 Setting the Scene: Ethnographic Accounts of the Three Kindergartens**

Before presenting and discussing the key findings that have emerged from the data, it is important to introduce the reader to the three schools that were sampled for involvement in this study. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the researcher aimed to sample three research settings and nine teachers to provide data as generalisable as possible relating to curriculum design and teachers' perspectives on Early Years provision within Shanghai. This chapter presents an overview of three kindergartens, each school community, children's numbers and teaching staff to provide the contexts within which the study took place.

### **4.1 Overview of the three kindergartens**

There were three public kindergartens invited to participate in this investigation. This section focuses on the background information of the kindergartens including location, their ranking within the Shanghai kindergarten system and additional information.

According to the Shanghai educational department, there are three general levels of registered kindergartens in Shanghai: first-class kindergartens; second-class kindergartens; and third-class kindergartens (Shanghai governmental issue). There are four main criteria influencing a kindergarten's ranking:

1. the ratio of teachers and children;
2. the educational quality of kindergartens (as determined by local government)
3. the construction standards; and
4. the sanitary conditions.

In this study, all the participating kindergartens were classed as first-class kindergartens (i.e. they were regarded to be amongst the highest quality of provision). According to the Shanghai government announcement (2022), 44% of kindergarten provision was ranked as first-class kindergartens by the end of 2021. In contrast, public kindergartens will consist of 71% of early years provision in Shanghai in 2020. Consequently, public kindergartens were chosen as they form the majority of provision in Shanghai and first-class settings as these were deemed to be those with the higher quality provision and, in terms of the Shanghai

model, more likely to experiment with adopting different, possibly Western approaches. Therefore, they were felt to be best placed to illustrate best practice in terms of early years provision as well as more amenable to research given that they were not currently facing issues relating to teacher-child ratios etc. In addition, all three kindergartens were located in the PuTuo district in Shanghai. The PuTuo local government early childhood education three-year plan (2020), suggested that it was important for *'kindergarteners to focus on the top-level standards of early childhood education, and attempt to perform international cooperations...localise the imported approach such as the STEAM and PATHS curriculum, interconnect the international curriculum with the Shanghai local curriculum...'* (PuTuo Government Issue, 2020).

#### **4.2 Introduction of kindergartens and teachers**

This section provides more detailed information about each of the three kindergartens in turn. In addition, the curriculum structure would also be described. According to the interviews and teachers' weekly plan, the curriculum in public settings are divided into two parts: the 'Shared Curriculum' and 'Chosen Curriculum'. The 'Shared Curriculum' means each public kindergarten in Shanghai shares a similar curriculum which mainly rely on the four Shanghai local reference books, covering four kinds of daily activities. As to the 'Chosen Curriculum', each kindergarten has the preference for their own curriculum, the proportion of 'Chosen Curriculum' is around 10% to 15% (Teacher Xu, setting A).

In each kindergarten there were three levels of grades: the lower class (for children aged 3-4 years old), the middle class (for children aged 4-5 years old) and the higher class (for children aged 5-6 years old). There were three classes in each grade. One class from the higher grade was chosen for each setting. Details of the classes chosen for inclusion are therefore provided. Teachers' educational background is also discussed as. This was felt to be particularly important given Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and teachers' own beliefs that their educational background influenced their teaching practice.

##### Setting A

School A is located in PuTuo district in Shanghai. It was a first-class public kindergarten in this area and had been classified as operating at the first level setting for over ten years. There were 38 children in the chosen class with two class teachers. The 'Chosen Curriculum' is clay

handicraft making. Each week, there is the afternoon-period for children to experience making stuff with clay. Table below describes the professional information of the head teacher and both class teachers who participated in this research.

Table 4.1: Professional background information for staff in School Rainbow

Participant and alias used	Professional background information
Headteacher Ye (School A)	Headteacher Ye was transferred to School A one month before the researcher visited it. She had been a headteacher for over ten years., and had been in the teaching profession for over 25 years. She majored in early childhood education at college.
Class teacher Xu (School A)	Class teacher Xu had been working as a teacher for 33 years. She worked as the teaching leader in School A, meaning she was in charge of supervising other teachers' and ensuring their teaching quality. She majored in early childhood education when she was in college. In more recent years (date unspecified) she had also attended a university online course.
Class teacher Sheng (School A)	Class teacher Sheng had been working as a teacher for 8 years, all of which have been spent in School A. She majored in the arts in college rather than following an education program. However, she subsequently attended professional training provided by the educational department and passed the necessary examinations to be able to teach.

The researcher conducted fieldwork in School A over a three-week period in October 2018, 8 parents signed the consent form so that observation data related to 8 children can be presented in later chapters.

### Setting B

School B is in PuTuo district in Shanghai. It was a public kindergarten in the area and had been classified as operating at the first level for around 8 years. According to the researcher's

observations, there were approximately 28 children in the chosen class with two class teachers. The ‘Chosen Curriculum’ in this kindergarten is ‘Reading’. Different from the previous setting, the ‘Reading’ curriculum does not set the specific period in the curriculum. It is planned throughout the daily activities.

Table 4.2 below describes professional information of the head teacher and the class teachers who participated in this research.

Table 4.2 Professional background information for staff in School B

Participant and alias used	Professional background information
Headteacher Wen (School B)	Headteacher Wen had been in the teaching profession for over 30 years and had experienced the second round of curriculum reform in China. She attended teacher training in early childhood education in 1995 and majored in this area. She transferred into School B in 2012 and subsequently changed the ‘Chosen Curriculum’.
Class teacher LL (School B)	Class teacher LL did not major in early childhood education. She had been working in the teaching profession for 12 years. She had worked in private settings for three years before transferring to the public school system. Prior to starting work in public settings, she attended teachers professional training and passed the necessary examinations to work in the public sector.
Class teacher Ling (School B)	Class teacher Ling had been working in the teaching profession for 11 years. At university she majored in Youth Management. She also had subsequently attended the necessary training and passed the required examinations in order to teach in public settings.

The researcher conducted fieldwork in School B over a three-week period in November 2018.

### Setting C

The last setting is also located in PuTuo district in Shanghai. It was an average sized public kindergarten and had been classified as operating at the first level setting for around 5 years. The ‘Chosen Curriculum’ is an environmentally friendly course, materials, physical environment and environmental thematic courses and games are designed in this setting. According to the researcher’s observations, there were approximately 25 children in the chosen class with two class teachers. Table 4.3 below describes the professional information of the head teacher and both class teachers who participated in this research.

Table 4.3: Professional background information for staff in School C

Participant and alias used	Professional background information
Headteacher Wu (School C)	Headteacher Wu was transferred to School C in September 2018. She had been working in the ECE area for over ten years and majored in this area in college. She did not change the ‘Chosen Curriculum’ when she started working at the school. However, she did make some changes to the organised daily activities aiming to improve the diversity and quality of ECE in the setting.
Class teacher Ye (School C)	Class teacher Ye had been working in the profession for 13 years while she also attended training in special education for young children. Class teacher Ye had majored in architectural design at university. Before entering the public settings, she had taken training in special educational needs for special children and also undertaken the required early childhood education training and passed the required examinations in order to work in ECE, like teachers in the setting B.
Class teacher Huang (School C)	Class teacher Huang had been working as a teacher since graduating 7 years previously. All of her teaching career had been spent teaching in School C. She majored in early childhood education at university on a three-year programme followed by an additional year working as an intern.

This setting was visited by the researcher in the beginning of November 2018 for one week and in April 2019 for ten working days: almost three weeks in total.



## **Chapter 5 Data presentation of documentary analysis: documentary guidance for daily activities in ECE settings**

Educational policy makers and teaching professionals are recognized as major producers of documentary materials in providing supporting sources for related educational institutions (Silverman, 2006). In the literature review, it was seen that the Chinese government issued a series of outlines, guidance and suggestions for ECE programs over 60 plus years. Chapter 2 also highlighted the influence of western educational ideologies and approaches on ECE in China. In doing so it also highlighted the different levels of administration of ECE practices: the national level, the local level, and the school level.

This chapter presents the findings relating to the documentary analysis of national guidelines (the National Learning and Development Guidelines for 3–6-year-old children), local guidelines (the Shanghai local reference book (for teachers), and teachers' own weekly lesson plans. In doing so it focuses on the following research questions:

1. What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy, and surroundings?
2. What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?
3. How are western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?

As described in Chapter 3, the national guidelines (as enshrined within national policy) provide suggestions on the educational aims and teaching suggestions on educational practice for children aged 3-6 years old. These are supplemented by the four local reference books in Shanghai which were written to provide detailed themes, activities and lessons for teachers planning daily activities within the framework of the national guidelines. Given that the 'learning' reference book is the one used primarily for planning activities this is the focus for the 'local' documentary analysis. Finally, teachers were asked to provide the researcher with their weekly lesson planning documents. Written by the class teacher, these documents

describe in detail the activities planned for each day of the week and the underlying learning objectives. Findings of the documentary analysis are presented by themes, comparing the documentary guidance at the national and local level with teachers' plans. In conclusion, this chapter has analysed the three sources description on educational practice, including what education should be like and how these educational practices were conducted.

### **5.1 What education should be like?**

In this section, it would focus on what should be taught in the kindergartens, mainly discussing the educational aims, content, and structure. Educational aims are mentioned frequently in the national guidelines, Shanghai local reference books and teachers' weekly plans. This section would focus on the analysis of educational content, aims and structure in three kinds of documents, as well as the difference among them. Based on the analyses of these three kinds of documents, four themes emerged: the continuity and interconnected aims; focus and understand children's developmental features; emphasise on preparing children with life-long learning abilities; care for the importance of cultivating individual ability.

#### *Described education content and organisation of daily activities based on three documents.*

The national guidelines, local reference books and teachers' weekly plan, have detailed descriptions of what should be taught in settings. The national guidelines include two main parts: the suggested milestones children should achieve at certain ages, and the teaching suggestions for teachers. The milestone covers five aspects: 'health' covers the '*physical, emotional and socialisation of children*'. Such definition highlights the perceived three main aspects of health. For the 'language' area, the national guidelines emphasise that '*age 3-6 years are the key stages for developing children's linguistic abilities, especially their speaking*'. Rather than giving a clear definition of language the guidelines emphasise that language is used to communicate and think. It emphasises the function of language. As to the 'societal' area, it stands for '*interpersonal relationships and to be well accustomed to society*'. It indicates that learning how to build communications with others and being adapted to society in the future was one of the key aims of children's development. The definition of 'science' was regarded as a '*process of exploring the nature of things and solving problems, attempting to find out the similarities and differences between things*.' To some extent, this definition has pointed out three core tasks children should accomplish during the early years: exploring things, solving problems, and focusing on the similarities and differences. The last area, 'arts', is indicated in

the national guidelines as being an effective way of self-expression and knowing the world. It also indicates the function and necessity of learning arts in the early years, underlying the interrelations among different areas. As to the local reference books, in Shanghai public ECE settings, daily activities have been divided into four aspects which include ‘learning activities’, ‘exercising activities’, ‘living activities’ and ‘Games’. For each kind of children’s daily activities, there is a corresponding reference book for teachers’ reference. There are detailed descriptions of examples, such as aims, materials and process for organising activities. The National Guidelines have advised the educational aims and teaching suggestions for planning and conducting daily activities in public settings, while the Shanghai local reference books are designed to specify detailed practical examples based on the guidance of the National Guidelines. Based on the National Guidelines and local reference books, teachers have arranged and planned daily activities which also have been divided into the above four areas. In addition, each kindergarten also had their own featured curriculum (described in chapter 4). The teachers’ weekly plan shows that the content of curriculum in kindergarten has been divided into two categories, the ‘Shared Curriculum’ and ‘Chosen Curriculum’, which has been explained in the previous chapter.

### Educational aims

The educational aims are suggested to be integrated with five developmental areas, focusing on different kinds of developmental aspects, instead of only caring for the single part. The National Guidelines has described it in all five developmental areas. For instance, in the ‘health’ area, it describes that *‘Developing good body condition, pleased emotion, strong constitution, harmonious body movement, good living habits and basic living abilities are the symbols of the health condition, as well as the foundation for development in other aspects.’*. It is the similar description in other areas, in the ‘language’ area, that *‘children’s language development interplays with different aspects of development, also influencing the development of other areas...’*. Not only in the national guidelines, but also the ‘learning’ local reference book clearly shows that the educational aims cover different aspects of developmental areas. In each listed example for a learning session, the first part is the showing of integrated developmental areas. In detail, the example uses marks to represent the proportion of each developmental area, i.e., three five-pointed stars with the ‘language’ and ‘societal’ areas, two five-pointed stars with the ‘art’ and ‘science’ areas, and one five-pointed star with ‘health’. This example means that, on the one hand, this session focuses more on the ‘language’ and ‘societal’ developmental parts. On the other hand, such a description also indicates the suggestions of integrated educational

aims, including all five development areas. The teachers' weekly plans also share similar statements. In general, the documentary guidance suggests that educational aims should cover all five developmental areas.

In addition, the educational aims emerged in the documents can also be classified into three themes: cultivating cognitive abilities and skills, caring for moral/social performance and affection/emotional development, and behaviour improvement. Specifically, cognitive abilities and skills include children's understanding of the outside world, as well as certain knowledge and skills. For example, the national guidelines described the educational aims in the 'language' area as '*can understand logical and assumption sentences in context...be able to understand symbols and characters in context...*'; in the 'science area', the educational aims are described as '*be able to discover the object features and difference...be able to prove their assumption...be able to discover and understand the physical phenomena in daily activities...*' etc.. From these similar statements, it can be concluded that the educational aims, as suggested by documents, should care for the knowledge and skills in five developmental areas. Not only in the national guidelines but also in the 'learning' reference book, educational aims are detailed listed to improve children's cognitive ability of the outside world and certain skills they need. For instance, in the session example 'Hidden and Seek with Shadows', the educational aims are '*observe the shadows around, understand the features and why shadows exist...*'; '*use daily objects to measure the shadow, knowing the front and back measurement method...find the relations between shadow and light*'. Apart from this session, it is similar to other examples. Another session 'Classmate Status' also described the educational aims as '*with dissolve drawing, draw the crowded people...*'. These descriptions strongly show that educational aims are suggested to cultivate children's cognitive abilities, extending certain knowledge and skills.

Finding around cultivating children's moral performance and affection development has also been explored. The word citizenship can be used to present this finding. It can be described that citizenship is also the focus of educational aims. In this study, citizenship has mainly covered two aspects: socialisation and identification. Three kinds of documents all include the socialisation and self-identification relevant aims. It includes children's socialisation development such as obeying social rules, cultivating good personal character such as not telling lies and respecting others. Children's feelings and emotional condition such as being happy, being positive and willingness were also included in the socialisation aspects, guiding

children with the appropriate behaviour and attitude as the small group member in society. In the national guidelines, there are descriptions like *'children are willing to...actively respond to others...can show sympathy to others when people are sad...'*; *'children are suggested to like discussing with others and telling what they read from books...show interest in symbols in books and daily life...can feel the beauty of linguistics...'*. Such statements show that educational aims are suggested to be affection related, encouraging children to be positive and keen to interacting with others, as well as showing respect to others and social rules. For instance, in the 'socialisation' part, the educational aims are described like *'children are able to understand the meaning of rules...not telling lies...be responsible for tasks they are assigned to...care for the environment...be active and happy in group activities...being proud to be Chinese...showing respect for different ethnic groups and other culture...'*. All these related descriptions show the focus of children's socialisation improvement. The session examples and teachers' weekly plan also indicates the similar point. The educational aim in the session 'Guess the Birthday' describes it as *'knowing your mate's birthday, caring for others' feelings'*.

When going through the teachers' weekly plan, the group game in the setting B planned by Teacher Y described that *'children can feel happy when playing games with peers...'*; In the 'Role Play' period, the educational aims focus on the *'whether children's emotion is positive or negative, whether they can expand how they play games...'*; In the 'learning' session plan in the setting A, Teacher Xu described that *'children are willing to express their thinking. Respect others and listen to others when people are speaking...'*. All these statements indicate that the educational aims of how children feel, and their emotional condition is the focus of activities planning, as well as moral related character is teachers' attention. Descriptions like *'willing to', 'positive or negative', 'like discussing with', 'be happy', 'be proud'* represent the attention for children's affection development. While the descriptions like *'caring for others' feelings', 'respect for others'* indicate the attention for children's moral development. As to self-identification, it means the cultivation of guiding children to identifying themselves in certain conditions. For instance, the session 'Visiting Shanghai' suggested the educational aim as *'write the lyrics for the song Shanghai is really beautiful, deepen their love for Shanghai...'*. These educational aims show the cultivation of self-identification as Shanghai-nese. In the national guidelines, there are also statements such as *'being proud to be a Chinese...willing to do things for the group...be happy about the development of your hometown...be able to speak the local language and mandarin with correct and accurate pronunciation...'*. Such statements

all indicate the cultivation of helping children to form the identification in the society, their belongings to the community, hometown, and their country.

As to behaviour development, it mainly refers to children's performance and personal experience doing things such as better performance in exercising, better performance in making things in playing and daily living habits, and knowing how to write characters etc. Such improvements in behaviour-related areas are also the focus of suggested educational aims in documents. For instance, in the national guidelines, the educational aims in the 'Art' area are described as '*can sing the song with rhythms...can dance to express their feelings or certain scenes...*'; in the 'Health' area, the educational aims listed the movement development as one of the sub-educational aims in this area. In the 'socialisation' part, it suggests that '*encourage children to obey the rules and introduce children with necessary social behaviour rules...*'. When it comes to the teachers' weekly plan, statements in the Teacher Xu's plans for sports games describe that '*practice jumping with single leg and both legs, as well as others jumping abilities, improving children's ordination abilities..*'; in the Teachers Huang's weekly plans, the educational aims for activity 'rhythm practice' are described as '*prepare kinds of beating material for children to practise, observe children how to perform and how to dress them up...*'. In the Teacher Li' weekly plan, the activity 'My useful hands' listed the educational aims as '*help children to learn threat through the needle, and be able to tie a knot..*'; Not only in the activity part, in the eating period, the teachers are also suggested to help children with good living habits such as '*whether children cannot talk to others when eating, and be able to chew carefully and swallow slowly, leaving the table to be clean and tidy...*'. From all these educational aims, it can be concluded that the educational aims are suggested to focus on children's behaviour development, including their body and movement development, daily living habits, socialisation behaviour, and hand-making abilities, as well as their writing, singsong and drawing abilities.

It can be concluded that educational aims suggested by three kinds of documents included three main aspects: cultivating cognitive abilities and skills, caring for moral/social performance and affection/emotional development (citizenship cultivation), and behaviour improvement. The cultivation of cognitive development for children includes children's understanding of the word, certain knowledge and skills they suggested to be equipped with; cultivating their citizenship and self-identification includes their social moral development and affection for people, environment and nation. When it comes to child's behaviour development, it includes

children's body movement development, as well as their social behaviour and learning skillful behaviours.

## **5.2 How educational activities was conducted?**

*The 'national learning and developmental guideline for 3-6 years old children'* was issued by the Chinese educational department in 2012 (otherwise known as 'the national guidelines'). This guidance is designed to help kindergarten teachers (and children's parents) to better conduct their ECE practice to provide for the young children in their care (The National guidelines, 2012). As described in the introduction of the national guidelines, its purpose was to guide preschools and families in five areas of children's development: health, language, society, science, and arts. This section focuses on how this guidance is applied in practice. Themes and sub-themes emerged from the thematic analysis. Each of these are discussed in turn below.

### **5.2.1 Features of organising and planning curriculum**

This section would analyse the features of documentary guided educational practice, including six themes, explaining focuses of organising educational practice in kindergartens. Sub themes would be presented below.

#### ***Focusing on the 'child-centred' ideology***

The national guidelines emphasise that adults should plan daily activities centred on children's developmental features, needs, and interests, especially catering for their individual differences. For example, within the area of 'health' the guidelines state that teachers should show that they '*appreciated each child, pay attention to their merits, respect their individual difference...*'; '*outdoor activities should be based on children' difference...*'; '*respect children's interests and unique feelings, understand their behaviour...*'; '*plan kinds of various activities, fitting for children's age features and their developmental needs such as walking, running, jumping, climbing, etc..*'; '*based on children's understanding ability, use some causality, hypothesis and if-condition phases...*'. This is underpinned by an awareness of developmental stages and differences. For instance, the national guidelines specify that teachers should '*show respect for children's individuality...each child follows a similar developmental process but showing difference at the developmental pace...*'. This is reinforced by the national guidelines listing children's developmental aims at different ages in all five of the developmental areas. Consequently, it can be concluded that the focus on the child represents a 'child-centred'

ideology, which represents the emphasis on children's developmental needs and individual differences. The pedagogy to 'child-centred' ideologies have also been explained in following sections. It can be found out that John Dewey reviewed in chapter 2 also advocated such ideology, which treats children as the centre in educational practice. It also indicated that the former 'subject-centred' and 'teachers-centred' approach imported from the Soviet Union has been replaced by the western educational ideology.

#### Focusing on the emphasize of relations with daily life.

The national guidelines emphasise the importance of providing activities related to their daily life. It is indicated that the daily activities in a setting should be planned bearing in mind children's daily life experiences. For example, it is stated that '*teachers can provide crayons, knives, papers or other common objects from children's daily life to conduct learning activities...*'; '*introduce children to common symbols such as hospitals...*'; '*encourage children to observe interesting things in life such as leaves...based on children's life experience, guide children to imagine...*'; '*based on children daily life, guide them to learn math by comparing numbers of objects...*'; '*set the actual scene for children to understand the meaning of numbers...*'.*encourage children to discover and solve the problems in their life...*'; '*support children with attending outdoor activities to experience and understand things in their life...*'. Words such as '*surroundings*', '*real life problems*', '*life and games*', were mentioned frequently in the national guidelines. Apart from the national guidelines, the 'learning' reference book provided life-related examples as learning sessions for teachers' reference. For example, themes in the 'learning' reference book centred on common objects in daily life such as 'Capital Beijing', 'the National Holiday', 'Interesting water', 'Myself' and 'Our city'. Themes are the objects around children, familiar to their daily life. Therefore, it can be concluded that activities that use or connect with children's daily life are important for teachers' planning, as well as providing related tools and materials (which would be discussed in the following paragraph).

In chapter 2, reviews of Dewey and Vygotsky's philosophies show that educational practice should be linked to children's social life. Such a pedagogy in learning has indicated the similar point as reviewed in chapter 2.

#### Caring for social interactions in educational practice



The importance of social interactions on children's development has also been emphasised. The documentary guidance has indicated that social interaction between teachers and children could influence children's development. The social interaction between teachers and children in this chapter can be understood as the way and content teachers interact with children. For example, in the 'Health' areas of National Guidelines, it describes that '*adults should communicate with children in the gentle way, which helps children to control their temper and act as the model for controlling temper for children...*'; in the 'Language' area, teaching suggestion has been described as '*caring for the words discussing with children, using words they can fully understand to communicate...*'. It can be argued that when describing guiding children in better performance of their behaviour, the communication with children has been highlighted. In the teachers' weekly plans, at each end of learning session and activities, there has been the teachers' feedback based on children's performance and behaviour. For instance, in teachers' weekly plan arranged by Teacher Shen in the setting A, it describes '*give feedback and comments on children's performance in role play...*'. Similar statements have been found in other teachers' weekly plans. It can be inferred that social interaction between teachers and children can be seen as an important aspect in children's development.

The Vygotsky' cognitive development theories, as reviewed in chapter 2 has shown the emphasis on the social interactions. The educational practice suggested in the documentary guidance has shown that interactions between teachers and children are vital for children's development, corresponding to Vygotsky' cognitive development theories.

#### *Focusing on the materials and environment*

Apart from the previous three findings, the importance of prepared material, tools and environment has also been highlighted in three kinds of documents. The tools, materials and environment in each setting, the national guidelines and the reference books have been listed with some examples and criteria. The environment, which is also known as the ethos, includes physical and atmosphere environments, as described in three kinds of documents. In other words, ethos is also the focus of planning daily activities and curriculum in kindergarten. Specifically, on the one hand, documents suggest that appropriate ethos should be provided to promote children's development, on the other hand, it indicates the interconnectedness of ethos and children's development. In detail, themes-centred and children's development appropriateness are the criteria for preparing and providing ethos and materials in kindergarten. Themes-centred in this study means the material and environment

should be designed and provided corresponding to the different themes. Materials and surroundings were indicated and emphasised in three kinds of documents. For example, in the 'Health' area, in terms of describing the development of enabling children's fingers movement, it states that *'provide crayons, knives, papers, etc., making full use of natural materials...letting children draw, cut and fold, kind of handicraft related activities.'* In the 'learning' reference book, the session *'Looking at the Lantern and Find the Equations'* listed the educational aim as *'understanding the different maths equations can present the same meaning, while the different meanings can be shown by the same equation.'* In this case, materials were listed as *'Pictures of Chinese knot, firecrackers and some Chinese character '喜'...prepare lantern children made by children in their daily activities.'* Materials correspond to the session theme. It is like other sessions in the 'learning' local reference book, as well as teachers' weekly plan. As described in the learning session discuss 'Food Hygiene' wrote by Teacher Ling in the setting B, describing the educational aims as *'knowing the production date and the end of date, as well as the safety labels...improving the cognitive understanding of food hygiene issue and eat less snacks...'*, the prepared materials are *'different kinds of package of food, bottles and cans, as well as pictures of food going bad...'* Not only the learning session described the prepared materials, the 'Games' part also clearly stated the preparation of materials and tools for children, making these materials and tools convenient for children's playing. Taking the 'Role Play' plan written by Teacher Shen in the setting A as the example, she described the materials for this game as *'hand-making barbecue samples, fan, weight, rules, body examination sheets, etc.'* It can be concluded that all the materials prepared are for the theme and educational purposes.

As to the child's developmental appropriateness, it can be explained as the educational environment and materials provided should meet children's development appropriateness. The national guidelines have clearly described that *'prepare the environment for children can take care for themselves.'*; *'provide children with good reading environment.'*; *'provide children with some interesting tools for exploration.'*; *'provide children with adequate and various kinds of materials and tools supporting their exploration of common objects, features of materials and objects.'* All these relevant suggestions show that the environment, tools, and materials should care for the children's developmental request. There are also descriptions emphasising the features of provided materials and environment for helping children's

development. Concluded from three kinds of documents that materials and environments should care for:

1. the concentrated life and experience based commonly seen objects.
2. children sized.
3. low-structured objects.
4. trusted, safe and comfortable ethos.

To specify, meeting the requirements of the concentrated daily common seen objects can be understood as the relations with daily life as explained above. Common seen objects are usually the ones that children are familiar with in their daily life. For example, in the national guidelines, the teaching suggestions '*advised teachers to help children understand the relationship between objects and solids such as cubes, for example, use dishes, desks, wheels and sticks to help children understand shape of objects.*'. It suggests teachers use concrete objects to explain the concepts of abstract ideas. It is also similar in the teachers' weekly plans. For instance, in the setting C, the outdoor activity in the afternoon, it described the material preparation as '*wooden make long chair, mattress, bricks, recorders and tapes...*'. From these descriptions, it indicates that the documentary guidance believes the concentrated life of commonly seen objects fit the feature of children's learning - the preference of concrete objects. The abstract concepts, things children seldom see or know, and experience children never do are difficult for children to understand. In sequence, in all three kinds of documents clearly suggested the use of concrete objects in practice.

Apart from the concrete objects, the documents also suggested the children-sized tools and materials. In the national guidelines, it clearly states that '*provide the suitable size of desks, chairs and beds for children...*'; In the 'learning' reference book, the session 'Spring Festival' presented the material as '*children-sized and suitable knives, paper cuts.*'. While in the teachers' weekly plan in the setting B, it describes the tools for children's sports periods exercises describing the use of '*small sized basketballs, adjustable basketball stands...*'. These statements prove the use of children-sized tools and materials in practice.

As to the low-structure tools and materials, it refers to the raw materials and semi-finished tools, enabling children with chances to participate in making-activities. The national guidelines suggest that '*when decorating the playing areas for role play, it is important to provide raw materials and semi-finished products for children...*'. In this teachers' weekly plan in the setting B, it describes the materials for 'role play' as two kinds of categories, which are

low-structured materials such as construction materials (kinds of bricks and related materials), regenerated materials (collected boxes, bottles and cans etc.), and existing tools (collecting boxes, paper cuts, crayons, markers, blackboards etc.), and the high-structured tools including simulated food, tableware, medical equipment, etc.). From such description, it can be assumed that the documentary guidance prefers raw and low-structured materials, combining with few high-structured materials in educational practice. In the setting A, there is a ‘construction session’ each week, as described in the teachers’ weekly plan. It is the session ‘*provide children with low-structured bricks, letting them to construct things based on their own understanding...*’. To sum up, the low-structured materials and tools are suggested in the educational practice, enabling children to develop their hand-making skills, as well as ‘replacement’ cognitive abilities. In other words, it is the ability of children to use materials and tools to make something representing things they imagined.

When it comes to the trusted and comfortable ethos in kindergarten, it can be concluded that the documentary guidance believes the importance of ethos contributing to children’s learning. In other words, the ethos is one of the elements shaping children’s learning process. In detail, the national guidelines express that ‘*provide a warm, cosy mental environment, helping children form the feeling of safety and trust in kindergarten...*’; ‘*create a safe living environment for children...*’; ‘*provide the appropriate reading environment for children...*’; ‘*create the warm, caring, and comfortable environment for children, establishing the good teachers-children relationship, letting children to feel safe and trusted in health human-relationships...*’. While in the ‘learning’ reference book and teachers’ weekly plans, there is no clear description of the prepared environment. It will be further discussed in the interview and observation chapter, with detailed data.

To conclude, the focus of materials and environment indicates that the documentary guidance believes in the interconnectedness of environment and children’s learning. In addition, it also reveals the children’s learning feature: the preference of concentrated commonly seen objects. Low structured materials and tools enable children to develop their constructive abilities.

#### *Focusing on the self-operation and self-experiences*

Another feature in organising and planning educational practice is advocacy of self-operation and self-experiences in children’s learning process. Self-operation means letting children to ‘do something by themselves’, while self-experiences mean direct perception of objects. In

other words, the documentary guidance suggests that planning daily activities should provide chances for children to operate and experience things on their own. For example, in the national guidelines, the teaching suggestions in the ‘art’ area, it describes that *‘adults should create chances for children to know different forms of art, cultivating their affection for arts...’*; *‘let children to observe the common plants and animals, guiding them to describe features of plants and animals by their own expressions.’*; *‘support children to acquire certain knowledge and improve their cognitive understanding of the external world, such as participating in outdoor activities, observation, planting and other activities...’*. All these related statements indicate the principle of self-operation and self-experiences contributing to improving personal understanding of objects.

The session in the ‘learning’ reference book also shows the chances for children to self-operation and self-experience. In the session ‘Protecting Our Teeth’, it aims at guiding children to care for their teeth and knowing the way to protect their teeth. It describes *‘provide the teeth model and mirror... enlarge the picture of the teeth model, let children observe the model, discuss the function of different parts of teeth...look into the mirror, use stickers to mark the position of tooth decay...’*. In this session, the teeth model was provided for children to observe, forming their understanding of different parts of teeth. Stickers were used by children to mark the tooth decay, deepening their direct perceptions of teeth and tooth decay. Pictures were used to help children with direct understanding of harmful influences. Another example shown in the ‘learning reference book is... It can be concluded that on the one hand, documentary guidance suggests educational practice with focusing on providing chances for operation and directly experiencing to improve children’s cognition and understanding of certain knowledge and skills. On the other hand, it also proves the essential of concentrated commonly seen objects in educational practice.

It is also indicated in the teachers’ weekly plan. In the teachers’ weekly plan (setting C), Teacher Ye described the individual playing games as *‘guide children to use different materials to make the houses, bridges and plants in the city, helping children to explore the way to beautifying their environment...’*. Apart from Teacher Ye, in the setting B, Teacher Ling also planned the operation session for learning density of objects. This session was about providing children with chances to put different objects in water to find out whether it can drift on water or not. It also shows that children’s self-operations exert a positive effect on their cognition development. To conclude, the documents believe in the influences of children's self-operation

and self-experiences on their learning process. It can also be assumed that children's learning is based on their direct experience.

Advocating of self-experience and self-operation can be understood as the 'learning by doing' ideology emphasised by John Dewey. It can also be understood that 'learning by doing' ideology is closely linked to 'child-centred' ideology. Educational practice suggested in documents has pointed out the importance of children's doing in activities to better improve their development. In chapter 2, John Dewey's philosophy has pointed out providing chances for children' self-doing. The principle of 'learning by doing' has been interpreted in the documentary guidance. At the same time, feedback and comments on children's doing has also been emphasised in the previous sections, which can be understood as the scaffolding advocated by Vygotsky.

#### Group-based, teacher-leading session versus child-leading activities

Grouped-based activities and individual activities, teacher-leading and child-leading activities are the two main ways of organising educational practice in kindergartens. Group-based activities and individual activities both co-exist. While the teacher-leading approach is mainly described in the 'learning' sessions in kindergartens. The detailed daily activities examples are suggested in the reference books and presented in the teachers' weekly plan. In this case, when analysing the way of organising educational practice, the focus would be on the 'learning' reference book and teachers' weekly plans.

As exemplified in the 'learning' reference book, the process is led by teachers. For example, the session '*What part of vegetables can be eaten?*', aiming at teaching children with distinguishing different part of vegetables, started by

*'Teachers tell children to discuss what vegetables they bought in operation corner, which provided different kinds of vegetables such as carrots, tomatoes, broccoli, etc. (provided by teachers) ...Review the song 'Market'...use the vegetables children listed to rewrite the song...guide children to discuss whether they can eat vegetables immediately and why? Guide children to trim vegetables and label them...Guide children to discuss the distinguishing features of vegetables, which part can be eaten...tell children to record different parts in tables...'*

Analysing this learning process, it can be found out that the teacher took the lead in the session by telling children what to do. In other words, teachers gave instructions to children in the

whole process. It is obvious that the session example only describes the behaviour of teachers in practice. At the same time, it also indicates the group-based approach in the learning session. A class of children follow the instructions by teachers. It is the same in teachers' weekly plan that teachers took the lead in 'learning' sessions. For example, in the setting C, teacher Ye planned the learning session as 'Knowing Symbols in Daily life'. In this session, it was made to guide a class of children, not individually. At the same time, the learning session began by teachers asking children ciphers. It described that

*'Asking children ciphers: what does one person walking and talking mean? Let us see what these symbols are...Ask children questions about presented pictures. Do they know what these symbols mean? Where do you usually see these symbols? Except these presented symbols, have you ever seen any other symbols...Guide children to make symbols by different materials, focusing on children's understanding of symbols...'*

This session plan also shows the group-based learning approach and teacher-led approach in this kind of daily activities. Teachers gave instructions to children, which means discussion, operation and conclusion through the learning session were guided by teachers.

Compared to 'learning' sessions, other kinds of daily activities such as sports, playing and living activities, achieved the balance between group-based and individual approach. In detail, the teachers' weekly plan described the sports activities as individual exercising and collaborative activities. For example, in the setting A, the sports activities are categorised into *'group sports activities and individual exercising in different areas.'* Group sports activities means children exercising as groups or teams, such as doing morning exercises, while individual exercising in different areas means children choose what areas they prefer, such as climbing areas, playing basketball. It means children can exercise on their own. While in the setting B, the sports activities are described as *'group sports and separated exercising sports.'* Group sports means the same as described above. The separated exercising has shown the way of letting children individually exercise at different areas. In the setting C, the sports activities are described as the same in the setting B: the separated sports activities and group sports activities. To conclude, the group-based and individual approaches co-exist in the sports activity in kindergartens.

As to the 'Games' in kindergarten, it can be also described as group-based 'Role Play' and individual game-playing activity. In all three kindergartens, the teachers' weekly plan described the same 'Games' activity as 'Role Play', which refers to the 35-minute periods for

children to cooperate with peers doing the games playing roles of different occupations such as doctors, firemen, actors, and musicians. While the individual game-playing activity refers to children can use different toys, tools, and materials to do certain activities such as hand making and playing in construction rooms. During this period, children can play on their own. When it comes to the ‘living’ activities, it is usually performed through eating, sleeping and ‘learning’ sessions. In other words, it is hard to conclude it as a group-based or individual approach.

Another obvious feature in ‘Games’ and ‘Sports’ activities is the child-lead approach. As described in the teachers’ weekly plans, the frequently used words by teachers in these activities are ‘observation’ and ‘Guidance’. For example, in the setting A, Teacher Xu described the ‘Sports’ activity as *‘provide different model cars, obstacles, and toys, guide children to drive the model cars, observe their performance...’*; *‘observe children can use balance beams, ladders to build something for climbing, reminding them of safety issues...’*. In the setting B, Teacher Li described the ‘Role Play’ activity as *‘provide materials and tools for children such as ...the focus is to observe children’s feedback on providing more materials, and whether they can use new materials and tools to develop new ways of playing...’*. From these descriptions, it can be inferred that these kinds of activities show the child-lead approach. On the other hand, it can be inferred that when the activity is more about learning skills and acquiring knowledge, the more teacher-led approach is chosen by teachers. When the activity is more about playing and exercising, the more child-led approach is arranged by teachers. It can be assumed that teachers believe learning skills and acquiring knowledge requires more teachers’ specific instructions and guidance. On the other hand, the game-playing and exercising relevant activities require children to be more involved in self-operation and performing, providing teachers with chances to observe children’s development.

Given these two different approaches, the ‘child-centred’ ideology has been completed through two approaches. It can also be understood that either ‘teachers-led’ or ‘child-led’ has been the strategy of performing ‘child-centred’ ideology. Such approaches did not deny the ‘child-centred’ ideology, while still treating children’s developmental needs as the priority in educational practice.



### 5.2.2 Teachers' role in educational practice

The national guidelines and local reference books focus on providing suggestions and examples for teachers. Based on the suggestions from these two kinds of documents, teachers wrote the weekly plans. It can be concluded that these documents indicate the role of teachers in educating children. In general, teachers played the role of observer, facilitator, and leader.

Not only in the national guidelines, but also in the teachers' weekly plan, observation is frequently mentioned. Teachers are suggested to observe children's performance in different kinds of educational practice. For example, in the national guidelines, the teaching suggests that '*observe children' behaviour, give positive feedback to children when they show obeying-rules behaviour...*'. In the teachers' weekly plans, there is a separate description of 'observation focus' in six teachers' plans. For example, in the setting A, the fifteenth weekly plan described the observation of 'living' activities in educational practice as '*observe whether children understand the way of refuse classification, and how they can classify refuse in their life...observe whether children understand the importance of air...*'. The observation focuses on the 'Sports' activities planned in the setting B, which were described as '*observe children how to throw balls and guide them...observe children how to use wheels and ladders to plan their playing...*'. Each kind of activity includes the observation focus. It can be assumed that teachers played the role of observing children in daily activities.

As to the role of facilitator, it can be understood as '*an individual helps groups or members to work effectively, understand their objectives and plan how to achieve these objectives*' (Vilngrid, 2012). In this study, the facilitator is used to present teachers the role of helping children improve their certain skills and abilities, encouraging them to achieve objectives and providing chances and environment for children's learning. The role of facilitator has been suggested and planned in these documents. In the national guidelines, it describes that '*...helping children to form good dietary habits and sanitary habits...inspire children's interest to participate in sports...*'. While in the teachers' weekly plan as described by Teacher Huang in the setting C, it describes '*reminder children to keep distance from peers and introduce the rules of playing, how to control their speed in climbing...*'; '*guide children how to use the recorders and table to record their findings...*'. In the setting B, Teacher Ling described the individual game as '*reminding children to observe the diagram, guide them to understand how to use the needle and how to make the knot, reminding them...*'. From these similar statements,

it can be inferred that teachers not only provide instructions in activities, but also help children with experiencing and conducting activities. Caring for children's performance in activities, and responding to these behaviours, provide assistance for children's need to complete different tasks. Facilitator can be used to describe the role teachers played in educating children.

When it comes to the leader, it can be understood as leading the process of different kinds of activities, especially in learning activities. As explained in the previous section, in the learning activities, teacher-lead approaches are frequently used. It can be also described that teachers played the role of leader in learning activities. The whole learning process is led by teachers, although they focus on children's response in activities. 'Child-centred' ideologies and teachers played the role of leading activities co-exist in parts of daily activities in kindergartens.

### **5.3 Western educational ideologies and approaches in educational practice in Shanghai**

In this section, it would focus on exploring the relationship between implicated educational western ideologies and approaches in documentary guidance. The analysis would start from the educational aims, role of teacher, curriculum/content and environment as documents suggested. In other words, this section would cover: the main concepts reviewed in the literature review chapter and findings emerging from the documentary analysis.

From the previous section, it can be concluded that documentary guidance suggested the education aim as:

1. Education aims should cover five areas, which are integrated. Five areas are health, society, language, science, and art. In five developmental areas, academic subjects and knowledge are described in the developmental areas, such as 'cognition of mathematics', 'language learning', and 'scientific exploration'.
2. Education should target the cultivation of citizenship and develop children's certain abilities and performance in society. As explained in the previous section, citizenship in this study can represent the socialisation, which means allegiance of a person to a state, nation and society, and the identification, which refers to a child identifying themselves to be who they are. Citizenship is directly related to Chinese society. Chinese values and traditions are suggested such as obeying rules, filial piety and proper behaviour in students through teachings, examples, and rituals.

The curriculum and content have been concluded that the documentary guidance suggest that:

1. Curriculum and content should be ‘child-centred’ ideologies. The suggested educational curriculum focused on children’s development milestones and features, providing suggestions for curriculum and content design.
2. Curriculum content designing is suggested to be daily life and children’s experience related.
3. Curriculum content and designing should care for the provided tools and environment. It also emphasises the importance of social interaction between children and surroundings, recognizing the influence from ethos.
4. Curriculum design should concern the chances for children’s self-operation and self-experience in session. Such features indicate the children’s development features that children’s learning proceeds through self-doing and concrete objects.
5. The approach to conduct designed curriculum and content are the infusion of teacher-led and child-lead approach, under the supervision of ‘child-centred’ ideology.

The role of teachers in the documents have also been concluded as the facilitator, guider, director and leader. Certain activities planned in the curriculum show the preference for teacher-led/directed approach, such as the ‘Learning’ session. The importance of tools and ethos including surroundings and material have also been expected to be centred on designed curriculum themes and children’s developmental needs. The trust, safety and comfortable ethos are highlighted in documentary guidance.

In the literature review chapter, the key concepts of John Dewey’s philosophy of education, Jean Piaget’s cognitive development, and Vygotsky’ cognitive theory have been reviewed. It can be concluded that these three educational philosophies show the similarities and differences with guided education in kindergarten. John Dewey’s philosophy emphasises developing informed and responsible citizens who actively contribute to a democratic society. The cultivation of citizenship is also the focus of his philosophy. However, the different national situation in countries led to the difference in interpreting the meaning of citizenship. The suggested citizenship in China centres on ‘filial piety’, ‘moral development’ and ‘respect for Chinese tradition and cultures.’. While the democracy in education demonstrated by Dewey refers to the focus on nurturing democratic habits of mind, critical thinking abilities and civic minded participation in society (Pery, 2016). In this case, it can be concluded as ‘same focus on citizenship’ with different citizenship meaning making.

*‘Education is not preparation for life; Education is life itself’*. This sentence also presents the ideology John Dewey holds for education. Concluded in the previous section that the suggested education curriculum and content also show emphasis on the relations with children’s daily life. The documentary analysis section presents that daily activities themes and content are centred on daily common seen and experienced objects. In other words, the suggested education curriculum and content treated things that happened in daily life as the sources for teaching and learning, which better contributes to children’s cognitive development. At the same time, the use of concreted objects revealed that experiencing with commonly concreted objects in educational practice can better improve children’s understanding of certain concepts and knowledge. It is the similar point John Dewey insists in his philosophy, that curriculum should be connected to social life and personal experience in daily life. The relation between education and life has both been emphasised by Dewey and suggested curriculum and content. The way Dewey suggests education and life is the focus on the ongoing, continuous process that intertwined with life itself. The suggested curriculum and content aim at preparing children for a way of learning, prepared for further life. On the other hand, the curriculum and content treated objects in ‘life’ as the ‘thing’ to be taught for children. The difference lies in the specified content of ‘what kind of life’ is.

Piaget suggests four stages describing children’s development progress. The concept of assimilation, accommodation and schemes in the educational practice contribute to the facilitating cognitive development and enhance children’s learning experiences. From the review of these concepts held by Piaget, it can be concluded that prior knowledge and existing schemas is helpful for teachers to understand student’s existing mental frameworks. It also suggests teachers to connect new knowledge and skills to what children already know. The suggested curriculum, activities and content in the teachers’ weekly plan and ‘learning’ local reference book indicates the linking prior taught session and children’s existing schemas before starting the ‘new activity’. To some extent, children’s experience in daily life is the ‘prior knowledge’. In this case, the planned activities and sessions are commonly based on life-related themes. In addition, in the teachers’ weekly plan, Teacher Xu planned the activity as *‘Use the story described in the book, guide children to play the role told in the book...’*; Teacher Huang described the beginning of the session as *‘what the road looks like when you cross in the morning? Do you remember the rules about how to cross the road we explained in the last session?’*. The suggested curriculum planned by teachers indicates the linkage between former

knowledge teachers taught. However, there is no whole description of assimilation, accommodation and equilibration shown in the teachers' weekly plan. The analysis of this point would be described in the observation data analysis chapter. In the teachers' weekly plan, teachers attempt to review the knowledge or information children already acquired. Then based on this existing knowledge (scheme) to develop the new understanding of certain objects. To sum up, assimilation, accommodation and scheme has been applied in the teaching process, helping children to understand the new knowledge.

When it comes to the 'child centred' ideology in three educational ideologies and suggested curriculum and content. John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Vygotsky believed in the 'child-centred' ideology, while they suggested the 'child-centred' approach. However, the approach to the curriculum and content is the balance between 'teachers-led' and 'child-led' approach under the ideology of 'child-centred'. The 'teachers-led' approach is influenced by traditional Chinese culture and values. As the old saying described '师者, 传道授业解惑也'. This sentence is the role of a teacher is to impart knowledge, teach skills, and dispel doubts. Chinese education traditionally places the teacher in a position of authority and expertise. Students are expected to listen, follow instructions, and acquire knowledge from teachers. The 'learning' session is more like the traditional Chinese approach: teachers play the role of leader and instructors. When discussing the 'child-centred' ideology, the role of teachers is the key point. John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Vygotsky believed that teachers should play the role of facilitator and guide. The ZPD and scaffolding described by Vygotsky hold the view that teachers should play the role of guide, using scaffolding to help children reach the higher level. It is different from the role of teachers shown in the curriculum and content. The role of teachers indicated in western educational ideologies is around 'facilitator'. While shown in the documentary guidance, the role of teacher has also played the role of leader in certain activities. In detail, the previous section has concluded that teachers in the Chinese kindergartens play the role of facilitator, guide and leader. Chinese teachers in some activities played the role of instructor, such as 'learning' sessions. The influence from traditional Chinese values and education will be explicitly explored in the following chapters.

The experience and social interaction are the two key points suggested by John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Vygotsky. It is also the two elements consisting of the curriculum and pedagogy. John Dewey emphasised the importance of learning through direct experience and making

meaningful connections. In other words, ‘learning by doing’ is the focus in Dewey’s philosophy of education. Jean Piaget and Vygotsky believe in the significance of social interaction in the learning process. They highlight that learning is most effective when the curriculum and content is grounded in real-life experiences and when children are actively engaged in the learning process. The suggested and designed curriculum and content also planned the main way to perform the educational process by providing chances for children to learn from self-operation and self-experiencing, and social interactions with peers and teachers. Analysing the similarities among three educational ideologies and curriculum and content, it can be found that the documentary guided curriculum adopted the principle of focusing experience and social interaction in the learning progress. In addition, the interpretation of experience and social interaction in the documentary guidance is providing chances for children to learn by self-operation and self-experiences. Teachers should be aware that social interaction with children influences their learning.

Difference emerges around the ‘ethos’ aspects in educational ideologies and designed curriculum and content. The ethos and environment described by John Dewey centres on a learner-friendly environment encouraging exploration, freedom and democracy, as well as for hands-on, self-operational and experiential learning. Jean Piaget emphasises the importance of a supportive and interactive learning environment. Vygotsky points out the use of cultural tools such as language, signs and artefacts in cognitive development. The described ethos in curriculum and content described the provided environment to be trust, safety and friendly for children’s development. It also emphasised the order, discipline and adherence to rules and regulations. Such an ethos is more Chinese style, which would be emphasised in the observation data analysis. It can be assumed that the importance of ethos in children’s development has been implemented in curriculum and content, while a friendly, supportive, and interactive environment has been planned. However, the Chinese style ethos are suggested as well. It is assumed to be due to the ideology meaning making of educators, which is much influenced by Chinese traditional culture.

It is worth noting that Vygotsky emphasises the importance of symbolic play, using cultural tools such as language, signs and artefacts has been applied in three settings, which is known as ‘Role Play’. Not only cultural tools and artefacts have been provided, the low-structured tools are also provided for children’s playing. It shows the close linkage between Vygotsky’s view of play and planned playing activities in kindergarten.

Through comparing three ideologies and their planned curriculum and content, similarities, and differences between them are revealed. The epistemology of education, which advocated the ‘child-centred’ ideology has been absorbed in documentary guidance. The pedagogy in learning such as ‘learning by doing’, concept of ZPD and assimilation have been interpreted into teaching suggestions and examples of daily activities in documents. At the same time, Chinese traditional values, and beliefs such as the definition of citizenship has led to the different meaning-making of this word. Cultivation of children’s socialisation and self-identification has shown the model of ‘being Chinese.’, which shows the strong emphasis on Chinese features. Such points will be explored in detail in the interview and observation data analysis chapter. It can be concluded that the cultural and tradition differences between western countries and China have resulted in different strategies in conducting these ideologies. Western educational ideologies provide the educational framework and principles for pedagogy. They have also become intertwined with Chinese traditions and culture, leading to a reorganisation of these educational ideologies. Western education, reflecting certain values and cultural backgrounds, has not been fully eliminated by decision-makers in China. These ideologies have been adjusted by decision-makers and infused with specific Chinese traditions, values, and culture to make them more suitable for Chinese children and society.

### **5.5 Gaps among three kinds of documents**

In this section, it would focus on gaps among three kinds of documents: the national guidelines, ‘learning’ local reference documents and teachers’ weekly plans. It can be concluded that the national guideline is the foundation and principles for planning daily activities, while the ‘learning’ local reference book works as the examples for planning different kinds of activities. Teachers’ weekly plans are written based on the principle of national guidelines, taking the local reference books as example.

The national guidelines suggest five developmental areas for children’s development, while the Shanghai local authority design four kinds of activities covering five developmental areas. As explained in section 5.2, each activity covers five developmental areas. The educational aims and approach to teaching centres on the milestones and suggestions described in the national guidelines. For example, the session ‘Shadow’ describes the educational aims as *‘mastering the way of measurement, taking shadow to be the measured objects, encouraging*

*children to be interested in shadow's changes, understanding the relations between light and shadow.*'. It shows that the educational aim focuses on the measurement and understanding of shadow. The national guidelines suggested children aged 5-6 years old to be able to *'explore and discover the conditions or influencing factors that give rise to common physical phenomena...'*; *'found out that many problems in life can be solved by mathematics...'*. Comparing the educational aims described in the reference book and national guidelines, it indicates that the example listed in the reference book specifies the national guidelines through four kinds of activities.

Teachers' weekly plan is also guided by the national guidelines, referring to the local reference books. However, the four kinds of daily activities (Game, Sports, Learning and Living) are implemented in three settings. Six teachers' weekly plans organised daily activities into four kinds of activities as the local reference books suggest. The 'Sharing Curriculum' and 'School-chosen Curriculum' are also presented, which has been explained in the previous section. The similarity between local reference books and teachers' weekly plan lies in the same themes and examples. In other words, teachers refer to the themes and examples in the 'learning' reference book. Although, some sessions change the educational aims and part of the process or add some new sessions. For example, in the setting A, Teacher Shen changed the session 'Class Pictures' educational aim. The educational aim in the local reference book is *'Using the technique of cross-hatching, create a lively crowd scene...'*. Teacher Shen described the educational aim as *'Using the concept and method of foreground and background, depicting a lively crowd...'*. Reasons for changing the educational aim will be presented in the next chapter. Apart from the educational aim changes, teachers add new sessions which are not examples in the local reference book. For example, Teacher Ling adds new playing and learning activities into weekly plans such as individual learning activity 'How many water droplets can stand on a coin?'; playing activity 'Water chess'; group game 'How tall the wall is. New sessions are added by teachers. To be noticed that through six teachers' weekly plans, Teacher Li in the setting B and Teacher Ye in the setting C add more new sessions in the teachers' weekly plans. Interviews with teachers would explain why they add new sessions.

To conclude, the national guidelines play the role of principles for planning daily activities, while the local reference books provide examples for teachers' references.



## **Summary**

This chapter analyses the three documents in daily activities designing. The national guidelines play the role of principles for organising daily activities, while local reference books exemplify the daily activities for teachers. The documents indicate that education should centre on children's individual development and citizenship. The culture difference influences the decision-makers' cognition of western education ideologies and redefines these imported ideologies and approaches in the Shanghai context. Western education ideologies were trimmed by Chinese traditions, values, and culture, providing the aim of education, approach to education for Chinese decision-makers when designing three documents. The current situation that western education ideologies and approaches in the Chinese context can be described as trimmed by the principles of appropriateness.

## **Chapter 6 Interview data analysis-educational practice from teachers' perspectives**

The previous chapter examined the educational aims and practical suggestions contained in the governmental guidelines and local reference books. In particular, it examined the links between the educational aims, content, educational practice and the western early childhood education (ECE) theories. It explored the relations between the documentary guidelines and ECE theories and how far these theories and approaches were reflected in the chosen documents. It has been found out that culture difference and interpretation of decision-maker of western ideologies and approaches are the two determinants shaping the planning of educational practice in chosen settings.

As stated above, the documentary analysis detailed what was advised for teachers and the ways in which teachers translated that advice into their lesson planning. In order to explore whether there was a gap and links between teachers' understanding, interpretation and suggested guidance in the documents, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data pertinent to both head teachers and class teachers' perspectives about their understanding on these guidelines, the western educational theories/approaches, and the daily arrangements in their settings. Interviews also explored teachers and headteachers' educational background and other possible influences on the educational practice they made for the 5–6-year-old children in chosen settings. The links between teachers' understanding, preparations for daily activities and documentary guidelines and theories was also explored. In the three chosen settings, both head teachers and class teachers were invited to participate in the interviews and a total of 9 people (three headteachers and six class teachers) were interviewed.

This chapter presents and discusses the key findings that emerged from the interview data pertinent to perspectives from head teachers and class teachers on how to conduct ECE practice in their settings. These main points are considered and stated in sequence:

1. Teacher's statements of designing, organising and implementation of curriculum (daily activities) in chosen settings.

2. Factors influenced the planning, organisation, and implementation of ECE in these settings, as teachers explained
3. Teachers' understanding of western educational ideologies and approaches.

In order to demonstrate three aspects, themes emerged from data were established in the following:

1. Governmental influence and teachers' autonomy in planned curriculum and content.
2. Influence of implementation of daily activities.
3. The implementation of 'child-centred' ideology.
4. Teachers' role: observation in educational practice.
5. Pedagogy: sticking to key experience.
6. Educational belief: Education should be prepared for future life.

Themes were formed based on the interview questions and analysis of the transcriptions as detailed in the methodology chapter.

### **6.1 Planned curriculum and content: governmental influence and teachers' autonomy**

The first research question in this thesis sought to answer was: *What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy and surroundings?* In other words, it centres on how the curriculum was designed or chosen in a public setting and what it looks like in practice. Analysis of curriculum choice and design enables the researcher to understand what the choice or design was and why these choices and designs were shaped in the way they were. As described in chapter 4 the 'Sharing Curriculum' is the curriculum suggested by the Shanghai educational department and the 'Chosen Curriculum' was that aspect of the curriculum decided by headteachers, this chapter would explore teachers' perception about the curriculum designing and implementation in actual practice. In addition, the analysis also allows for an exploration of any gaps between the accepted guidance and theories and daily practice within public settings. This section presents detailed information including the descriptions and explanations of curriculum content and structure, the reasons for making such curriculum content choices in public settings and teachers' personal understandings of the national guidelines and local reference books. How far and how much head teachers and class teachers understood the guidelines and theories influenced their practice. Through the perspectives of teachers, it allows the

researcher to explore whether western educational approaches and ideologies have been applied during the curriculum planning and implementation process.

#### 6.1.1 Governmental influence in ‘Sharing curriculum’ and content designing.

There was one key point frequently raised from both headteachers and class teachers’ interviews. The general curriculum structure and content was designed by Shanghai local educational department and all public settings shared the same curriculum structure. All three head teachers expressed the same conclusion such as *‘there were rules from the Shanghai governmental department that the content of the local reference book should take around 80 percent of our curriculum in public settings.’* (Headteacher Wen, setting B). According to interviews with head teachers and class teachers in chosen settings, 80 percent of the curriculum was named as the ‘Shared curriculum’, which means the curriculum content was based on the guidance of national guidelines and local reference books. The definition of the ‘Sharing curriculum’ given by one class teacher was the curriculum *including four areas of daily activities (sports, learning, games and life) was suggested by the educational government. There are four local teachers’ reference books provided and we just followed the instructions.’* (Teacher Xu, setting A). This was reinforced by other head teachers and class teachers during their interviews: *‘sharing curriculum means advised structure and content required and advocated by the local educational department’.* (Headteacher We & Teacher LL, setting B). The Shanghai educational department suggests the curriculum structure to be the combination of ‘Sharing Curriculum’ and ‘Chosen curriculum’. The ‘Chosen curriculum’ means the curriculum chosen by headteachers in each preschool. That is to say, the governmental force is the strong factor that decides the general curriculum structure in public settings. When it comes to the curriculum content teachers plan for each setting, the National Guidelines, local reference books and other sources have been emphasised by both class teachers and headteachers. Interviews with class teachers and headteachers show that they plan and organise daily activities that rely on different sources and instructions. In different settings, teachers expressed that the national guidelines and local reference books are frequently adopted in planning, there are other sources they would refer to such as Pedagogy Content knowledge book issued by local government, different western educational approaches such as ‘Project-based’ learning.

#### National guidelines and local reference books

This section is divided into the sources and elements influencing daily activity designing. In other words, the different sources influencing the curriculum design, as well as to what extent, the National Guidelines and local reference books influence the curriculum planning. Fully understanding the curriculum designing enables an understanding of ‘what the curriculum looks like’ in public settings.

There was one repeated point raised by class teachers that the National Guidelines provided advised specific educational aims. In all head teachers and class teachers’ interviews, explanations of the curriculum design started from introducing the general curriculum content and structure. From their perspectives, the general curriculum content and structure provided teaching aims and specific suggestions which guided teachers in how to conduct daily activities. Headteacher W in the setting C expressed that *‘these books covered the typical children’s behaviours at different ages and what themes children were probably interested in, as well as some tips for our teachers.’*; *‘do you know that we have the national guidelines and reference books, usually, teachers would plan activities to refer to these two documents...’*. Other class teachers and headteachers all mentioned referring to the National Guidelines when planning curriculum, especially when they need to classify the educational aims and matching the designing content to the educational aims. Teacher Shen in the setting A expressed that *‘when we want to check the educational aims, we would refer to the guidelines, especially when we need to write the new session for competition....’*; Teacher Ye in the setting C described that *‘when I plan the daily activities, I, for sure, would refer to and based on the national guidelines and local reference books...’*. It has also been mentioned that teachers would plan the ‘sports’ based on the guidelines. As Teacher Xu described *‘we would refer to the national guidelines, some materials and requirements have been listed clearly in the national guidelines so that we would refer to it...’*. Teacher LL in the setting B also expressed that *‘we have the requirements from the local government that each day upper body and lower body exercises should be covered, and based on the national guidelines, we plan the material and aims as the national guidelines describe.’*. These statements all indicate the adaptation of the National Guidelines in daily activities planning.

Apart from the National Guidelines, the local reference books are the most frequently mentioned source that teachers expressed in the interviews. Both class teachers and head teachers claimed that whilst their educational practices followed the ‘learning’ local reference books when planning curriculum. For instance, one class teacher expressed that *‘there are*

*some activities such as sports activities, we just follow the local reference book*'. (Teacher H, Setting C). This point has also been emphasised in other head teachers and class teachers' interviews. Two class teachers add extra descriptions that *'compared to the learning area, sports, life and games areas were less relied on the local reference book.'* (Teacher Shen, Setting A & Teacher LL, setting B). Interviewing with teachers and headteachers shows that the National Guidelines and the reference books are the sources influencing their planning daily activities. While it also emphasises that comparatively, teachers rely more on the local reference books, showing the local reference books are more detailed on daily practice than the National Guidelines. For instance, one headteacher articulated that *'the national guideline was not the principles for monitoring instead of suggestions targeting children's development. Actually, we mostly used those four local reference books.'* (Headteacher WE, setting B). This was reinforced by Teacher Xu who stated, *'we would refer to educational aims, but more focus on local reference books.'* (Teacher Xu, setting A). Teacher LL, in the second setting, gave additional detailed information: *'we refer to national guidelines for educational aims, but we follow the specific cases provided by those local reference books.'* When asking Teacher H again about the designing playing activities and living activities, she also expressed that *'we have the role play periods, which were suggested by the local government, and what I mean by reference books is more about the learning activities, and we also refer to former teachers' weekly plans which have been used for quite a long time...'*. As to the sports activities designing, Teacher Xu expressed that *'we get used to following the learning reference book, you can see that this book is actually written well, and provides us with specific examples...'*. From the interviews with class teachers, it can be assumed that referring to the reference books is the subconscious reaction. It also reveals that although teachers expressed that they follow the instructions as reference books suggested, it is the learning reference book they usually adopted in planning daily activities.

From both headteachers and class teachers' statements, it can also be assumed that teachers had few options in choosing and planning the curriculum content and activities, but still need to care for the four kinds of activity approach. Teachers believed that specific instructions guided their educational practice and that these instructions improved ECE quality during their sessions. Two head teachers and three class teachers gave similar descriptions such as *'we have to follow the regulations'*, *'it's the requirements from the educational department'* (Teacher Shen, Teacher Xu & Teacher LL, setting A & B). Specifically, Teacher Shen pointed out that *'as to our new teachers with less teaching experience, we did not know what*

*to do at the beginning without specific instructions from those books.*' (Teacher Shen, setting A). These statements show that teachers realised their teaching practice to some extent, relied on the reference books, which also provided specific aims and enabled them to become more confident in their teaching. It shows that the national guidelines and local reference books influence daily activities planning, which is similar to the previous chapter's findings. The difference is that only 'learning' reference books are comparatively more adopted in daily activities. The 'Sports' activities, as teachers described, mainly refer to the national guidelines; the form of 'Games' is also influenced by the suggestions from local educational authorities. When it comes to the 'living' activities, it has been described as *'decided by teachers and through children's performance in settings, sometimes learned from the reference books and national guidelines.'* The national guidelines and local reference books are the sources influencing curriculum content planning.

However, there are two class teachers that hold slightly different opinions. Teacher Ye in the setting C and Teacher Ling in the setting B expressed that they would prefer to not only focus on local reference books but also learning from other teachers, school or books, to learn something new for the curriculum. Teacher Ling expressed that *'Actually, I would like to learn from other sources since I prefer some new sessions when I visit other teachers' sessions or school...but yes, I would organise curriculum part from local reference books, part from other sources...'* It is the teacher's preference in referring to other sources and the extent they rely on the local reference books.

It is also noteworthy that to what extent teachers followed the guidelines and local reference books differed according to the four areas, as well as their autonomy on curriculum content. Teacher Shen in the setting A stated that *'when we prepared for next week's activities or session, we relied more on the 'learning' reference book.'* The most frequently mentioned reason for such difference is that *'the learning reference book is more detailed and practical.'* (Teacher Huang, setting C). Teacher LL in the setting B expressed that *'I would prefer to adopt the themes provided by learning reference books, and we also refer to other reference books since some sessions in other books are not suitable for today's society for example, the telephone box is ...we still need to follow the instructions from the local authorities.* From these interviews, it can be assumed that comparatively, the detailed and practical local learning reference book is more often referred to in the planning. The words 'practical' and 'suitable' were frequently mentioned by all the teachers when it came to

making choices of reference books. It also can be inferred that ‘pragmatism’ is the preference of class teachers in curriculum content planning. Another class teacher also gave a similar description of the "*Reference book for ‘games’, well I think we did not refer to it too much since it was impossible to conduct as what was provided in the book. As to the ‘sports’ book, the listed guides or cases did not fit children’s developmental needs from our observation. In addition, the activities and equipment used in sports books has been out of date, which did not fit the current society situation. While the ‘learning’ book, there were specific themes and each session and themes linked to others and it also provided very specific instructions for us.*’ (Teacher Ling, setting B). From interview with teachers, it indicates that teachers’ choice of reference books has been influenced by the ‘pragmatism’ and current society development situations. The consideration of current society development can also be understood that teachers believed education should care for the current social development.

To summarise, the forms and content of educational activities are largely influenced by the local authorities. The national guidelines are less used in the educational curriculum planning, while the ‘learning’ reference book is dominated in the curriculum planning. The ‘pragmatism’, ‘meeting children’s need’, and ‘fit the current society situation’ can be the reason for teachers’ choice of referring to ‘learning’ reference book in planning curriculum.

To conclude, teachers and head teachers reported the use of national guidelines is providing an underlying framework in terms of helping them classify the educational aims included in the daily activities. For example, ‘*we follow the aims listed by the national guidelines but when it comes to the curriculum design, we usually follow the four local references.*’ (Head teacher Wu, setting C). The local reference books frame the approach to design daily activities: adopting four kinds of activities, while the national guidelines provide the children’s development requirements for the daily activities. Consequently, the national guidelines underpinned the daily activities whilst the local reference books provided their content: ‘*we should stick to the national guidelines which means designed activities should correspond to the requirements from the national guidelines.*’ (Teacher Xu, setting A). This confirms the findings for the previous chapter relating to teachers’ lesson planning. When it comes to learning from other sources, it would be detailed analysed in the following section.

#### Learning from other sources



From interviews with headteachers and class teachers, it can be concluded that other sources mainly cover guidance from governmental educational authorities and professors, in-service training including learning from other schools and teachers, as well as western educational approaches.

It is also to be noted that the 'Games' activity, in three settings, teachers all expressed that 'Role Play' is the featured activity in PuTuo district, which was suggested and guided by the local government. As Teacher LL in the setting B stated that *'role play is widely adopted in our district...guided by local government, and we have some professionals visiting frequently, guiding the role play, they were usually professional headteachers and educator in the educational department, experts in children's role play ...'*. Headteacher We in the setting B also expressed that *'the role play is suggested by our PuTuo local government...we also have other forms of group playing which are quite traditional such as hidden and seek, planned by our teachers...'*. It is the similar statement that Teacher Xu expressed in the interview. While Teacher Xu in the setting A also described that *'we were suggested to support children to play this game on their own, children have the right to choose what role they prefer to play. We would give them feedback after the playing period...'*. The 'Role Play' is the suggested activity advocated by the local educational authority. Frequently inspection, assessment and guidance have been provided with authority and professional educators. Other playing activities teachers have also described them as group games and individual playing activities. From these interviews, it shows that the forms of activity are also influenced by decision-makers: local education authority (government influence).

When it comes to the 'learning' activities, it has been emphasised that teachers would have the autonomy to make changes underpin to the guidance from the government. Headteacher We in the setting B expressed that *'we also have other reference books such as Pedagogy Content Knowledge book introducing teachers with how to teach. We also have some in-service training which provides teachers to learn from other teachers in our preschool and other preschools...'*. Teachers in the setting B also expressed their use of different sources. When it comes to the other teachers, Teacher Huang in the setting C described that *'we also refer to former existing curriculum plans...as well as search something online, as you know we were required by the local government to do some innovations...'*. Headteacher W in the setting C also expressed that *'I would like our teachers to learn something new to add to their curriculum planning. This semester, I plan to suggest to our teacher, try the Project-based*

*learning approach, which I learnt from other preschools. I know that other preschools have tried this approach and achieved great outcomes....*'. All these statements show that the curriculum planning was based not only on the local reference books but also referring to other sources.

Interestingly all three head teachers' interviews indicated that learning or referring to other sources including existing systematic related curriculum and imported western approaches or theories shaped the detailed content of their curriculum. In the setting A, the head teacher Ye considered adopting the STEM approach in her setting since she had attended a lecture introducing such an approach '*I attend a lecture today, held by headteachers and educators from Taiwan introducing their adaptation of STEM in their preschools. I would also prefer to give it a try, seeking out any innovation we can do when referring to STEM, combining this approach with our existing curriculum...I believed that this STEM imported from the US, which has been widely used in other place could be a good example for us to try...I know that this model usually means science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, emphasizing on children's hands-on experience...*'. As Headteacher Ye explained her understanding of STEM, she believed in the widely used advanced western approaches. The hands-on experience of children has been valued by headteacher Ye.

In the second setting, the head teacher chose to adopt a reading-related curriculum designed by others which she believed was suitable for conducting in her setting. While in the third setting, the head teachers chose to adopt the 'Project approach' which was imported from western countries, to organise the curriculum and refer to other school's curriculum and how they plan the daily activities. To conclude, western educational approach is one of the sources that teachers refer to when making something new to the existing curriculum. It shows that learning from imported approaches is also the option for different headteachers.

#### 6.1.2 Headteachers' decision in 'School-based' chosen curriculum design

As stated in the beginning, the 'Chosen curriculum' took around 20 percent of the curriculum time available in public settings. According to the interview, the chosen curriculum was mainly decided by the head teacher. This section presents findings relating to how headteachers chose their 'Chosen curriculum'.

While on the face of it, headteachers did not appear to actually exercise their right to choose the proportion of the curriculum allocated to them, further analysis reveals that when it came to designing the structure and content of the curriculum, personal educational beliefs and head teachers' own perspectives did influence the curriculum design. Compared to the 'Sharing Curriculum', the choice of the 'Chosen curriculum' varied a lot in these three settings.

In the participating settings, two of the three headteachers stick to the 'Chosen curriculum' decided by the former headteacher but to improve the way of organising the 'Chosen curriculum' based on their own educational beliefs. In the setting A, the headteacher Ye stated that *'I was just transferred to this setting. I thought that the curriculum here was pretty good for improving children's hands-on experience, and our setting is the only one that chooses the clay-making in this district. So, I believed that I should stick to it and make it better.'* From headteacher Ye perspectives, the unique curriculum model in this district contributing to children's hands-on experience is vital. The other headteacher W in the setting C who retained the chosen curriculum held a similar perspective. She expressed that *'when I take charge in this preschool, I found out that the chosen curriculum is not well-concentrated, but the environmental-friendly is good so I make some changes to improve the featured curriculum and suggest teachers to focus on it...'* Both Headteacher Ye and Headteacher W believed in the widely used imported western educational approaches, which can be used to improve ECE qualities in their preschools. While headteacher WE in the setting B, changed the chosen curriculum. The main reason given was that *'I did not see any featured curriculum when I first entered this setting. At that time, there were requirements from the educational department that it should highlight the features of the 'Chosen curriculum' in each setting.'* Based on the interview with headteachers, it shows that the headteachers' recognition and choice is the key determining factor for deciding the 'Chosen curriculum' design.

Another element is the requirement from the government on how to conduct the 'Chosen Curriculum', which is *'through these four kinds of activities: sports, living, games and learning'* (HT We, setting B), otherwise there were few restrictions on its content. Headteacher Ye also expressed the similar description *'we still need to organise activity through four kinds of activities, since it is still one of the aspects in the curriculum...'* These descriptions indicate that although head teachers decide the content of their featured

curriculum, the governmental force restricts them to organise activities as four kinds of activities.

Elements such as the community culture environment in the ‘Chosen curriculum’ design were also raised by headteacher W in the setting C. She articulated that

*‘In this district, the culture development was advocated and nearby, there is a science and technology museum so in this case, I was thinking how to link our chosen curriculum to the local environment, as well as the community service such as museum. I also told teachers in this setting to learn from the primary school nearby, which we had similar themes with.’*

Headteacher W chose to use the community sources as the environment to organise the chosen curriculum based on her perception. In other words, the local community has been the source for implementing educational practice.

The headteacher in the second setting also stated that *‘at that time, reading activities were prevalent among preschools and children in this community, and children living around were not that naughty. I thought that if you prefer a systematic educational approach, you should adopt one systematic curriculum, so I chose reading as the chosen curriculum, and use one reference book to guide our practice.’* (Headteacher We, setting 2). It can be assumed that ‘not that naughty’ children can be understood that children were well-behaved and being obedient from headteacher’s perspectives. Such understanding shows the strong linking with Chinese traditional beliefs. To organise the ‘Chosen Curriculum’, Headteacher We chose another reference book which was developed by certain ECE experts. From headteacher We statements, it can be assumed that her decision was influenced by the popular trend at that time and children’s situation in her preschool. That is to say, the head teacher’s perception influences how to design the ‘Chosen Curriculum’. When interviewing the headteacher in the first setting, she believed that *‘making handicrafts could develop children’s imagination and creative abilities.’* Consequently, it can be concluded that head teachers’ educational beliefs decide the content of the ‘Chosen Curriculum’.

Concluded from the interviews with class teachers and headteachers, it can be assumed that the governmental force is the key factor guiding planning curriculum. The four kinds of activities are the principles they need to follow in planning. Headteachers have the right to

choose their specific curriculum. At the same time, headteachers would like to learn from other sources to form the content of the chosen curriculum.

## **6.2 Influence in implementation of daily activities**

As discussed in the previous two sections, the government forces shape the approach of four kinds of activities in preschool, as well as providing sources for curriculum planning. The national guidelines and local reference books established the curriculum approach and content for the 'Sharing curriculum'. Whilst head teachers' preferences and recognition decided the design of 'Chosen curriculum'. Sources such as imported approaches, in-service training and learning from other schools and teachers all influenced the curriculum planning. In terms of how to combine different sources into the curriculum, it is a complicated system of different factors which would be presented by the socio-ecological framework.

When interviewing headteachers and teachers, it can be assumed that the educational practice lies to teachers' implementation in preschools. Different levels of sources and factors forming teachers' interpretation when they planned to implement. In this section, it would focus on exploring the elements in teachers' interpretations and implementations of curriculum. Findings would be presented by levels based on the Bronfenbrenner' framework at the end of this section. This framework helps to organise elements and seek the linkage between different factors.

### *Training for education practice*

Teachers have expressed that they would receive different kinds of training helping them to improve the education quality. From interviews with class teachers and headteachers, they have expressed that they would receive training from the educational department and sometimes headteachers would provide opportunities for teachers to learn from other teachers, educational professional's assessments and attend related lectures.

Teacher Xu in the setting A described the influence from training as '*When we attend new training with new guidelines from the government or learning new theoretical approaches from others, we would reorganise this information into our existing understanding, and form a new pattern of what educational practice should be like to guide our practice...*'. Teacher LL in the setting B also described that

*'You know we have some training courses to help us to understand the issued guidelines and related policies, for example about the way to role play, and the updated child-centred educational ideologies. For example, we have been told to improve children's independence in role play... In public settings, teachers need to attend the training each five years which contains the explanation of guidelines, the latest governmental issues and requirements, as well as a way to pedagogy. Apart from this, there are also some training courses provided by our settings such as visiting other schools to see their individual environment and how they organise curriculum...there are different sources of training we can attend...'*

Teachers in other settings also expressed similar points of view. Teacher Shen in the setting A described that

*'we need to attend the training provided by the government each five years and we also have to pass the test when the training finishes, usually, the training is about the guidelines, and how we do in the settings, like planning curriculum, children's playing, professional skills including how to write the teaching plans. These training sessions are mostly about practical teaching...we also have some sessions about children's psychology and so on, but this is not that easy for us to understand...there are also some updated requests. For example, we are not allowed to teach children knowledge which should be taught in primary school. I also support this request. In general, regulations and guidance from the government has also been explained in training. We also have in-preschool training such as pedagogical research exploring imported new approaches such as STEM...'*

From interview with Teacher Shen, it mentioned the knowledge should be focus on children's current developmental stage. It is the point that can be understood as the 'child-centered' ideology. At the same time, this request from government can also be referred to the ZPD raised by Vygotsky. Teachers showing support for governmental request also indicates that they have been aware of the importance of respecting children's developmental stages. They may not trace back to Vygotsky's theories. However, they understood the discipline of children's development. It can be concluded that such pedagogy has been redefined as the specific requests by the government. Teachers followed the request from the government to adjust their educational practice.

Headteacher W in the setting C also expressed attending regular training sessions provided by the education department. In addition, three head teachers expressed that there are also chances for them to learn from other schools about new sessions, pedagogy, and approaches such as the learning of ‘STEM’ and ‘Project-based’ learning approaches. Teachers would learn from other preschools about the implementation of these imported approaches, which has been adjusted and localised in other settings. Based on teachers’ understanding of these interpreted approaches learnt from other preschools, they would conduct these approaches in their classrooms.

All these related statements show that a training course which includes professional skills training, guidelines and policies explanation and new session and approaches training is the way for teachers to learn how to implement educational practice. These imported western educational ideologies have been adjusted to better suitable for Chinese context. Teachers learnt from these localized approaches and considered how to implement these approaches in their preschools.

As to the influence from training, it has been described as the core to ‘understandable and practical’ issues. From one side, the training enhances the requirements from the education department. All head teachers discussed the influence of the existing regulations on their setting’s curriculum and practice: *‘in our public settings, there are regulations issued by the government that those content from four local reference books should take around 80 percent of our curriculum and we would learn how to understand the national guidelines and use the reference books to plan our activities in training.’*. In addition, one headteacher indicated that the ‘chosen curriculum’ should be connected to, and restricted within, the four specific areas: *‘local educational department has required that the chosen curriculum should also be conducted by those four areas (life, sports, games and learning)’* (Headteacher We, setting B). These requirements and suggestions were enhanced by the regulations and part of these guidelines and policies have been explained in training (held by government and in-preschool training). Two class teachers stated that *‘we could make some changes, but we still need to stick to guidelines. It should not overstep the limits.’* (Teacher Shen & Xu, setting A). Although class teachers also admitted that *‘both national guidelines and local reference books have taken the children’s characters and abilities at specific periods or ages, there was a difference between what they described and children’s real situation, so teachers were advised to make some changes based on what has been provided and children’s abilities or*

*needs.*' (Teacher LL, setting B). It can be assumed that these in-service training, which is not only held by the educational department but also provided by preschools, exert the influence on educational practice by guiding teachers' understanding.

In addition, the training also influences teachers' perception of what they should do in preschools. As discussed in the previous chapter, the guidelines described teachers' roles as focusing on facilitatory, leader and observer. According to both head teachers and class teachers' interviews, they all echoed this key idea that in daily activities, class teachers should observe and provide support as advised in the guidelines and related regulations issued by the government. For example, in the third setting, Teacher Ye stated that '*in the sports period, I mean usually, it was in the morning, we normally just observe what children have done and keep them safe, children know what they could play or do on each day.*'. It was a similar situation when it comes to the 'Games' and 'life' areas: '*we would not interfere too much when they play unless there were any conflicts or something they could not solve on their own.*' (Teacher H, setting C). All class teachers held similar ideas that their role in the conduct of daily activities was to observe children's behaviour and provide support, if it was necessary. Headteachers also shared this view. Explanation for this universal agreement could be the unified system of teacher training and requirements from the government. It also echoes that teachers' perception of education was influenced by different kinds of training.

Both head teachers and class teachers expressed positive attitudes towards the provided guidelines and reference books. In particular, teachers believed that the educational aims, suggestions and cases, to a large extent, helped them better organise their activities. In as far as teachers found them useful it can be inferred that teachers' educational beliefs were largely aligned with their contents. Teacher Shen in the first setting clearly stated that '*I think all those provided books were written in a helpful way. Cases or steps suggested in the books are quite good for children's development.*'. When it comes to the evaluation of issued policies or regulations, all class teachers stated that without the specific reference books, they might feel more confused and not confident to teach. Teachers believed that the systematic curriculum framework and detailed content improved their teaching quality, found it supportive of their practice and improved their confidence.

In addition, teachers also expressed that educational professionals would '*visit our preschool to assess and guide our curriculum such as role play...*' (Teacher LL, setting B & Teacher



Ye, setting C). This kind of training is provided by local educational authorities. To conclude, training provided by the government and preschools did restrict the approach and content to education, it also shaped teacher's understanding of how to plan the implementation of educational practice in preschools.

One issue raised from the learning from training is not enough understanding and attitude of new imported approaches. When interviewing class teachers, it shows that some training centres on theoretical ideologies and imported approaches such as Jean Piaget's cognitive theories, learning about 'Project-based' learning are difficult for teachers to internalise. When talking about adopting new approaches such as STEM and 'Project-based' learning in their settings, head teachers including class teachers expressed the view that they sometimes felt 'confused' or unsure of how to integrate these approaches into their daily activities. At the same time, it can be understood that importing new approaches from western countries is the way for headteachers to support their curriculum innovation. The curriculum innovation has been suggested by the government. This suggests that there is a gap between the guidelines and teacher/head teacher knowledge. This point is illustrated by Teacher Ye: '*we didn't really understand these approaches so that we still have not clear thoughts about what to do.*' (Teacher Ye, setting C). It can be inferred that teachers have difficulty in understanding theoretical approaches and ideologies, which may influence their implementation of educational practice.

Teacher Xu also expressed that

*'We learnt some new approaches such as STEM, Montessori approaches, Project-based learning and there are also new educational ideologies explained in different kinds of training courses. But some of them are difficult to understand, I do prefer to explore how to apply these new approaches into practice, but I can only, based on my understanding to apply them in teaching, which I think have difference with their original concepts. I can only conduct the approach to my understanding. Some ideologies such as constructive ability, I prefer it so I would plan to apply it in free time playing periods. I would make changes based on children's performance...'*

She described the difficulty in understanding new imported approaches and apply these new approaches based on her understanding, as well as children's feedback during educational practice.

Teacher Huang in the setting C also described that

*'We have been informed to try the Project-based learning approach by the headteacher. But I think it is a little difficult for us to understand it. We learn from other schools which perform good practice in applying this approach. As for me, it is difficult to distinguish between thematic play and Project-based learning approach. It seems we both choose the topic for children to play...Personally, I did some research and most of the applications are in primary school. Besides, it is for foreign children, maybe it is not suitable for our children. And you know, our children were not able to handle this approach.'*

Teachers expressed their difficulties in understanding new approaches even though they received training for these approaches. It might influence their implementation in practice.

Another point indicated in the training is the hierarchical system in planning and implementing educational practice. It is noted that the local educational department at higher levels typically, have more decision-making authority, control and influence on educational practice planning and implementation through influencing teachers' perception. When it comes to the headteachers-class teachers' relation, it is also the indication of hierarchical relationship. Class teachers are at a lower level and have less autonomy in educational practice. Teachers need follow the instructions from headteachers like Teacher Huang described that even though she did not believe the Project-based learning approach is suitable for their children, she still needed to apply it into children's daily activities, which led to the negative attitude in planning such an approach into educational practice. The indication of hierarchical relation corresponds to the finding in the previous section that governmental force is the key element in educational practice in public preschools.

To sum up, the training course provided by preschools and government, which can be regarded as the decision-maker, treats teachers' perception of educational practice as the key to convey educational philosophies to influence children's development.

#### The influence from culture and socio-economic situation of society in implementation and planning

Apart from the training course influences educational practice through teachers' perception. The current socio-economic situation of society has also been mentioned by teachers. For

instance, Teacher LL in the setting B described that *'some of the examples described in the local reference books and national guidelines are out-of-date. So, we would make some changes based on today's situation in Shanghai. For instance, there was a lesson discussing the architecture in Shanghai, some places have disappeared, so we made changes on the content of session, discussing new landmark in Shanghai. As you know, education was suggested to be connected to children's daily life...'*. In other words, Teacher LL makes changes on the content and adds new topics based on the local reference books, according to her understanding of the situation of the external world. It is the same with other teachers. For instance, Teacher Xu in the setting A expressed that *'although we stick to the national guidelines and refer to the local reference book, some topics and materials we did not use anymore such as the telephone box...so we would use the new content to replace the old one but stay the same pedagogy...'*. Judging from teachers' statements, it can be assumed that teachers would make changes to the examples in local reference books based on the current socio-economic situation. Such a factor belongs to the macrosystem according to Bronfenbrenner's framework.

Culture has also been mentioned by teachers when they express how to design the daily activities. Teacher Ye in the setting C has described that *'I think education should care for the culture heritage so sometimes I would teach children with some Chinese stories.'* Apart from the culture element in session. Teachers also expressed that *'you know that we still believe children should be obedient and well-behaved...so you might listen to me always teaching children to be well-behaved and listen to me, I believe this is due to the traditional culture I received. I know that there are some requests from the government that we should still to the child-centred ideology, but it is easier for teachers to conduct educational practice if children could listen to us...'* (Teacher Huang, setting C). Teachers have believed that Chinese culture is rooted in their minds so that their educational beliefs and behaviour would definitely be influenced by traditional culture. From teachers' interview, it also indicates that they believed some traditional values held contradiction attitudes towards the current educational ideologies suggested by local government. From this perspective, it can be argued that the 'child-centred' ideology has been shaped teachers' perception of implementation. On the other hand, the traditional values such as well-behaved and listened to teachers have rooted in their perception. Such two different concepts co-existed in teachers' understanding, shaping the educational practice.

### The influence from teachers' preference: strength, interest, and pragmatism

Teachers' strengths mean any specific advantages they possess, while the interest refers to teachers' preference in teaching. For instance, in the third setting, Teacher Ye mentioned that *'I used to major in architecture, so I am good at drawing. In this case, I can't help linking the activities or curriculum content to drawing.'* There were similar situations in the other settings. Teacher Ling expressed *'I think I could do a better job in maths and logical teaching so in the preparation, I would put more focus on such sessions or activities.'* (Setting B). Teacher Shen mentioned that *'I majored in arts and good at drawing, so when I make the plan, I would make some changes based on my knowledge...when the learning session focuses on the art related, I am mainly in charge of this'*. Head teachers also acknowledged that *'activities in this semester were planned concerning teachers' interest and what they were good at.'* (Headteacher We, setting B). Therefore, teachers' preferences represented not just what they believed to be suitable and beneficial for children's development, but something they felt confident to perform in practice. In other words, teacher's educational beliefs about their own capabilities affected the design or changes of both the 'Sharing curriculum' and 'Chosen curriculum' content under the guidance from local government.

Teachers' wider educational beliefs were also influential. Two additional themes relating to class teachers' preference or strengths in practice: teaching experience and observation. For example, Teacher Xu in the setting A stated, *'I made such changes on suggested curriculum because I believed these changes would improve children's logical ability. For example, in today's learning session, I changed the session content, adding more difficult questions for them, inspiring our children to rethink...'* Later in the interview, she elaborated further: *'I have taught for over 30 years, and I believe that such an arrangement really does good for children's development.'* It can be concluded that experienced in teaching enabled her with better understanding of children's development. Another class teacher in the second setting also expressed that *'From my experience, if this activity aimed at science exploration, I prefer to let children have an experiment by themselves. I think it will be more helpful for them to understand it.'* (Teacher Ling, setting B). All these statements show that teachers' teaching experience could shape their understanding of children's development, which influence their educational practice.

Pragmatism is also the principle for teachers' planning curriculum. From Teacher Ling's perspective in the setting B, the 'Games' reference book was *'not practical and did not fully*

*cover the children's development needs which has been clearly listed in the national guidelines'*. Similar statements have been expressed by other teachers. In addition, being busy with other work was a frequent theme in class teachers' interviews. According to three head teachers, the government inspected the quality of each public setting several times each year. To get good results in inspections, class teachers have to achieve a balance between how to get other tasks done and consider adopting the appropriate methods for the children in their care. The inspections aimed at improving and guaranteeing the quality of early childhood education in each setting. However, to get good results, teachers needed to find time preparing inspection documents instead of focusing on improving their teaching quality. There was a conflict between what inspections aimed to achieve and the practice-based outcomes. Influenced by these reasons, pragmatism is important for teachers in completing and planning daily activities for their children.

#### The influence from children's feedback and developmental stages

In contrast, all class teachers indicated that they made adaptations in their practice away from these more centrally planned arrangements. A central theme was the importance of the 'children's needs and developmental stages' in their class which included their current abilities and characters when planning daily activities. The most frequently mentioned reason was children's real situations and their needs. For instance, one class teacher clearly stated that *'we would make some adjustments based on the children's situation in my class.'* (Teacher LL, setting B). Other teachers expressed similar sentiments. For example, Teacher Xu in the setting A explained that *'children's abilities and needs have already gone beyond what was provided in the books, so in this case I need to make some changes to develop their logical thinking ability which is my preference. For example, in the national guidelines, the suggested milestone for children in math, our children have already been familiar with this knowledge, so we need to make some changes'*. Teachers perceived a gap between children's real needs and the guidelines from the reference books, which lead to teachers' changes on intended curriculum. In addition, the children's abilities also influence teachers' planning for organising activities. For example, in the setting B, Project based learning approach was implemented among six children since teacher LL expressed that *'I think this approach is not suitable for all the children in my class. We chose 6 children that are capable of project-based learning... other children were not able to participate in this approach'*. It can be assumed that children's development situation would affect teachers' implementation of educational practice.

### The influence from parent's involvement

One further factor was identified in the interview data, although it was only mentioned by one headteacher: parents' opinions and suggestions. Headteacher W's noted that parents had been involved in three parts of the daily activities in her setting (setting C). Firstly, they had helped prepare a three-year development plan within the setting and made suggestions for some specific activities. This was conducted through the settings parent committee. Head teacher W believed that '*such arrangement enables us to better understand children's needs and parents' needs.*' Secondly, parents oversaw the inspection of curriculum quality and process. Thirdly, they were involved in planning and ensuring the security and safety in the setting. In contrast, the other two settings favoured the view expressed by Teacher Shen: '*parents would not interfere in our curriculum or how we teach too much. They usually played the role of inspection and cooperation with us in some activities we demanded.*' (Setting A). Their statements weaken the influence of parents in their educational practice.

### The influence of community service

Two head teachers expressed that they took community service into consideration when they chose and planned the curriculum. The Headteacher W in the setting C described that '*I noticed that there were some museum and primary school which can provide us with examples and places to conduct the environmental-friendly activities, which were the Chosen curriculum in our setting.*' Headteacher W has also explained for this choice that '*I plan to make full use of the community service, which is the environment children are familiar with. It is the source that children learn...*'. It can be argued that headteacher's choice did influence educational practice. This arrangement also approved that the local community was also the element in planning and conducting educational practice. At the same time, the consideration of linking educational practice to children's familiar and living environment corresponds to the guidance of connected to daily life and experience, which were advocated by John Dewey.

### **6.3 Teachers' implementation of child-centred ideology**

Three class teachers, whilst holding the view of 'child-centred' ideology also provided clear instances where they felt it was important for the teacher to lead the session. This was particularly prevalent when discussing the 'learning' area, and suggested deviations from this

‘child-centred’ approach. For example, Teacher Y in the setting C stated that *‘in the ‘learning’ part, the main way we adopted to teach is the ‘collective teaching’ model. There were too many students in my class, and we were not able to give them freedom to do things like western countries. I think that in this part, teachers are still in charge of the whole session.’*. Although teachers expressed that they *‘treated children’ development needs and interests as the core and we attempted to cultivate children’s independent abilities...’* (Teacher Xu, setting A). Teachers believed that they hold the ‘child-centred’ ideology. However, the number of children in each class was the most frequently mentioned reason explaining adopting the ‘collective teaching’ model primarily due to pragmatism. It also can be inferred that the ‘collective teaching’ model was easy to teachers to conducting teaching sessions, which can also be understood as the ‘pragmatism’ principle. Head Teacher W in the setting C also pointed out that *‘I have found out that class teachers learnt a lot about guidelines or any other theoretical approaches. They also know how to support children but, in their practice, they just cannot avoid taking charge of the activities’*. It seems that there is a gap between teachers’ understanding of guidelines, reference books and related theories, which has been analysed to be ‘child-centred’ ideology, and their actual practice in daily activities. It can be argued that the number of student and pragmatism influenced teachers’ implementation of their understanding of ‘child-centred’ ideology.

Other contradictions between the ‘child-centred’ idea and teachers being in charge of activities also arose. For example, while the guidelines and the teachers themselves advocated a child-centred approach, three class teachers in three settings and one head teacher also indicated that class teachers did not stick to this point and sometimes they chose to take charge of the whole activities. Consequently, alongside ‘child-centred’ approaches were also implemented in ‘teacher-led’ activities.

*‘When it comes to the practice, it still counts on teachers even though they have learnt so many theoretical things and they believe that they have understood them.’*

(Headteacher W, setting 3)

*‘Actually, in some parts of our activities, it was really difficult to avoid teachers leading the way.’* (Teacher S, setting 1)

*‘In our ‘telling stories’ part, we usually choose to take charge of the whole activities in order to complete this case.’* (Teacher L, setting 2)

This suggests that there was a process from the teacher's interpretation of 'child-centred' ideology to their implementation of 'child-centred' ideology. As indicated above, there were two factors seen to cause such phenomena: teachers' not fully understanding policies or theories and too much focus within settings on getting tasks completed. However, their educational beliefs also consisted of related western theoretical approaches or guidelines. Teacher Ye in the setting C uses the word 'internalisation' of the influence of educational philosophy guidance. As discussed in the previous paragraph, factors such as children's feedback, developmental stages, student numbers and pragmatism principle all influenced teachers' implementation of their internalisation of these western approaches and guidance.

#### **6.4 Teacher' role: Observation in educational practice**

In all class teachers' interviews, they articulated that they should observe children's behaviour and use such observations to rethink their lesson plans and pedagogy. Such guidelines helped them construct their own pedagogical stance. They expressed the belief that the more they observed the children, the more they understood them. In addition, they believed that this was central to their practice, providing rich information about children's tastes and interests. Class teachers stated that they considered these factors when planning activities, and, importantly, to make changes during sessions.

*'I believed that you should observe your children since you could find out something not like you predicted.'* (Teacher L, setting B)

*'Actually, in our daily activities, we focus more on observation of children and our strategy is also based on our observation.'* (Teacher LL, setting B)

That is to say, class teachers believed that observation of their children enabled them to organise educational activities more suited for their children's development. When teachers changed or adjusted their pedagogic approaches, they could assess the suitability of the change through observing children's reactions to this change. Such a process was believed to have helped teachers develop their own teaching experience and pedagogic pattern. In this case, it also reflected the 'child-centred' focus of their practice that both class teachers and headteachers expressed in their interviews.



### **6.5 Pedagogy: Stick to Key experiences relating to daily life**

When interviewing teachers, they have expressed that their educational practice ‘*stick to the core experiences.*’ From their expressions, the key experience means ‘*Children's ability in acquisition and comprehension of essential concepts, abilities, and skills within a specific domain are of paramount importance.*’ (Teacher LL, setting B). Teachers also expressed that ‘*such core experiences have been mainly expressed in the National Guidelines, as well as others have been issued by the educational department.*’ (Teacher Ye, setting C). Judging from teachers’ expressions, it can be assumed that teachers centre on children’s experience when planning daily activities. In order to improve children’s cognition of core experiences, they would plan activities based on children’s personal experiences. For example, Teacher Xu in the setting A described that

*‘We would plan daily activities relating to children’s experience, you can see, this morning, we had the role play, and many roles and materials were children familiar with, and they choose to play it...’.*

Apart from it, Teacher Ye in the setting C expressed that

*‘Last week, I take our children to visit the museum near here, there are some dinosaur specimen and picture. I found that children were found in these dinosaurs and animals so that today’s lesson, I start the lesson from guiding them to recall the visiting museum experience, which would make them more understanding and interested in this lesson...’*

These statements show that stick to core experiences and relating them to children’s experiences have been rooted in teachers’ perception. It can be seen as the collective memory result from the teachers’ training.

### **6.6 Educational ideology: Education should be prepared for children’s future life**

A further key point which emerged from the data was that early childhood education should prepare children for their future learning and development. In later, repeated interviews, both class teachers and headteachers mentioned having slightly changed the daily schedule since the first interviews took place in order to add some additional learning sessions for those children aged 5-6 years old. Detailed explanations given by class teachers were that

*'In order to get children prepared for entering primary school, we add one more learning session in the afternoon, which means we need to cut off half an hour of sleeping time.'* (Teacher LL, setting B).

This mirrors a requirement listed in the local reference book. It has indicated that teachers held the view that education should play a role in helping children prepare for their future development. One class teacher went beyond this and expressed the personal belief that

*'We should think about children's lifelong learning and development, not only at this age and we want them to better fit in the society when they grow up.'* (Teacher Xu, setting A).

In other words, teachers were not just preparing children for the next phase of their education but were aiming to equip them with the values and ability to adapt to society. In some cases, this could, in fact, supersede the reference books and guidance: *'some advice listed in the reference book did not match the whole society, in this case, we would make some changes helping children catering to what they would experience now.'* (Teacher Ye, setting C). Such a statement was similar to John Dewey's educational philosophy, but with a different focus. John Dewey believed that education is life itself, which is slightly different from teachers' perceptions.

### **6.7 Western theories, guidelines and reference books, teachers' understanding and their practice**

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, one of the key themes of this research was to explore how western ECE theories or approaches were being reshaped in specific context. This section aims to explore the links between western ECE theories, teachers' educational beliefs and teachers' practice, including any possible links between theories, approaches and practice. The previous chapter explored the connections between the national guidelines and the local Shanghai reference books and suggested the influence of western theories on these documents. Consequently, it is interesting to explore how western theories influenced daily practice in terms of teachers' perspectives. In general, this section focuses on whether teachers planned to refer to western theories in their daily schedules, and if so, in what ways. In addition, the factors which influence this from the teachers' perspective are also explored.

### Barriers in applying western educational ideologies and approaches

In order to explore possible connections between the theoretical guidelines and teachers' practice, teachers were asked '*how much do you know and understand western ECE theories or approaches?*'. Teachers' understanding of western ECE theories and approaches have a direct influence on whether they would knowingly adopt theoretical guidelines and how far they can adopt these theories. However, almost all interviewed class teachers (5 out of 6 teachers) expressed the idea that they did not have a clear understanding of western ECE theories even though they recalled having learnt such theories in undergraduate or teacher training courses. As Teacher Shen in the setting A stated

*'I know there were some theories or approaches, but I only remember some names or several points of these theories such as Proximal development zone.'* Class teachers in other settings similarly stated that '*I know that there were related courses introducing these theories, but I did not have that deep understanding of them.'* (Teacher Shen, setting A).

Teacher Xu in the setting A, who had 33 years teaching experience also pointed out that '*we have learnt some new theories or approaches such as Montessori's approach, but we only learnt it and read it.'* In the previous section, it was also mentioned by Teacher Huang that they barely understand the Project-based learning approach. She mentioned that it is the requirement from the headteacher applying Project-based learning in educational practice.

Overall, the interview suggests that class teachers did not have a clear understanding of western theories or approaches. Both teachers with long term teaching experience and their less experienced colleagues, indicated that they lacked a deep understanding of such theories. In particular, they indicated that any knowledge they had gained had had no immediate impact on their practice.

When it comes to whether or not class teachers directly used western theories to guide their practice, interviewees indicated that they rarely directly adopted western theories when preparing and planning activities or in practice, or it is the requirement from the government or headteachers. Not only head teachers, but also class teachers admitted that they would prefer to adopt specific practical cases or rely on former experience. Teacher Ye in the setting C pointed out '*Usually we emphasise and focus on the practice.'* A similar description was given by all class teachers. From their perspective, they were not accustomed to considering whether there were related theories guiding their planning or practice. As Teacher Ling

described ‘*we would usually directly refer to former cases or our experience.*’ (Teacher L, setting B). These descriptions also reinforced the point that class teachers ‘*prefer their teaching experience or practical cases rather than theoretical guidance*’ (Teacher LL, setting B). It can be understood as the pragmatism principle in planning educational practice. However, it did not mean that class teachers totally abandoned adopting a theoretical basis for their teaching practice. According to the class teachers’ interview, there were some situations in which they preferred to refer to and adopt theories. In particular, teachers referred to drawing on ECE theory when they were preparing for the ‘public session’, working on papers or seeking for evidence to support their practices. In general, there are two different situations in applying western educational ideologies and approaches. The first situation is that teachers were aware the adaptation of western educational ideologies and approaches in planning and practice, such as the preparation of ‘public session’ and importing ‘Project-based’ learning approach. Another situation is that teachers were not aware of applying western educational ideologies and approaches, such as followed the documentary guidance. The close relation between documentary guidance and western educational ideologies and approaches has been explored in the previous chapter.

In the ‘public session’, a group of teachers observe one particular teacher’s educational practice. The observed class teacher is expected to show how they organised their session, which the other teachers or experts subsequently assess and evaluate. The results of this assessment impact on the teacher’s academic title and career progression. In order to demonstrate that the right educational aims and processes were in place in their practice, teachers mentioned using theoretical guidelines to support their practice when they were being observed in one of these sessions. In detail, the National Guidelines and local reference book as explained in the previous chapter have been analysed to be close linking to western educational ideologies and pedagogies. There was also imported western approaches applied such as ‘Project-based’ learning in practice. As Teacher LL stated, she would refer to theoretical guidelines when the ‘*educational aims were difficult to set*’. According to her description, teachers usually ‘*want the aims to match the activities so we would refer to theoretical guidelines and experts quite value this part.*’ (Teacher LL, setting B). It can be inferred that teachers would not generally refer to theoretical guidelines except when they felt the need to clarify educational aims, for example to an external audience, and then they would refer to those theories or different approaches. In other words, they are aware of their

importance, but only use them when it is a significant event in their teaching (i.e., a public session) rather than in their everyday practice.

As to working on a paper, class teachers discussed needing to conduct related studies on their pedagogy or certain activities aiming at improving ECE quality in each setting. It impacted their teaching career development and the assessment of the quality of their settings. The quality and quantity of these papers were also used in the assessment criteria for each class teacher. In these cases, again, class teachers chose to refer to theoretical papers or approaches to guide and improve their academic papers. This suggests that personal development needs, rather than children's needs or requirements from the government, drove class teachers to refer to theories. Paradoxically, teachers referred to the time spent working on papers and preparing documents as time lost from preparing their actual teaching.

Another point is the requirement from headteachers, which has been described in the previous section. Although Teacher Huang and Teacher Ye in the setting C '*found difficulty in understanding and implementing the Project-based learning*', they need to implement this approach into their teaching since it is the requirement that headteacher demands. It is the similar statements that Teacher LL in the setting B described. At the same time, it can be argued that the understanding difficulty would lead to the misunderstanding of this approach, which has been approved in the observation data analysis.

In general, class teachers expressed a preference for experience or practical suggestions of the use of theory. However, when it came to adopting new approaches in each setting four class teachers (in the two settings that adopted a 'Project-based learning approach') expressed the view that '*we did not really understand what this approach was about, let alone carrying it out in our sessions.*' (Teacher Ye, setting C). This view was supported by Headteacher W who stated that '*we want to know how to correctly conduct such approaches and we did not have enough training or experience guiding practice in our settings. We did not know how to apply such an approach into daily practice.*' (Setting C). Consequently, the analysis suggests that teachers realised the importance of an underlying pedagogical theory but lacked the understanding and practical guidelines to transfer theory into practice appropriately.

Although class teachers mentioned several situations for adopting theoretical guidance (as discussed above), they emphasised that '*usually we would not refer to those theories too*

*much since practical cases were more convenient and some theories were really difficult to understand, not even to transfer them into practice.*' (Teacher LL, setting 2). This was a barrier to adopting change. However, these practical cases were also the application of western educational ideologies and pedagogy. Teachers could not link related theories to their actual practice. Pragmatism has been emphasised by teachers through the whole interview process.

Finally, whilst pragmatism was a factor at play there was a further, underlying barrier to adopting western theories in particular. This was expressed as the '*gap between imported theories and the Chinese ECE real situation*' (Headteacher W, setting C). Two class teachers indicated that theories such as Dewey's theories, Montessori approaches or 'A project approach', to some extent, were not suitable for direct use in Chinese children's real situations. For example, Teacher Ye in the setting C stated

*'Different culture, background and ECE situation, we were not sure how to adopt such theories or approaches into daily practice and make these practices more suitable for our children. In addition, a large number of these theories were too theoretical with no specific case to follow.'*

For some teachers, therefore, there was a perceived gap between imported western theories or approaches and the Chinese context and they did not know how to decrease these gaps in order to design suitable activities or sessions for their children. However, it also was apparent that teachers were not sure about what the gap was and how to fully understand these theories. From teachers' interviews, it can be argued that the no fully understanding of educational theories and how to apply these ideologies and approaches into practice have contributed to the gap between theories and practice.

#### *Internalisation in the application of Project-based learning*

From previous discussing, it can be concluded that teachers in the setting B and setting C, have described that: children's abilities, cultural difference, guidance from governments and headteachers which centres on four kinds of activities and linking to existing curriculum themes have been mentioned by teachers shape their planning and implementation of the Project-based learning.

Another point has been pointed out in terms of applying western educational ideologies and approaches is teachers' internalisation. When considering taking the imported western

ideologies and approaches in practice, it is the teachers' understanding matters. Although they did not fully understand the meaning of certain ideologies and approaches, their conception has been, to different extents, influenced. For example, Teacher Ye in the setting C described that *'I think these ideologies and approaches have been internalised, although we can't recall them clearly or fully understand these...'*. In other words, western ideologies and approaches have unknowingly influenced teachers' educational practice. Teacher Ling in the setting B also described that *'we have vague impressions on educational ideologies and approaches, but I know I learnt them...'*. Teacher Xu in the setting A described the way she learnt about constructivism as *'I connected my former understanding and children's situation in my class, to see how it can be used for our children...'*. It can be concluded that the process of applying western ideologies and approaches to teaching go from the internalisation to interpretation. From teachers' interviews, the internalisation represents the different extent of understanding of certain western ideologies and approaches. The interpretation refers to the internalised ideologies and approaches, interplays with children's situation, culture differences and teachers' former knowledge, to be implemented in educational practice.

### **Summary**

The western educational ideologies and approaches have been applied into educational practice. Teachers' not fully understanding of these imported educational ideologies and approaches influence their educational practices. However, requirements from head teachers forced them to attempt to apply certain new approaches into daily practice. Based on interviews, western educational approaches such as Project-based learning approach has been directly applied into educational practice based on teachers' interpretations. It can be assumed that it is the practical model of education that has been directly adopted in preschool.

To conclude, the hierarchical model in chosen settings largely influences the educational practice. Governmental influence has been enhanced through this model. Based on this, in-service training influences teachers' perception and performance in education. Western ideologies and approaches were applied into chosen settings' educational practice, through

the process from internalisation to interpretation, intertwined with children's situation, culture differences and teacher's existing knowledge.



## **Chapter 7 Data presentation and analysis-intended curriculum and implemented curriculum.**

This chapter presents data relating to how educational practice was implemented in the participating settings. It draws mainly on observational data, alongside a comparison of the teachers' planned curriculum (teachers' weekly plans). This is supplemented by interview data pertaining to implementation and practice. The focus is on exploring findings relating to three research questions:

1. What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy and surroundings?
2. What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?
3. How are western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?

This chapter presents findings by themes, based on the coding frame developed both deductively and inductively, as described in Chapter 3, in particular, the curriculum structure and content, educational ideologies, and the ways in which western educational ideologies and approaches are implemented.

### **7.1 Curriculum structure and content: governmental guidance and requirements**

As described in the methodology chapter, the observations focused on settings daily activities, lasting for the whole teaching day (from 8:30 to 16:00) for two weeks in each setting, in total for six weeks. All daily activities were observed and recorded. Adamson and Morris' definition of a curriculum is used: that is, the implemented curriculum represents all the teaching and learning activities happening between teachers and children (Adamson & Morris, 2014). This section presents findings related to the curriculum structure and content, which emphasise the governmental force in the daily activities implementation.

### 7.1.1 Follow the guidance from the government

The curriculum structure and daily activity models were observed to be similar in all three chosen settings. From the observation of the curriculum and daily activities in the three participating settings, teachers appeared to plan the curriculum into four aspects: living periods, games, learning and sports activities. This corresponds with the guidance in the four local reference books as discussed in Chapter 5. As to the daily activity, it has been found out that five developmental areas which have been suggested by the National Guidelines. For instance, weekly activities in three settings carried out the sports activities each morning which indicates the health development areas in the National Guidelines. The setting A learning lessons in the observed periods were ‘Dance with me’ focusing on children’s music abilities, ‘Red and Green kids’ focusing on mathematics, ‘Role play’ focusing on children’s socialisation abilities. Such kinds of activities show that the curriculum structure and content follow the Shanghai local educational authorities’ requirements, which were divided into sports, games, learning and living activities. At the same time, the daily activities also cover five children’s developmental areas as the National Guidelines suggested.

When it comes to the content in each kind of activity, it was found that the content of the learning activities was also mainly shaped by the local teaching reference books issued by the Shanghai educational department with the themes and content largely similar to those provided in the reference books. For instance, under the theme ‘Myself’, Teachers in setting A performed the learning lesson ‘We are breathing’, as the local reference book suggested. Similar applications of recommended lessons in the local reference books were found in all three settings. This echoes teacher sentiments in their interviews, as seen in Chapter 6, that class teachers mainly refer to the local reference books when implementing learning lessons.

As to the other three kinds of activities, games in all three settings were divided into two kinds: ‘role play’ and ‘free play’, which were suggested by the Putuo government (the following picture shows a child preparing the materials for his free play).

All three settings shared similar curriculum schedules, themes, and activities. However, the chosen school-based curriculum differed between settings, which were required by the headteachers. In setting A, it was observed that Teacher Shen chose 12 children to attend the ceramics-making lesson while the rest of children in the classroom attended clay making

lessons. Based on her statements, those 12 children were in turn to attend the lesson since there are not enough positions in the ceramics-making classroom. From the observation, the ceramics-making lesson is focused on making animals by clay, while Teacher Shen planned the lesson as ‘Making Myself’ which belongs to the theme ‘Myself’ as the learning local reference book suggested. As Headteacher W in the settings described, the Chosen curriculum implementation still needs to follow the four kinds of activities guidance. This kind of chosen curriculum is the learning activity which belongs to the art-related developmental aims in the National guidelines.

Comparison between the observational data and the documentary guidance, shows that the curriculum structure and content mainly followed that suggested by the local educational authorities. These findings confirm those found in the previous chapter. In general, it reveals that governmental guidance is one of the shaping factors in designing the preschool curriculum in practice.

## **7.2 Curriculum content: implied educational ideology in practice**

As indicated in the previous section, the government guidance is the shaping determinant of educational practice structure and content. This section focuses on the themes relating to implied educational ideologies as observed from the activities observed within settings. There were two main aspects identified: curriculum ideologies and teachers’ behaviour.

### **7.2.1 Stick to the key experience in daily activities**

The observations revealed that each conducted activity and session had a key experience relating to children’s daily life. According to the class teachers’ interviews, they called such objectives the ‘key experience’, which stands for any specific educational aims, skills and knowledge that children were thought to need to acquire at different developmental periods (Teacher Li & Teacher Xu). To further explain this, data pertaining to key experiences in the teacher’s weekly plan and educational practice in all four kinds of daily activities are presented below.

*Scene 1 in the setting A: Drawing people when they stand in front and rear.*

*Teacher Shen was explaining and guiding the children to observe people in the picture, focusing on their body gesture and facial expressions. Teacher Shen, in order to make*

*children more easily understand how to draw people when they stand in front and rear, made a clear statement that 'there are five children and some of them stand in front while some of them are at the back, we should also observe their facial features, colour of their clothes...can someone tell me how we draw five people in one picture?'*



*Picture 7.1 Drawing lesson in the setting A. Teacher Shen picked up several pictures' children drew in the session and evaluated their picture, pointing out whether they did it correctly or not.*

This teaching session followed a typical process as found in the three settings. Class teachers designed the teaching plans with specific educational aims, then guided children with asking children questions relating to new skills. At the end of the session, teachers would evaluate children's performance based on pre-set educational objectives and the children's understanding of the session. In this session, Teacher Shen attempted to reveal and stick to the educational aims that children were intended to achieve by starting to attract children's attention to pictures and drawing by repeating and guiding children to 'see these pictures' and 'observe children in the picture'. The class teacher repeatedly asked the children to observe and think by themselves whether there was a difference among people in the pictures. When someone gave an answer that was not related to the educational aim planned in this session, the teacher asked someone else and explained the intended point directly.

It indicated the point that class teacher Shen sticks to the key experience she needs to implement in certain lessons. The lesson was implemented to be focused on developing and cultivating the children to acquire certain skills and understand intended knowledge. The pre-set educational objectives can be understood as the 'child-centred' ideologies, which treat children's developmental needs as the focus in activities. Teachers made slight changes to the pre-arranged processes based on children's reaction. However, the focus remained on the intended objectives. This corresponds to findings emerging from the interview data which found that there were certain skills, knowledge and objectives that children were advised to achieve in various activities, suggested by the local reference books.

It should be noted that from the observation data emphasised teachers caring for sticking to the pre-set objectives. Similar observations were made in other sessions and in other settings. For instance, in setting C, teachers planned morning outdoor exercises each day, aimed at improving children's different health developmental aims. Teachers chose to conduct the

activity using climbing frames and related equipment in the setting C (see picture 7.2).



*Picture 7.2 Setting C, children's morning sports period. Teachers planned this morning's sports activity to focus on children's climbing skills development.*



*Picture 7.3 During the free time play period, this girl was drawing by herself. The spider she drew was part of the learning session topic covered that week (setting C).*

*Scene 2 in the setting C: Teacher Huang guided children to draw the animals, focused on children's drawing abilities, as well as how much they learnt from the lesson about animals (see the picture above).*

It appears from analysis of the observations of daily activities, teachers adhered to the key experience and objectives when implementing their educational practices and such experiences and objectives were suggested by the local reference books, National guidelines and other teachers' intended curriculum plans. It is indicated that teachers largely treated objectives as the 'key experience' that were implemented in their teaching activities, especially in the learning activities. Such a way of implementing the curriculum leads to that education aim is the focus of the different activities. Focusing on the educational aim can be understood as the 'child-centred' ideology. However, the observation data indicated that teachers cared for the completion of pre-set educational objectives. It also caused the 'key experience' model. From this perspective, the focus on the 'key experiences' model can be assumed to be the cause of teachers' preference for practical and specific educational approaches and examples in their teaching.

### 7.2.2 Linking activities and lessons to children's daily life experiences

Another point emerged from the observation data analysis is that teachers prefer to perform the teaching practice linking to children's daily experiences. Such a finding corresponds to the point that emerged from the previous chapters. For example, in setting B, Teacher Ling held the lesson 'Buildings in Shanghai'. She started the lesson by asking children to recall a building they regularly see in their daily life. She continued the lesson by explaining the differences between the buildings the children described. Such a lesson is an illustration of the way in which daily activities within settings focus on children's personal experiences, objects and situations they are familiar with. Focusing on children's life and experience was also a focus of John Dewey's philosophy. From Dewey's perspective, as discussed in Chapter 2, education should be centred on children's life and experience.

Apart from the learning activities, game periods also indicate the focus on linking children's daily life experiences to guiding activities. For example, during the 'Role Play' period in the setting A, Teacher Xu asked children what kind of occasion he wanted to arrange with several chairs being placed in sequence, the child explained that he wanted to recur the occasion when people were sitting in the train. Teacher Xu asked him about his experience when taking the train such as

*‘Do you remember when you had to queue before sitting in the train?’, ‘you put these chairs but if nobody knows what you want to play, can you remember any symbols or marks to show that this place is the occasion for taking trains? Do you remember anything you see in the train station?’.*

From the observation of the interaction between teacher and child, it can be concluded that Teacher Xu attempted to guide the child's performance in the role play when she noticed some issues with the child's arrangement in the playing occasions. She performed the guiding behaviour by helping the child recall his personal experiences. It can be assumed that the concept of linking daily activities to children's personal experiences has been rooted in teachers' pedagogy patterns. Since not only Teacher Xu, but also other teachers prefer linking the teaching process with children's life experiences. For instance, in the setting B, Teacher LL performed the 'constructive lesson' which led children to construct things with toy blocks. She observed two children play with blocks with no aims by asking them what they want to pile up these bricks. They answered they plan to build the wheels but they just play with those blocks. Teacher LL asked the children what the shape of wheels they have ever seen in their life. She guides them to recognize the basic shape of wheels by relating with their life experiences.

To conclude, linking children's daily experiences in the teaching process has rooted in the teacher's implementation of educational practice.

### 7.2.3 Linking to children's previous knowledge and understanding

The analysis of the observations also found that teachers planned activities continuously, which means that teachers conveyed new knowledge, skills and information to children based on, indeed building on, their former understanding. Within this can be seen echoes of Jean Piaget's learning process: assimilation, as discussed in Chapter 2. This is illustrated in each of the examples given below (Scenes 3, 4 and 5).

*Scene 3: In setting B, Teacher LL planned a group game 'Writing 王', which is the Chinese character. She recalled the rules children had used in previous games, as a way to explain new, but similar rules: 'write down the 王, and turn back checking to see if anybody moves.*



*This is similar to the rule in the game 'Blockhead' I explained to you last time...'. The class teacher explained the new rules for playing based on children's previous knowledge, which helped children to better understand the new rules for games.*

*Scene 4: In setting A, Teacher Xu explained the function of lungs by questioning children about what they have already learnt and know about lungs and breathing. In addition, she also reminded the children whether they still remember the different functions of organs in human-being children have learnt recently.*

*Scene 5: In setting C, Teacher Ye led a session on 'Dinosaurs', based on the previous week's visit to the museum. The class teachers explained the difference between herbivores and carnivorous animals based on the knowledge children have known from visiting the museum.*

From these observations, it can be concluded that teachers tend to link new learning to children's previous understanding and knowledge. Apart from the learning activities, the 'Role Play' activities also show that teachers attempted to make new information within children's existing framework through linking to their previous understanding. For example, the discussion between teachers and children about understanding roles and responsibilities in society has been explained to children by telling the difference among roles they have already played (which would be explained in detail in the following section). It is the process that also requires understanding of children's current knowledge, which can be traced back to the ZPD. Teachers' guidance of linking new information to the previous knowledge can be regarded as the scaffolding, pointed out by Vygotsky. As seen in Chapter 6, teachers', in their interviews, did discuss the ZPD and attempted to use it in order to scaffold children's learning. This is supported by the researcher's observations of teachers' daily pedagogical practices.

#### 7.2.4 Learning by doing

From the analysis of the observations in all three settings, it emerged that 'learning by doing' was another key aspect of teachers' practice. Instructions and guidance were given by class teachers and children were then provided with opportunities to do things, learning and acquiring skills and knowledge from their practice. Such findings correspond with the guidance in the National Guidelines, as discussed in Chapter 5. For instance,

*Scene 6: In the setting A, Teacher Xu planned to explain the importance of oxygen. She started to ask one child to help her finish the experiment: She lit the candle, and told the child to put the glass cup covering the candle, finding out whether the candle can burn or not. Children can find out that the candle is gradually extinguished.*

*Scene 7: In setting B, Teacher Ling conducted a session focused on finding out the density of objectives. She guided the children to put different objects into water to understand the meaning of density.*

In both examples above, teachers provided opportunities for children to do the things in practice that they had explained and instructed in the activity. In this study, the process of learning by doing has been described by teachers starting from introduction of certain concepts or skills, then letting children do it by themselves. This could be considered to be in line with scholars such as John Dewey, who argued children should learn by experiential learning or doing (Orb, 2012). Such educational ideology was observed to be applied through all kinds of activities in the chosen settings.

This finding corresponds to the documentary analysis that teaching suggestions advocate teachers to provide chances for children to experience things. The observation data has approved that teachers' implementation of educational practice has been shaped by the documentary guidance.

#### 7.2.5 Feedbacks on children's doing

Another emerging finding from the analysis, related to learning by doing, was teachers' feedback of children's doing. Such phenomena were observed frequently in daily activities.



*Picture 7.5 Discussion and assessment process after role play in setting A, shows the feedback and discussion period after a 'role play' session. This was held by the class teacher Xu in setting A. Teacher Xu said "today, we played 'role play', how did you feel about today's playing?"*

*Children said together that 'we are so happy...'*

*Teacher Xu said that 'Ok, would someone be willing to introduce and conclude your roles and feelings during today's playing?'*

*The children raised their hands and Teacher Xu said, 'you are grown up now, so I wish that you pay attention and express your feelings with completed sentences, ok?'. Then she chose one of the children to express his feelings on the role playing. This boy first stood facing the class teacher, then Teacher Xu told him 'Let's face your classmates'. This boy said that 'Today, I played the role of owner of a hotpot restaurant. I added after-meal fruits for my customers. I would like to tell my customers that 'fish and prawns should be cooked for more time; fruits cannot be put in the hotpot...'. Teacher Xu evaluates that 'yes, today, I visited his hotpot shop, and he did remind me of how to cook different ingredients. What do all of you think of his hotpot shop?'*

*The children expressed that 'we think his shop is good.'*

This was a typical assessment and providing feedback process in all three settings for daily activities. During such an evaluation process, class teachers would comment on children's playing performance, and try to involve children in this process. It can be regarded as the social interaction between teachers and children. Teachers made comments and feedback on play based on children's own social experience to assess whether children conducted the activity correctly or not. Explanations were made for children to understand these points clearly. It can be concluded that the 'doing' and 'commenting' model is widely adopted since it is well-believed that *'it is effective to improve children's performance in activities.'* (Teacher Li, setting B & Teacher Xu, setting A). Such a process also indicates that teachers focused on what children did and how they did things.

There are also other activities observed indicating the preference of learning by doing and providing evaluations of doing. For example, in the setting B Teacher Ling also conducted the assessment after children's individual playing periods. Teacher Ling guided children to draw the picture of hands putting together when they had the learning lesson in the morning. She guided the children to draw pictures on their own, aiming at improving their understanding of the drawing skills. When the session ended, Teacher Ling evaluated children's pictures by pointing out problems with their drawing.

Based on observations on children's performance, teachers provided assessment and feedback on children's performance, aiming at reflecting on children's understanding through their performance. In the next round or different practice situations, teachers would observe whether children have improved their performance or understanding. As analysed in the previous section, the assessment process has concluded the pedagogy of linking with children's previous understanding, helping make new understanding within children's existing framework. Teachers' observation and support in practice can be understood as the scaffolding which was raised by Vygotsky. In this case, the process of learning by doing and evaluation of doing can be described as the following diagram 7.1.

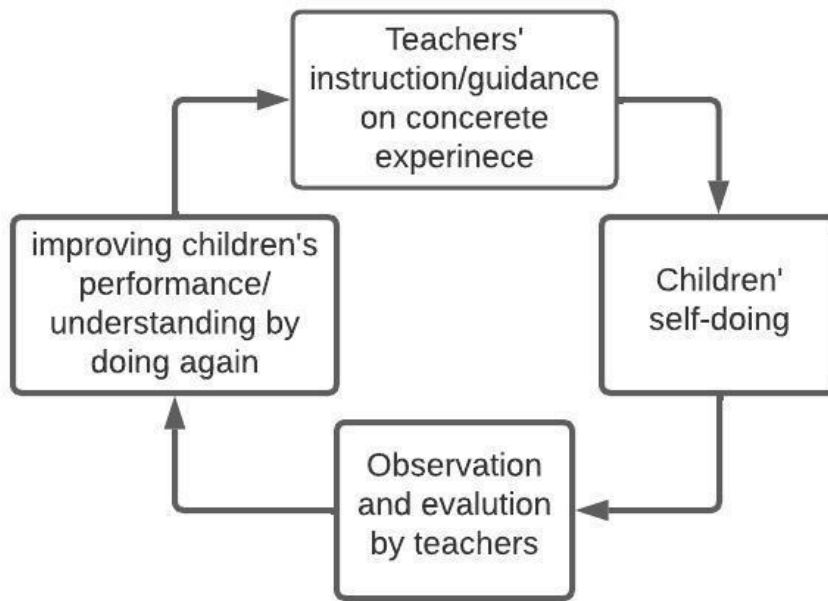


Figure 7.1 The process of 'learning by doing' and 'evaluation of doing'.

It can be concluded that 'learning by doing' and 'feedback on children's doing' are the two components of teachers' pedagogical approaches. As concluded above, the 'learning by doing' is also advocated by John Dewey. At the same time, this process also indicates that the educational process is composed of various pedagogical principles such as assimilation, ZPD and providing scaffolding. Teachers may not be aware of applying these educational ideologies and pedagogies in practice. The observation of educational practice has shown the integrated pedagogical approach in one single educational activity.

#### 7.2.6 The implementation of 'child-centred' ideologies in practice

As discussed in the previous chapter, teachers' interpretations of 'child-centred' ideology treated children's development milestones and aims as the core of their educational practice. As frequently stated in the interviews, teachers believed that '*we insist on children-centred teaching approaches...we treat children's interests, safety and development requirements as the priority*' (Teacher Xu, setting A). The observations made it clearer that a 'child-centred' ideology is interpreted into two main aspects: child-led activities and children' developmental demands leading activities.

*Scene 8: In setting B, Teacher Li conducted the learning session 'The Crow and the Pitcher', which was a music-centred session. She needed to guide children to understand the rhythms of this song, so she told the children to clap hands along with the song, checking whether children did so or not. When she noticed that there was someone confused about clapping hands, she would pay separate attention and provide more guidance for him or her.*

*Scene 9:*

*In the setting C, Teacher Huang gave individual help to children working with handicraft tools. When in a group-session, this child was not clear about the spider's net, and teachers played the role of observer and provided help with the child.*

*Scene 10:*

*In setting A, Teacher Xu played the role of guest in a 'role play' game. She asked children who played the roles of chef 'hey, boys, what dishes do you serve today?'*

*Two boys introduced their dishes and said 'we have hotpot here. Do you want to have some?'. Teacher Xu observed children's conversation and the interactions between peers to make responses and evaluations on their performance. Questions were raised when she realised that children made a mistake in placing vegetables in the pot, she pointed out that 'if you put the broccoli here, does it get bad easily?'*

From these examples, a 'child-centred' ideology is interpreted by teachers in practice as caring for children's performance in activities, providing appropriate intervention for individual needs and adopting child-led activities and games. The scene 8 set the understanding of rhythm as the 'key experience' in educational practice which was guided by the local learning reference book. It is also listed in the National Guidelines to be the suggested milestones for children at this age. The scene 9 shows that the teacher treated child' feedback as the issue and provided help in activities. It can be assumed that teachers treated children to be the focus in this activity and provide help when it is necessary. Scene 10 shows the child-led games, which is also argued to be the 'child-centred' ideology. Teachers mentioned that '*we should stick to the 'child-centred' ideology which was suggested by our educational authorities* (Teacher Xu & Teacher Li). Even in the different settings, teachers expressed similar statements. Such a finding can be traced back to the in-service training and governmental influence, as discussed in Chapter 6. It can also be assumed that even though class teachers expressed in the interview that they did not fully

understand the original ideology and approaches, they would be aware of key points from such imported educational ideologies through training, albeit more focused on their practical implications.

The scene 8 set the understanding of rhythm as the ‘key experience’ in educational practice which was guided by the local learning reference book. It is also listed in the National Guidelines to be the suggested milestones for children at this age.

Another preference in the teaching process also implied the ‘child-centred’ ideology is that teachers made changes to pre-set daily activities based on children’s feedback. For example,

*Scene 11: In the setting A, in the learning lesson, Teacher Shen planned to explain how the food was digested in the body. She planned to guide children to pretend to be different parts of organs to stimulate the digestive process. When she found out children did not know how to behave. Then she changed to showing pictures and cartoons of the digestive system, which are more concrete for children to understand. She discussed with children based on the demonstration from the cartoon.*

Making changes based on children’s feedback have been observed during other teachers’ teaching progress. From such a related sense, it can be assumed that teachers treated children’s feedback as the leading factor in implementing educational practice. It is also the implication of ‘child-centred’ ideology. When it comes to the first finding in this chapter: caring for the completion of ‘key experience’, it also shows that there is a balance between sticking to the ‘child-centred’ ideology and completion of pre-set educational objectives. Teacher understood the meaning of ‘child-centred’ ideology. However, to some extent, they still need to complete the educational objectives, even if some children did not acquire knowledge. In this case, some teachers would provide extra time and chances in the individual playing periods for those children to improve their understanding. All these arrangements show the close relation to ‘child-centred’ ideology.

### **7.3 ‘Content-based’ and ‘Play-based’ activities respectively led to ‘teacher-led’ and ‘child-led’ approach**

From the analysis of observation data, it can be concluded that the approaches to educational practice can be the ‘content-based’ and ‘play-based’ activity. The ‘content-based’ activities usually lead to the ‘teacher-led’ approach, while the ‘play-based’ activity contributes to the ‘child-led’ approach. The ‘content-based’ activity in this project means this kind of activity focuses on learning content, while the ‘play-based’ activity refers to the activity focusing on providing chances for children to actively participate with peers, objects and environment. In terms of two different kinds of activities, the approaches to these activities can be categorised into ‘teachers-led’ and ‘child-led’ approaches, which also centres on the ‘child-centred’ ideology.

From the observations, it is indicated that teachers largely treated educational objectives as the ‘key experience’ that were implemented in daily activities, especially in the learning activities. It can also be understood that ‘key experience’ suggested by documentary guidance have been interpreted by teachers as their educational objectives in practice, which guided their implementation. The observation data shows that teachers mainly followed the planned learning daily activities. Such a way of implementing the curriculum leads to a ‘content-based’ approach. Although these educational objectives centre on children’s development, teachers can only cover the majority of children to observe whether they achieved the pre-set objectives or not. For example:

*Scene 12: In the setting B, Teacher LL performed the mathematics lesson, when she observed that two children did not follow the instructions. She asked children about whether there was anything they did not understand during the whole lesson. One child raised his hand and asked questions. It has been observed that Teacher LL has briefly explained the questions and told him to ask her again in the after-lesson periods.*

Similar scenes happened in three settings occasionally. It has been observed that all the ‘learning’ lessons which cover different developmental area objectives were implemented through the ‘teacher-led’ approach (as shown in the picture 7.6).





*Picture 7.6 Teacher LL performed the learning lesson which centres on children's mathematics developmental objectives as the local learning reference book suggested.*

The reason for why 'content-based' activity has close linking with 'teachers-led' approach can be inferred with the 'pragmatism' principle, which has been mentioned in the previous chapter. The 'content-based' model has been explained as the result of treating 'key experience' as the focus of activities and planning the intended learning content. The interview chapter has revealed that the 'learning' activities can refer to specific and practical examples, which is easy for teachers to conduct. The 'content-based' model in learning activities also contributes to the easy conduct of practice for teachers. The teachers' weekly plans support this point. The 'learning' activities have been planned with detailed process and content, while other activities such as 'sports' and 'games' have been briefly described such as '*care for children's jumping and climbing performance.*'. There was no detailed content for these 'play-based' activities. In this case, the 'content-based' activities usually resulted in the 'teachers-led' approach.

In this case, activities such as 'Living', 'Sports', and 'Games' play-based activities, objectives and key experiences were implemented through child-led activities, with no intended detailed process. In such kinds of activities, teachers did not pre-set a detailed process of activities, with planned objectives which has been called the 'key experience' by teachers. In setting A and setting B, class teachers preferred to arrange 'Role play' and

‘Autonomous play’ while setting C frequently conducted ‘Autonomous play’ and ‘Individual play’ in their daily activities. In this study, the ‘Autonomous play’ represents the activities that children can decide what to play, and how to play with different peers and objects. The ‘individual play’ means children play on themselves. From the observation of ‘Games’ periods in all three settings, it is evident that teachers hold more general ‘big ideas’ instead of specific educational objectives in organising such activities. The ‘big ideas’ refer to the general education concept and aims such as cultivation of children’s independence. For instance, in setting B, during the ‘role play’ period, children had the opportunity to play a role they preferred such as doctors, nurses and firemen (as shown in the picture 7.7).



*Picture 7.7 In the setting B, children were playing the Role play. Two children chose to play the role of doctors, wearing the white coat representing they were doctors.*

As illustrated in the picture, it was children’s willingness and decision-making that led the whole game. Teachers occasionally interfered with children’s performances when they had

disagreements but otherwise teachers mainly played the role of observer and took photographs and notes for an after-game discussion with the children. Children led these games based on their previous life experiences. For instance, when a pair of children played the role of doctor and patient, the child in the doctor role would act 'like a doctor' treating a patient, inquiring about their body conditions and their feelings. At the end of 'Games' activities, teachers would organise 'evaluation and discussion' processes that would guide children to discuss their performance in the games, along with teachers' own evaluations which were based on their (the teachers') own personal experience and understanding of these games and performances. Taking the 'role play' in setting B as an example, at the end of the role play, teacher Li gathered the children and evaluated,

*'Please, everyone, it's time for us to see how you play the role this time. Oh, we can see that some of you play the role of doctors, some of you play the role of pianist and some of you play the role of firemen. Do you still remember when you go to the hospital what the procedures look like? Does the doctor check your condition with any specific machines?'*. (Teacher Li, setting B).

From the teachers' evaluation and questions, it was seen that in the 'role play' periods, teachers focused on improving children's understanding of cooperation and their personal daily socialisation experience.

From the analysis of observation data, it indicates that 'key experience' and 'big ideas' interplay with different models of daily activities. 'Content-based' activities are more guided and conducted according to a 'key experience' or 'specific educational objectives'. It appears to be more convenient for teachers to take a group-learning approach in performing such activities, especially in 'learning activities' designed for children to master certain skills and knowledge. In play-based activities, however, more of a 'child-led' model was observed to have been adopted in the chosen settings. Class teachers played the role of observer and facilitated after-session evaluation activities. In general, the implementation of the curricula chosen settings were categorised into two main models: 'key experience' directing 'content-based' sessions and 'play-based' learning activities. Guided by such two different educational strategies, both 'teacher-led' and 'child-led' approaches that were seen to be adopted in curriculum implementation.

As to determinants affecting such a phenomenon, as stated in chapter 2 that it is based on the long-lasting model which is imported from the Soviet Union and Chinese traditional values including the ‘content-based’ and ‘teachers-centred’ model. Teachers were used to the ‘teachers-led’ approach. As indicated in the literature review chapters, educational practice is also influenced by imported western educational ideology such as ‘children-centred’ ideology, which is contradictory to the Soviet Union model. Apart from the ‘pragmatism’ reason, the observation data provides an additional rationale for such an approach, namely the teacher to child. From the observation, it was seen that one teacher needs to pay attention to approximately 30 (and in some classrooms nearly 40) children and their performance in a learning session during a 30–40-minute period, while two class teachers observed 30 children’s performance in the other three activities. It is difficult for teachers to spend more time observing children if they adopt an individual play approach all day for a wider type of activity. As described in the interviews, it is more feasible for teachers to organise group-learning activities to facilitate learning if there are large class sizes. Group-learning activities required teachers to organise sessions by the unit of the classroom, as shown in the picture 7.7.

Another point shown in the observation data is that teachers’ educational belief also shaped the implementation of ‘teachers-led’ approach. For instance, Teacher Xu in the setting A with 33 years of teaching experience was used to the ‘teacher-led’ approach, as shown in the previous example. Teacher Xu played the role of leader, instructing the learning session. Teacher Ye, young teacher in the setting C preferred to conduct the learning session based on children’s feedback so she largely did changes on the intended curriculum, which is away from the ‘content-based’ and ‘teachers-led’ model. It can be inferred that Teacher Xu has received the in-service training of the Soviet Union model (teacher-centred model) and taught by this model years. Although she also received the training about ‘child-centred’ ideology in these years, the ‘teacher-centred’ model rooted in her teaching pattern, which influenced the implementation of ‘child-centred’ ideology. The observation data indicated that Teacher Xu has conducted the ‘child-centred’ ideology with a ‘teacher-led’ approach, which preferred to give instruction to children in activities. So it can be argued that teachers’ educational beliefs in pedagogy were also influenced by in-service training and teaching experience.

Based on the approaches to educational practice, teachers’ roles have also been revealed. When it comes to the ‘content-based’ activities, teachers played the role of leaders in

activities. They started the whole process of learning activities. As to the ‘play-based’ activities, teachers played the role of observer and guider, treating children as the leader of the whole activities.

#### **7.4 Surroundings and ethos in practice**

Apart from the curriculum and teachers, the role of surroundings and ethos are also the components of educational practice. Analysed from the observation of environments such as provided tools, materials and ethos, it can be concluded that the physical environment including tools and materials are provided for improving children’s certain educational objectives. Whilst the ethos is implemented within the contradict of ‘being obedient’ and ‘being independent’.

##### **7.4.1 Tools and materials provided based on educational objectives**

Observed from the environment from the chosen settings, it can be concluded that

1. Tools and materials were similar in three chosen settings.
2. Provided tools and materials were provided based on pre-set educational objectives.
3. Tools and materials were low-structured concrete and daily life-related.

Taking notes from the different kinds of activities, provided tools such as sports equipment, teaching aids and materials children played with were similar in three different settings. For example, the sports equipment such as climbing shelves, kinds of balls, balance beams etc. are similar, which has been explained by headteachers that these are mostly provided by the local government, and they also learnt the environment creation from other preschools. As shown in the picture 7.2, the sports activity equipment is similar in three settings. It can be assumed that due to the governmental suggested educational objectives, the provided equipment is similar to each other. The picture 7.2 shows the climbing shelf in the setting C, which were arranged to improve children’s climbing ability including their body ordination abilities. In other words, tools, materials and equipment are provided centres on pre-set educational objectives. Apart from the sports activities, it can be observed in other kinds of activities. For instance, in the setting C, the tools provided for children’s playing are the constructive blocks, which is similar in the setting A (as shown in the picture 7.8 and 7.9).



*Picture 7.8 It was the construction room providing different shapes of woods, aimed at improving children's imagination, constructive and concepts of numbers, space abilities and understanding, constructing objectives children have seen in their daily life in the setting C.*



*Picture 7.9 Teacher Ye in the setting C gave help and guidance for children who are struggling to build the bridge. She asked the children what they would prefer to do with the wood and what kind of bridge they would prefer to build.*

The constructive blocks were provided to improve children's imagination, constructive abilities and understandings of concepts in numbers and space, which has been suggested in the National Guidelines. It can be concluded that the provided tools and materials are arranged based on children's educational objectives which has been suggested by the local reference books and National guidelines.

Observed from the educational practice, it can also be noted that the majority of tools and materials are low-structured and relating to children's daily life. For instance, the picture 7.10 shows the materials are the used milk bottles, cups and toothpaste boxes.



*Picture 7.10 During free time play periods, this child played with his peers, checking which tool he preferred to use in their games. Other children told him to 'hurry up, just choose one of them, no matter which one is better'. (Setting B)*



*Picture 7.11 These cups were provided by teachers and instructions were given to children that they should use these cups to make something higher and solid (setting B).*

As illustrated in these pictures, the majority of tools and materials provided in educational practice are children's life related. When it comes to the play-based activities, it can also be noted that children's life-related tools and materials were used to represent objectives in their life. In other words, the symbolic characteristics of these provided tools and materials are frequently used, especially in the play-based activities. Based on the symbolic features, provided tools and materials are also low structured such as blocks, cups which can be used to construct and represent certain objectives children see in their daily life. In other words, imitating objectives children experienced in their daily life.

#### 7.4.2 Ethos: 'Being obedient' and 'Being independent'

Another point revealed in the observation data is the coexistence between the preference of treating children with 'being obedient' and 'being independent' ideologies. In three chosen settings, teachers have been observed to express words and sentences emphasising the aims of preferring children to be good. In other words, teachers wanted children to listen to their



instructions and to be well-behaved in settings. On the other hand, they also provided chances to improve children's independence abilities. The unconscious behaviour and conscious behaviour can be assumed to be the cause for such phenomena in chosen settings.

As observed in the setting A, Teacher Shen occasionally told children to be well-behaved in learning lessons, pointing out that discipline is important. Teacher Shen usually spends minutes to keep the discipline before starting the lesson, aiming at creating the quiet ethos for implementing the learning lessons. In addition to the learning lessons, not only Teacher Shen, but also other teachers have been observed to perform similar behaviour. For example, in the setting C, during the free-playing periods, Teacher Huang frequently told children '*Watch out your behaviour...do not be too noisy*'. During the learning activities, Teacher Huang sometimes spent time on keeping discipline, which instructed children to be well-behaved and listen to her. Teacher LL in the setting B praised one child to be well-behaved in participating actively and obeying the disciplines in lessons. Such behaviour suggested other children imitated this child.

Analysed from the observation data, it can be concluded that teachers cared for the children to be well-behaved in educational practice, which can be assumed to be influenced by traditional Chinese culture which suggested students should respect authority and rituals (Wang, 2006). Teachers as authority figures play a crucial role in teaching progress. From the observation, teachers instil these values (respecting authorities and rituals) in students from an early age.

At the same time, teachers also provided chances for children to cultivate their independence in educational practice. For example, Teacher Xu in the playing periods found out that two children had an unpleasant dispute over toys, while Teacher Xu guided children to solve this situation on their own. In general, teachers cared for encouraging children to solve issues and problems on their own, they would provide help and intervention when they felt children were not capable of solving the situation. In addition, teachers also provided children with chances to perform basic self-help skills on their own, such as teachers guided and observed children to dress themselves, brushing their teeth and feeding themselves, which were the suggested educational objectives described in the National Guidelines. Observational data indicates that encouraging children to be independent represents teachers' preference for

cultivating children's independence in problem-solving, self-help skills, making choices and completing tasks.

Comparing the ideologies in encouraging independence and instilling being good in educational practice, it can be concluded that teachers prefer to cultivate children's independence abilities, but still wanted children to be influenced by the traditional being good and well-behaved ideologies.

### **7.5 Implication of 'Project-based' learning in practice**

In setting B and setting C, headteachers directly imported 'Project-based' approaches into their organised activities. While in setting A, headteacher Ye expressed that *'I prefer 'STEM' approach... since I attended one lecture last week, finding out examples performed in Taiwan preschools that are interesting. So I prefer to give it a try. Besides, we are advised to do innovation in our curriculum'*. During the data collection periods, the setting A did not implement the STEM in practice so that it would not be discussed in this project. However, it can be concluded that it is the headteachers' decision that decides whether to import new approaches or not.

According to Kokotsaki (2016), the 'Project-based' learning approach is *'an active student-centred form of instruction which is characterised by students' autonomy, constructive investigations, goal setting, collaboration, communication and reflection within real-world practices.'* From such a definition, it can be understood that this is a child-led approach since from the content, objectives and process are decided by the children themselves. In other words, it is of great importance for teachers to fully understand what a 'Project-based' learning approach is and how to apply this approach for different children's learning.

In setting B, teacher Li organised a small group of children (5-6 children) that teachers believed to be capable of performing new approaches. In other words, such a new approach was only initially adopted for a small group of children. During her interview, she explained that:

*'I think that the 'Project-based' approach is more suitable for those capable children to be better. But we have to give it a try, finding out whether it is appropriate for*

*children to do and how to correctly apply it in practice. You can see that other children that are not capable of completing normal activities would find it quite difficult to decide which objective they prefer. If we let them choose a topic and construct it as they like, everything would be in a mess. Nothing they would learn.’ (Teacher Li, setting B).*

From Teacher Li’s perspective, children’s developmental stages and abilities are the factor influencing teachers’ implementation of this approach.

When it comes to class teachers in setting C, both Teacher Ye and Teacher Huang complained that:

*‘We always imported various educational approaches, but we did not fully understand what the approach is and personally, as I know, the ‘Project-based’ learning approach is more suitable for older children instead of children in preschool, but we still need to try it since it the task was a requirement from our head teacher.’ (Teacher Ye, setting C)*

From these teachers’ understanding of the ‘Project-based’ learning approach, it can be assumed that teachers were not familiar with this approach and did not even fully understand how it was supposed to work. In this case, the main way for them to understand this new approach was to learn from other teachers and read related articles introducing the ‘Project-based’ learning approach. Based on their understanding and learning from other preschools, teachers organised ‘Project-based’ learning approaches.

*‘Project-based’ learning approach in setting B*

*Teacher Li gathered a small group of children and asked them to vote for any specific topic they would prefer to research. The majority of them agreed that they prefer rain and weather. In this case, Teacher Li suggested studying the weather and the pool which was connected to the session they learnt in the previous week. Within these children discussed detailed objectives they wanted to know about the pool while teachers helped them to sift through these objectives.*



*Picture 7.12 Children's artwork produced in the 'Project-based' learning session.*

This example, observed in setting B, is similar to the directly applied original 'Project-based' learning approach in practice. However, class teachers chose capable children to finish the task and believed that it was not suitable for the whole class if they implemented the original model of this approach. In contrast, in setting C teacher Huang tried to arrange a simplified version of 'Project-based' learning approach where she led the whole process and divided children into two groups.

*'Project-based' learning approach in setting C*

*Teacher Huang simplified such an approach into the small group activities. She planned several tasks for children to choose. She chose 'Easter egg making' as the main topic, setting various sub-topics for children to choose animal related topics and plant related topics. Based on the general instruction, the children chose to cooperate with each other to complete this task.*



*Picture 7*

*Teacher Huang instructed children to make different eggs, explaining what they should do. Children listened and tried to make eggs in groups (2-3 children in each group).*

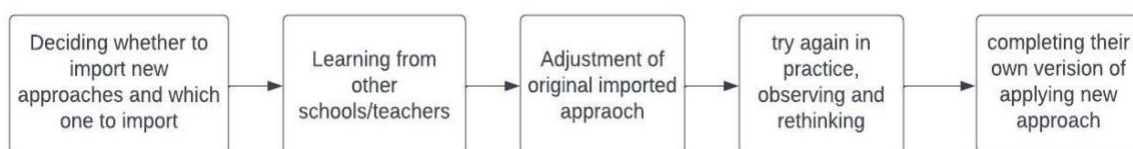
In this example a simplified version of ‘Project-based’ learning approaches was adopted, similar to the daily thematic activities. Children were not fully involved in the design of the whole learning process. On the contrary, children in setting C just followed teachers’ instructions while class teachers expressed that ‘*we did not understand what the approach is*’ (Teacher Huang & Teacher Ye, setting C; Teacher Li, setting B).

It can be seen from the implementation of ‘Project-based’ learning in two different settings, teachers held different ways to conduct this approach. It can be argued that Teacher Huang's negative attitudes towards this approach (explained in the interview chapter) led to her understanding of new approaches and implementation of this approach. She organised the ‘Project-based’ learning as thematic group activities, and children followed the instructions as the teacher suggested.

It was a common phenomenon for the class teachers when importing new educational approaches and ideology to be confused about understanding these approaches. Under these circumstances, teachers usually visited other schools to see ‘well-trial’ examples, learning from other class teachers and attending *some training courses explaining these new approaches, then we try again in practice*’ (Teacher Li, setting B). It can be assumed that the process of importing new approaches into practice involves deciding whether to import new approaches applying new approaches into practice—learning from other schools—adjustment of original imported approach—try again in practice—completing their own version of applying new approach. It can be assumed that the teachers’ perception took the crucial lead in implementing the ‘Project-based’ approach. which reveals that teachers are less capable in directly applying and tailoring imported new approaches into practice. In this case, related training and the learning of new approaches and ideology is vital for teachers’ implementation.

In brief, comparing these two different cases of applying a ‘Project-based’ learning approach, it can be argued that:

1. New imported western educational approaches are difficult for teachers to effectively interpret them into practice. It is teachers’ understanding and interpretation that facilitates conducting new approaches; and their attitude towards new approaches influences their understanding and implementation of approaches.
2. Usually, learning from other schools and teachers implementing a new approach is the primary way for teachers to shape and attempt to use imported approaches in their own settings.
3. The common process of applying imported approaches is:



*Figure 7.2 The process of applying new approaches into practice in participating preschools.*

It can also be assumed that teachers’ preference on specific approaches such as ‘Project-based’ learning since such specific approaches and examples can be copied in different

settings. By learning from other preschools, teachers implemented the imported approaches in their own settings.

### **Summary**

This chapter has analysed the observation data in three preschools. Finding out that the actual educational practice has shown the application of western educational ideologies and pedagogies, such as sticking to children's daily experience, linking to prior knowledge, and 'child-centred' ideology. There are different factors influencing the implementation of these ideologies and approaches, including children's feedback, teachers' attitude and understanding, in-service training and teaching experience. In conclusion, this chapter has revealed that there is a gap between teacher's internalisation and their implementation of educational ideologies and approaches.

## **Chapter 8 Discussion and conclusion**

This thesis was designed to explore the mechanisms of applying western educational ideologies and approaches within ECE in a Chinese specific context. As reviewed in Chapter 2, the rise of curriculum innovation and the localisation of imported theories and approaches in preschools has been understood as a strategy to improve ECE quality in current day China. This thesis takes the stance that '*Education is inherently intertwined with ontological and axiological assumptions of what it means to be a human in a given culture.*' (Pratt, Louie, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2018, p.6). As such, the manner in which educators introduce children to knowledge, how the knowledge is framed, which knowledge is chosen and questions of what gets to count as knowledge are believed to be implicitly tied up with the given culture. This is closely aligned with the constructivist approach taken in this study. Aiming to address this issue, this project adopted an ethnographic approach to exploring educational practice in Shanghai. Three kinds of data were collected aiming at providing empirical and comprehensive data on educational practices within ECE.

This study summaries the main findings from each data analysis chapter. Discussions targeting research questions will be presented in this chapter. The limitation and suggestions for future research will also be presented.

### **8.1 Summary of findings in relation to the research questions**

As described in the introduction to this thesis, this study was designed to answer three research questions. This section presents the key findings emerging from this research in relation to these three research questions:

Research question 1: What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy, and surroundings?

Research question 2: What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?

Research question 3: How are western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?



The pertinent findings in relation to this research question were identified and explored through the three main chapters which presented the findings of the data analysis (Chapters 5-7). This chapter firstly presents these findings separately by chapter.

Chapter 5 mainly focused on how the educational practice was intended to be implemented, as evidenced through analysis of the documentary guidance. In other words, Chapter 5 explores how documentary guidance suggests the curriculum, pedagogy and surroundings should take place in practice. From the analysis in documents, it was concluded that:

1. Educational practice should cover five developmental areas, aimed at preparing children for citizenship within contemporary Chinese society. The curriculum, as arranged in teachers' weekly session plans, relied heavily on the suggestions provided in the National guidelines and the local 'learning' reference book.
2. Government guidance suggested that the curriculum should be planned across five integrated developmental areas. At the centre of this was a 'child-centred' ideology as the core of any implementation of educational practice implementation. This aligns with the 'child-centred' ideology highlighted by John Dewey.
3. It was suggested that the curriculum and associated activities should be based on children's daily life and personal experiences. The curriculum and children's daily activities should also be designed to provide opportunities for children's self-operationalisation and self-experience. It is argued by this thesis that, again, these principles are based on John Dewey's beliefs surrounding the importance of experiential learning.
4. The approach to curriculum delivery and associated activities can be described as a balance between teacher-led and child-led approaches. The difference of approaches can be closely linked to the role of the teacher in each activity, whether that be the role of facilitator or the role of leader.
5. The surroundings and ethos within ECE were also emphasised in the documentary guidance. This was seen as important in facilitating social interactions between teachers and children. This thesis argues that this aligns with Vygotsky's theories which see social interactions as essential to learning, leading to the promotion of collaborative learning and peer interactions in practice.

Based on the findings emerging from the documentary analysis, the following figure (Figure 8.1) was developed to summarise educational practice as described in these key documents;

the national guidelines, the local reference books and teachers' weekly plans. As shown in the diagram, the curriculum structure was described as the 'Shared Curriculum' and 'Chosen Curriculum'. The educational ideologies shown in the documentary guidance has been concluded to be centred on a 'child-centred' ideology, children's life experiences, learning by doing and the importance of surroundings. The teachers' roles were variously 'facilitator' and 'leader', relating to whether the activity involved a teacher-led or a child-led approach.

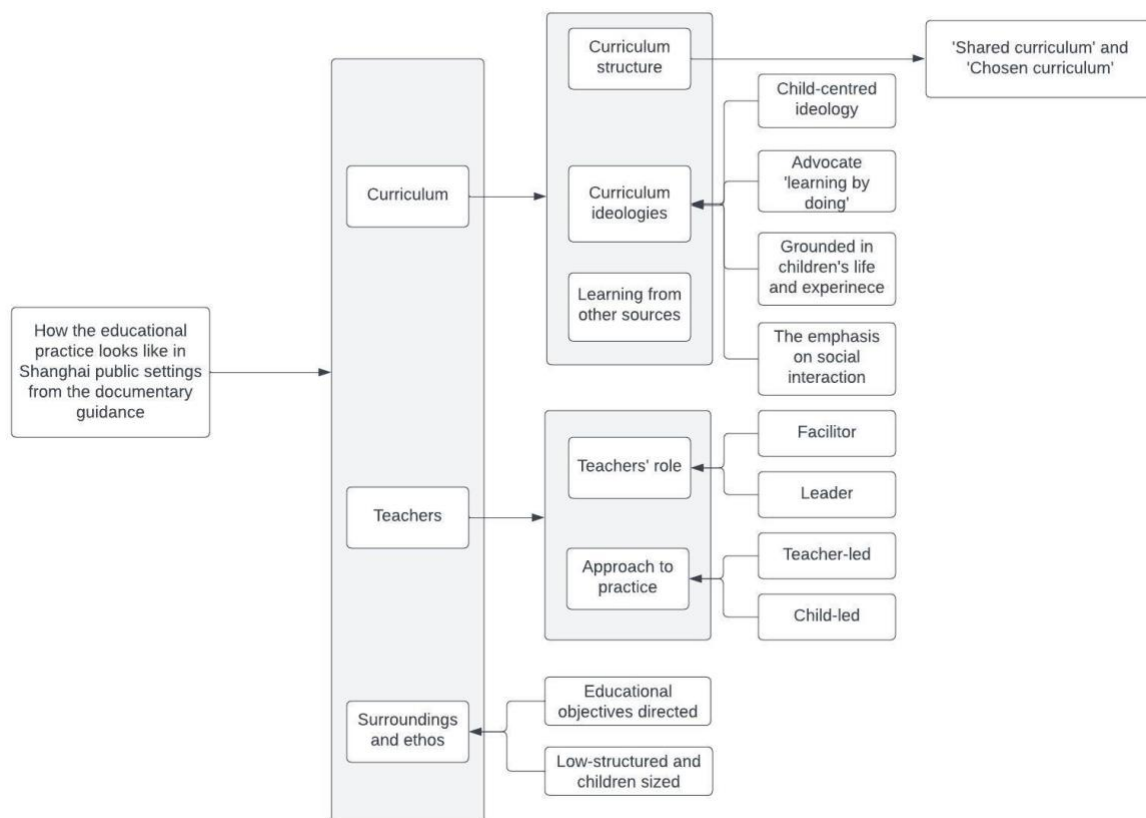


Figure 8.1 Educational practice as suggested by the documentary analysis.

Chapter 6 presented findings from the analysis of teachers' and headteachers' interviews. This chapter emphasised the importance of government guidance in the implementation of ECE at the setting level, including the national guidelines, the local learning reference (issued by local government in Shanghai), and through (government initiated) teacher training. The curriculum structure and content were both influenced by the governmental guidance, as well

as the teaching suggestions contained within this guidance, particularly at the local level (i.e. the local reference book). The main findings emerging from the interviews suggested that:

1. Three main sources of guidance were used to plan ECE educational activities within settings, the National Guidelines, the Shanghai local reference book, and learning from other schools and books. Whilst teachers felt that they had the autonomy to make changes and add new activities they did so based on their understanding and interpretation of the existing documentary guidance.
2. Teachers' autonomy led to some learning from other sources and learning from other schools and books were frequently mentioned by teachers when they talked about planning daily activities within their setting. They also indicated that imported western educational approaches and ideologies were a resource that teachers could draw upon in planning daily activities.
3. Governmental influence demonstrated a hierarchical model which shaped the formation of educational practice within participating settings, from the national level to the local level, the local level to the school level, from the headteacher to class teachers. This was also highlighted in the interviews discussing headteachers' choices in educational practice implementation for their setting.
4. Teachers' in-service training was a further determining factor in influencing teachers' implementation of ECE practice in general and the documentary guidance in particular. The hierarchical model ensured the influence of this in-service training on educational practice. However, teachers were also aware of, and took into account, the current socio-economic and cultural context in Shanghai when implementing their ECE practice.
5. Alongside external factors (in-service training, documentary guidance, socio-economic and cultural context) influencing implementation, teachers' skills, knowledge and experience, and children's developmental stage, student numbers and feedback in practice also influenced teachers' implementation of ECE in practice.
6. Parental involvement was discussed by only one headteacher (Headteacher W) in this study. In their setting parents were reported to take part in monthly school activities. Whilst the family are firmly located in the preschool-level, closely linking to teachers' educational practice. In this study, parental involvement was perceived to be through their interactions with preschools. This was alongside the local community, which was also a reported source influencing teachers' ECE practice.

- Teachers' understanding of different sources (such as government guidance, imported western ideologies and approaches, other teachers' practice) was at the core of their implementation of ECE in practice.

These findings suggest that there are four levels of determinants influencing educational practice: the national level, the (Shanghai) local level, the setting/headteacher level and the class/class teacher level. The national level and Shanghai local government level, which is here referred to as governmental guidance. Parental involvement in settings can be understood as the preschool- level, which represents the interaction between teachers, headteachers and parents. In terms of external and internal perspectives, teachers' internal elements such as personal skills, knowledge and experience were also a key factor identified as influencing teachers' internalisation of documentary guidance. This process happened in the preschool, directly impacting on children's education. The following figure (Figure 8.2) has been developed to describe the formation of educational practice based on the analysis of the interview data in this thesis. It shows the structure and content of educational practice from national level to the school-level, as well as how different the determinants impacted on the formation of educational practice.

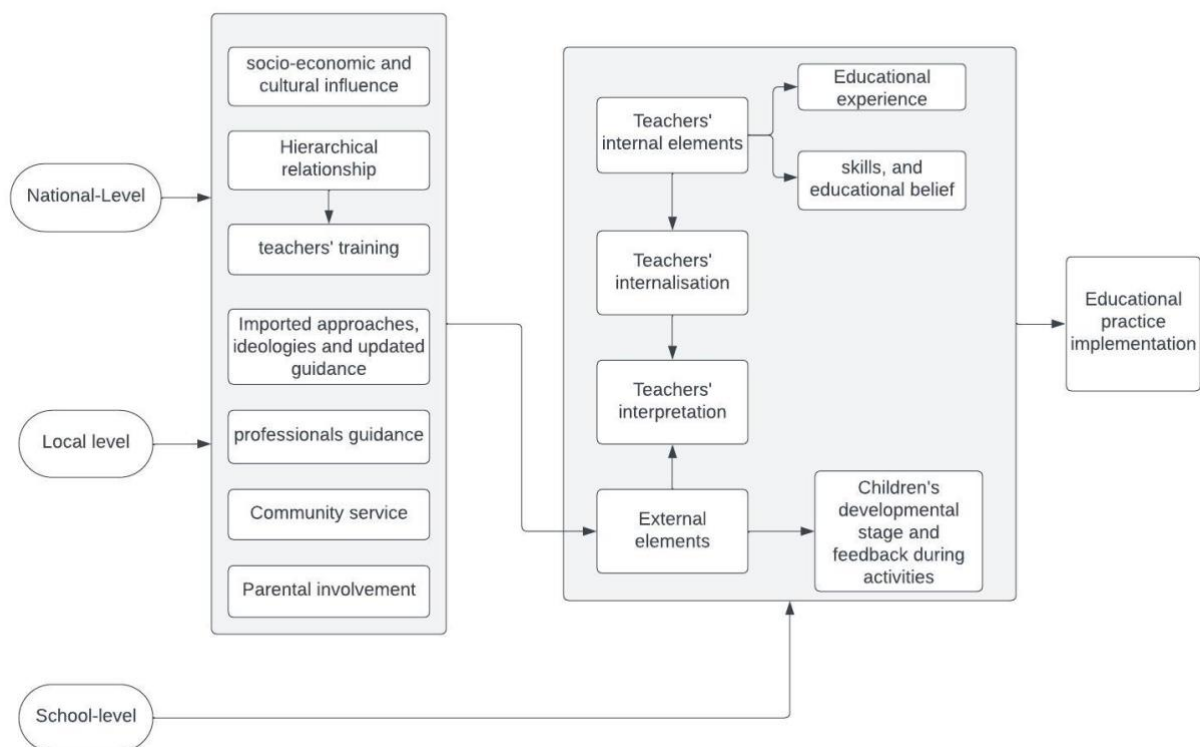


Figure 8.2 The different levels of factors shaping the implementation of educational practice

The findings from the analysis of the observation data (Chapter 7) relating to this research showed that:

1. Educational practice within participating settings was predominantly implemented following the Shanghai local governmental guidance. This confirmed the finding from the interview data that governmental guidance was the key influential factor in educational practice.
2. Sticking to a core experience in children's daily activities was also teachers' priority. In doing so teachers focused on children's prior experiences; the provision of new information and knowledge was therefore linked to children's previous understanding and knowledge.
3. 'Learning by doing' and 'evaluation of doing' was also implemented in teachers' educational practice.
4. The implementation of 'child-centred' ideologies was performed around caring for children's interests, needs, developmental stage and feedback from 'teacher-led' activities, as well as encompassing 'child-led' activities. The 'teacher-led' and 'child-led' approaches related closely to 'content-based' and 'play-based' activities, respectively. In detail, the 'content-based' activities relied on the 'teacher-led' approach while the 'play-based' activities were conducted through 'child-led' approaches.
5. Provided tools and surroundings were similar in the three chosen settings, which can be assumed to be due to governmental funding and resourcing of public settings; pre-set educational objectives provided the principals for arranging the materials and surroundings within settings; these provided materials and tools were related to children's life-experiences, which corresponds closely to the finding (above) that activities were rooted in children's life and prior experiences.
6. The ethos in the participating settings can be described as attempting to achieve a balance between children 'being well-behaved' and 'being independent'. These two aims did not contradict each other.
7. 'Project-based' learning (PBL) has been implemented in two of the three participating settings. It was, however, implemented in different ways. In setting B, teachers conducted this approach with 5-6 children, encouraging children to choose a topic they were interested in to focus on. In setting C, teachers organised the whole class to implement the PBL approach. In this example, children also largely followed the

teachers' instructions. These are examples of the ways in which teachers' own internal understandings influence the implementation of ECE in practice.

## **8.2 Conclusion and discussion**

In terms of curriculum formation, structure and content, the interview and observation data presented similar results when teachers were discussing their educational practice and when their actual practice was observed. These two kinds of data both emphasised the importance of government guidance in educational practice structure and content. In essence, four main documentary sources were seen to have influenced educational practice, the National Guidelines, the Shanghai local reference books, various western educational ideologies/approaches, and other teachers' practice and books. In addition, (predominantly government-provided) in-service training also shaped the teachers' understandings and practice of education and pedagogy.

The documentary, interview data and observation data all indicated that a 'child-centred' ideology was advocated in theory and in practice. This ideology is also advocated in the western ideologies discussed in this thesis and elsewhere (Lau, 2012). When the data is triangulated, it can be concluded that:

1. Educational practice was implemented by teachers to encourage children's self-doing. In other words, 'learning by doing' was a key principle in both teacher-led and child-led activities, with an emphasis on providing opportunities for children's self-operationalisation and experience. The documentary guidance emphasised the suggestion of 'learning by doing' for teachers. In the observation data, teachers were observed to provide chances for children to experience and participate in pre-set educational tasks. Hence, it can be inferred that teachers are in agreement with the documentary guidance on the value of experiential learning.

Teachers also evaluated children's activities, indicating the importance of feedback, guidance and support provided by teachers in practice. Such arrangements can be traced to Vygotsky's scaffolding theory. Scaffolding refers to providing support and guidance to students as they learn and develop. The analysis also showed that teachers offered children assistance, asked probing questions to help children improve their

cognition of certain concepts, and bridged gaps between children's current understandings/abilities and new levels of information.

2. Educational practice incorporated children's daily life and personal experiences. Triangulated data shows that teachers believed in such an approach and put this into practice when delivering the curriculum. Daily activities were based on children's life experiences. As reviewed in Chapter 2, Dewey's philosophy of education focuses extensively on the role of experience in learning. The findings show that the teachers enabled experiential learning in practice, connecting practice to the lived experiences of the children in their care. Piaget and Vygotsky, as reviewed in Chapter 2 also acknowledged the importance of experience, although they did not place as much emphasis on it as Dewey did.
3. The curriculum was planned and implemented to link to children's existing knowledge and understanding. The observation data analysis concluded that teachers recognized children's prior knowledge and linked new information and knowledge with children's prior understanding. Teachers' weekly plans and the observation data both showed that educational practice was arranged to link to children's daily life and prior experiences. Such arrangements are a close indication of Jean Piaget's assimilation theory. Teachers connected content to children's prior knowledge, ensuring a smooth integration of new information.

Children's experiences of problem-solving processes and self-operation activities observed in this study can, therefore, be understood as developing through the accommodation process advocated by Jean Piaget. Teachers provided chances for children to encounter information challenging their existing understanding, promoting accommodation and cognitive growth. The problem-solving process and open-ended questions observed during various activities encouraged children to reevaluate their understanding of certain concepts.

In general, educational practices were observed to be linked to children's prior personal life experiences and knowledge, which can be closely aligned with Jean Piaget's cognitive development theories.

4. In addition, the balance between two different ethos was also illustrated in the observation data. Educational practice was described as providing a balance between guiding children to be obedient and well-behaved and cultivating children's autonomy and independence. Such a point can be seen as the infusion of Chinese traditional education beliefs, which emphasises a respect for authority and good behaviour (discipline) (Wang, 2006), with western educational philosophies highlighting the significance of self-directed learning and autonomy (Wermke & Salokangas, 2015). It should be noted that in this study, the observation data has indicated that the cultivation of independence and autonomy refers to the children's abilities to solve problems and be able to take responsibility for themselves in daily life. This represents the parallel coexistence of Western educational ideologies with traditional Chinese educational philosophies.

Low-structured tools and materials were frequently used in education practice. Their use was related to pre-set educational objectives. In their interviews, teachers explained this as being a requirement from the local educational department in order to support children's constructive and cognitive development.

In line with Vygotsky's cognitive development theory (as reviewed in Chapter 2), the social interactions between teachers and children were also seen by teachers and in the documentary guidance as important in contributing to children's learning. Teachers took care in their interactions with the children in their class.

5. The approach to educational practice was divided into 'content-based' and 'play-based' activities which correlated to 'teacher-led' and 'child-led' approaches. 'Content-based' activities mainly refer to learning activities, which were predominantly guided by the Shanghai local reference book. Teachers adhered closely to completing pre-set educational aims and content within such sessions. 'Play-based' activities refers to the other three kinds of activities, namely the 'Games', 'Sports' and 'Life-related' activities. It can be inferred that when the activities were more 'academic learning' related, the approach was 'teacher-led'. If the activities were more 'playing' related activities, more 'child-led' approaches were adopted by teachers. The 'teacher-led' approach is more in line with the former 'Soviet Union' model, which advocated a teacher-centred approach in educational practice. As



discussed in the literature review, the Soviet Union model impacted ECE in China during the period. It can be concluded that teachers attempted to achieve a balance between ‘teacher-led’ and ‘child-led’ approaches in their educational practice. The application of the ‘Project-based learning’ approach in two settings provided an example of the ways in which teachers explored a new (to them) approach to support ‘child-led’ activities with different interpretations of their application into practice.

6. From the triangulated data, it is evident that the documentary guidance and content taught in in-service training was central in forming educational practice. Based on the findings, teachers’ understanding of ‘theory to practise’ has been described as the process from teachers’ internalisation to teachers’ interpretation, which was influenced by teachers’ internal and external factors. Teachers’ internalisation can be seen to represent teachers’ equilibration, as described by Jean Piaget. Teachers found the balance between their existing schemas and incepted new information about educational practice from external sources such as the government, other teachers and western educational ideologies and approaches.

*Research question one: What does early childhood education practice look like in participating settings, including curriculum, pedagogy, and surroundings?*

The first research question can be answered based on the conclusions from the triangulated data. It can be concluded that educational practice in ECE was largely influenced by a hierarchical model in China. There were four levels of sources informing practice: the National Guidelines issued by central government, the Shanghai local reference books issued by local government, imported western educational approaches which were determined by headteachers and learning from other reference books and other preschools. However, the way in which guidance was translated into practice lay with teachers’ own interpretations. In other words, teachers’ interpretations played a central role in implementation and practice. Due to the hierarchy, this interpretation was largely influenced by in-service training. The curriculum and pedagogy were also shaped and formed by governmental guidance.

In terms of educational ideologies emerging from data, educational practice focused on a ‘child-centred’ ideology. The curriculum was implemented to cultivate children’s self-development and citizenship. The central pillars of this pedagogy have been concluded to be educational practice grounded in children’s life experiences; learning by doing and evaluation

of doing; linking new knowledge and information with children's prior knowledge and understanding; and an emphasis on the social interaction between teachers and children in educational practice. Educational practice can also be divided into 'content-based' activities and 'play-based' activities, which led to 'teacher-led' or 'child-led' approaches in practice. Dependant on these teachers played the role of either facilitator or leader.

Observed from the ethos in chosen settings, Chinese traditional values guiding the principle of 'being obedient' and western educational ideologies advocating 'being independent' coexisted in practice. Tools and materials largely related to facilitating pre-set educational objectives.

It can be seen that these educational practices have drawn similarities with western educational ideologies. The epistemology of education and pedagogy in learning has been described as guided by western education ideologies and approaches. The following sections describe the mechanisms by which western educational practices are applied. The following figure (Figure 8.3) can be used to describe the findings relating to the first research question, which explains the sources which inform implementation at different levels which then translates into educational practice.

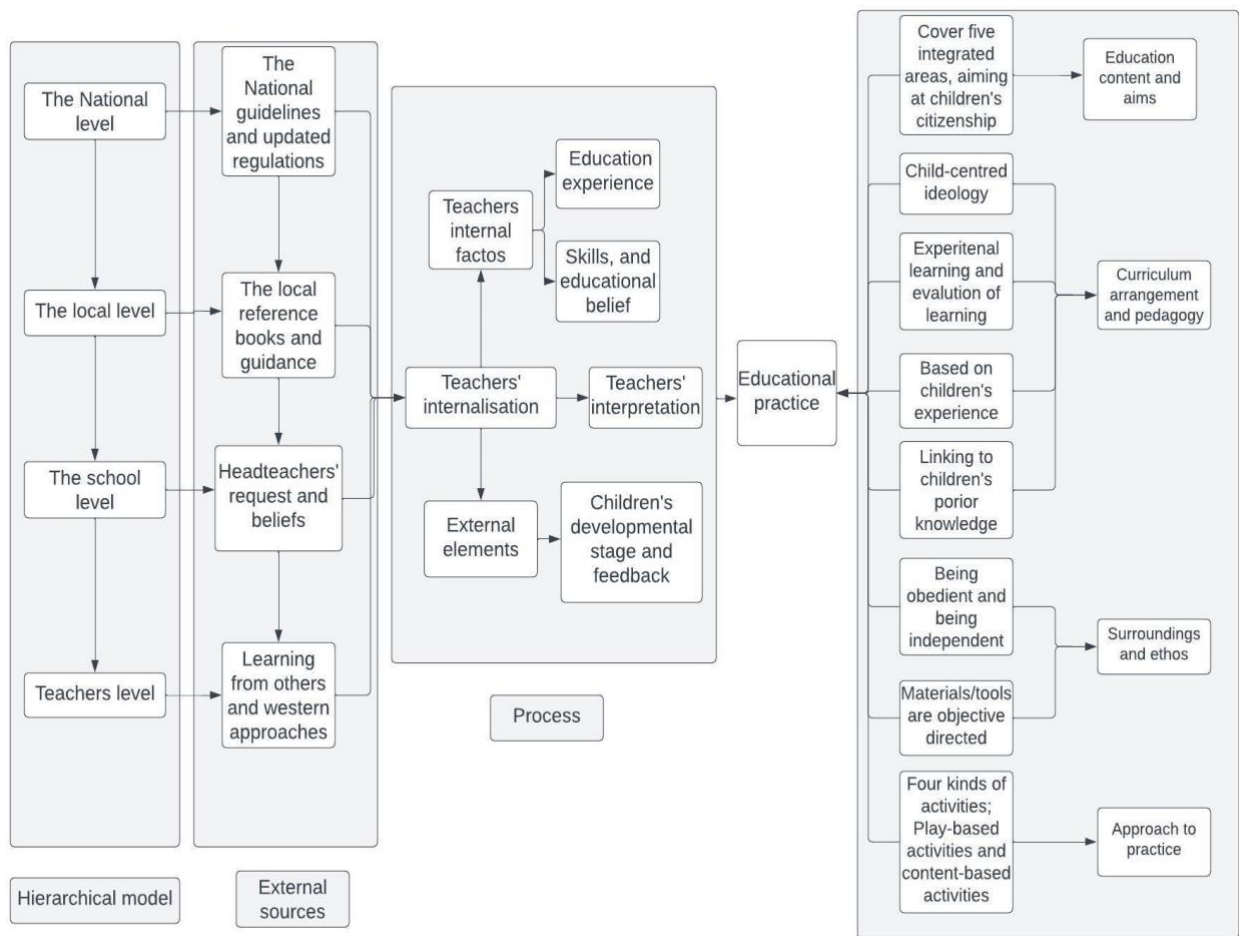


Figure 8.3 The components of educational practice in participating settings

Research question 2: What kinds of western early childhood education theories and approaches are implemented in participating settings?

Chapter 2 identified key themes within the different western ideologies reviewed and these themes were used as codes in the analysis of the data in order to better understand the underpinnings of the implementation in practice in ECE (research question 2). Ideologies described in the research question 1 such as ‘child-centred’, ‘learning by doing’ and ‘linking to children’ life experiences’ can be traced back to John Dewey’s philosophy of education. Pedagogical approaches such as ‘linking to children’s prior knowledge and understanding’, ‘scaffolding’ and ‘emphasis on social interaction’ have been centred on Jean Piaget and Vygotsky’ cognitive development theories.

Based on the findings reported above, relating to Research Question 1 it can be argued that the documentary guidance analysed for this thesis showed close links to western educational

ideologies and approaches. All three kinds of data provided answers to this question. From data collected from documents, it can be found that western educational ideologies were one of the guided ideologies in curriculum design and pedagogy suggestions.

Findings from data have shown that the western educational ideologies of knowledge (epistemologies) and process of learning (pedagogies) have been tailored with factors such as Chinese traditional values (epistemologies) and children's situations in a Chinese specific context. It can be argued that the educational practices described in participating settings have shown the application of epistemological and pedagogical aspects of western education.

### *Interpretation of epistemology and pedagogy*

The documentary analysis chapter demonstrated that there was a focus on 'child-centred' ideologies within ECE guidance. It was argued that this was closely aligned with the 'child-centred' ideology advocated by John Dewey. The 'child-centred' ideology is presented in documents which detail for example milestones for children's development covering five areas and the awareness of children's developmental stages and differences, as described in the national guidelines. This is similar to previous findings by Wang et al. (2005) who concluded that early childhood curriculum guidelines consistently prioritised a child-centred approach, considering children's developmental requirements, interests, abilities, and their prior experiences.

It is the philosophy advocated by John Dewey that a child-centred approach to education places the emphasis on learning about the needs and interests of the child (Lorina, 2022). In terms of education, findings also showed that education should target children's citizenship which is suitable for Chinese society, for example, it covers children's self-identification in different contexts of society, and children's mental and physical development for themselves. Dewey advocated citizenship for a democratic society (Hickman, 2009). Citizenship in democratic society has been concluded such as problem-solving, critical thinking and active civic engagement (Ploeg, 2019). Such ideologies can be treated as the preparation for the needs of society, which is the epistemology of education.

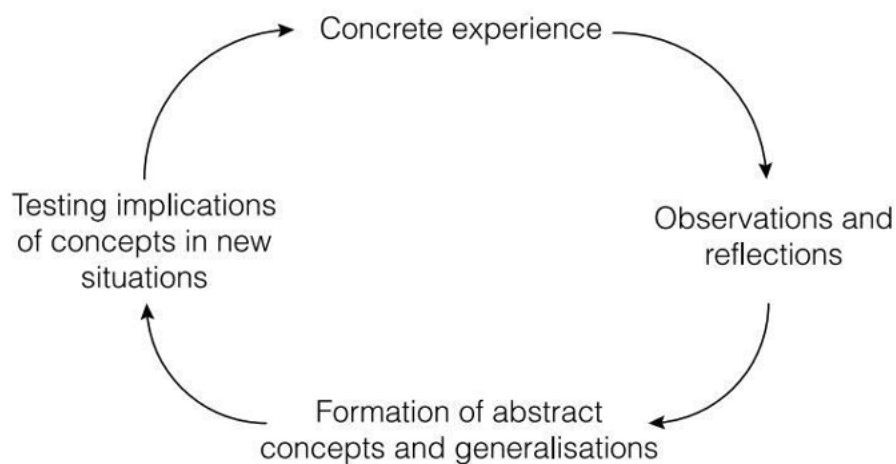
The core citizenship in Confucian philosophy, which is acknowledged to be the main value-system in China, is encapsulated by the concept of 'Xue-zuo-ren', denoting the pursuit of attaining a genuine understanding of one's humanity. According to Confucius, genuine

learning is centred on self-improvement. The concept of 'Xue-zuo-ren' encompasses the attainment of aesthetic refinement, moral excellence, comprehensive knowledge, and profound religious insight (Tu, 2000). Chinese traditional values and western epistemology both emphasise human development. However, they do not share the same meaning. The educational ideologies mentioned by western scholars emphasise individualism, whilst Confucian values look at human development within the community. Researchers have emphasised that it is the difference between individualism and collectivism (Choy, 2017). The ethos found in settings and described in this study as forming a balance between being obedient and being independent can also be used to support the argument that western education epistemology and Chinese traditional values coexist within ECE in China.

The cultural influence in defining the epistemology of education has also been raised by other scholars (Zhao, 2017; Yang, 2018; Zhu, 2011). The perspectives of culture have been recognized as the reason for different interpretations of western ideologies into Chinese education practice. In general, previous researchers have taken a cultural perspective to explore the application of western ideologies in China (Yang & Li, 2019). However, they did not provide empirical findings pointing to the consistency of adopting the western educational epistemology and pedagogy in practice. In other words, the cultural difference in practice has been discussed but the recognition of adaptation of western education in practice has not been empirically supported. This study has proved that educational ideologies such as 'child-centred' pedagogy has been widely used in practice. It is inferred that different cultures can lead to different interpretations of education ideologies. However, in this study it did not change the pedagogy of learning in practice and western education epistemology was tailored with Chinese traditional values. For instance, triangulated data show that the educational practices were arranged to be (1). grounded in children's personal life experiences; (2) linked to prior knowledge and understanding; (3) suggested the 'learning by doing' and evaluation of doing'. (4) the use of scaffolding in teaching. These pedagogies of learning were the underlying principles for the teaching suggestions and examples provided in the local government reference books. The interview data has indicated that the documentary guidance heavily influenced teachers' understanding as did in-service training.

The learning by doing and evaluation of doing process observed in this study is also similar to Lewin's experiential learning model (1952), which supports the main finding in this study. Pedagogy in learning was grounded in western educational ideologies and was

implemented in the daily activities in participating settings. Orb (2012) reviewed this model in his research stating that: ‘*not only a deeper understanding of Kolb’s original theory is required, but a return must be made to John Dewey, perhaps the architect of experiential learning (learning by doing), to fully comprehend its importance.*’ Consequently, such a model can be seen to have its roots in John Dewey’s experiential learning philosophy. Figure 8.4 describes the model grounded in experiential learning. The process of learning by doing and evaluation of doing has been described in Chapter 7 (see diagram 7.1). It can be seen that the following experiential learning process is similar to the process teachers conducted in settings. Teachers’ observations and reflections of children ‘doing’ involved a similar experience to the process “observation and evaluation of performance’. This process aims at providing reflections on children’s doing, forming their understanding of certain concepts and skills. After the evaluation process, teachers would observe children’s performance again to know whether children improved their performance or understanding or not. The similarity between two learning models suggests that the educational practice in chosen settings followed the pedagogy of learning which was grounded in John Dewey’s theories.



*Figure 8.4 Lewin’s experiential learning model (cited in Kolb, 1984: 21).*

#### The application of the ‘Project-based’ learning approach

Apart from the adoption of Western epistemology of education and pedagogy of learning, one specific approach, ‘Project-based learning’ was adopted in two of the three participating settings. This approach was directly imported from western ideologies. As discussed in Chapter 2, this approach shares a connection with John Dewey’s philosophy, in terms of his emphasis on experiential learning. This approach emphasises active learning through real-world projects. The use of specific imports has approved the finding that the specific

pedagogical approach has been applied in specific contexts in China. It has been observed that different teachers' understandings of such an approach directly influenced the implementation of this approach.

To conclude, the epistemology of education and pedagogy of learning were applied and informed ECE practice in participating settings. The cultural difference did influence part of the interpretation of the epistemological aspect of education, making the definition of education better situated in Chinese society. The pedagogy of learning has been applied to educational practice. Former research has focused on meaning-making of western ideologies from cultural perspectives. This study has explored the mechanism from the cultural perspectives to implementation in practice, which includes different levels of determinants (xxx). In other words, this study explored the elements of shaping the western ideologies and approaches in practice beyond culture.

*Research question 3: How are these western educational ideologies and approaches reshaped and tailored in participating settings?*

Based on the findings of the data analysis, it can be concluded that the western educational ideologies and approaches were reshaped in two different ways: directly and indirectly based on teachers' interpretations of the documentary guidance and other sources of support for their teaching. In particular, the western educational ideologies were shaped by Chinese traditional values and the socio-cultural context related western educational ideologies and approaches were implemented through the teachers' adoption in their planned daily activities of the recommendations and suggestions contained in the documentary guidance.

Consequently, it can be argued that an indirect application of western educational ideologies and approaches was taking place in Shanghai preschools. In contrast, specific approaches such as the 'Project-based learning' were directly imported by headteachers into their settings. Consequently, teachers in setting B and setting C conducted separate periods in their ECE daily activities for implementing 'Project-based learning'. An additional factor influencing teachers' implementation of 'Project-based learning' was children's developmental stages and abilities, as evidenced through teachers' interviews.

Headteachers' choice of importing western educational ideologies and approaches resulted from governmental requirements on curriculum innovation. It is the headteachers' decision that which approach can be imported in their preschools. In this case, headteachers' choice

can be understood as the school level factor in importing western educational approaches in preschools.

As seen in Figure 8.2, one external influence in the school level shaping the application of western educational ideologies and approaches, is children's feedback and developmental stage. Teachers took children's feedback and developmental stages into consideration when they planned and implemented educational practice such as the implementation of 'Project-based' learning. An example of an internal influence is teachers' understanding of the 'Project-based learning' approach, as explored in Chapter 6 where it was seen that teachers' educational experiences, beliefs and their skills have shaped teachers' understanding of different sources.

At the local level are parental involvement and the local community as influential factors on educational practice. The local community such as the primary school location, including access to museums and public services provided resources for implementing daily activities. Parents would occasionally participate in children's daily activities, although this appears to have been limited to one setting.

When it comes to the indirect application of western ideologies and approaches, it means that the epistemology of education and pedagogy of learning has been applied into specific examples and teaching suggestions in documentary guidance. As discussed in the previous sections, John Dewey's philosophy of education, Jean Piaget's cognitive theory and Vygotsky's developmental theory have been tailored and reorganised into the detailed and practical suggestions and activities examples in the National Guidelines, local reference books and other books. Findings from the interviews also suggested that external elements such as socio-cultural factors were influential in shaping their application. The contemporary early childhood education curriculum in China has been seen as the hybrid of traditional culture, communist culture, and the western culture (Zhu & Wang, 2011). This has also been addressed by previous researchers who have argued that the culture difference between imported western education ideologies and approaches and the Chinese cultural context has led to educational practices felt to be inappropriate within contemporary Chinese society (Huo, 2015; Choy, 2016; Yang, 2018 & 2019).



Elements such as governmental influence, which can be regarded as the exosystem level in the socio-ecological system framework, and which has been shown in this study to have made a large impact influencing practice, has seldom been explored in other studies. Research conducted by Yang (2018, 2017 & 2019) have used the framework from the culture perspective to understand the mechanisms of curriculum innovation. His study explored the meaning-making of western educational ideologies within Shenzhen and Hong Kong but did not focus on the practical implementation within settings. This study has explored the process from 'being imported' to 'being implemented', which has enabled a broader view to be taken of the factors which influence this reshaping of western educational ideologies in specific contexts.

Former research by Yang and Li (2019) has also explained the socio-cultural mechanism in curriculum. However, they did not explore the influence of hierarchical models which has been seen to be central to this study. In addition, they indicated that parents' beliefs and expectations were important in shaping the curriculum. However, this study suggests that there is little parental involvement in educational practice in the participating public settings in Shanghai and consequently little influence on the curriculum and on teachers' pedagogy.

Differentiating from Yang and Li's research, this project explains the influence from different levels of educational impact on teachers' implementation of ECE in practice, including socio-cultural perspectives, the hierarchical model in Chinese education, as well as teachers' interpretations. In other words, it provides a broader picture of educational practice formation. However, socio-cultural factors, professional guidance, imported western educational ideologies influence and school-based requirements have also been emphasised in this study. Apart from Yang and Li, other researchers have argued that the local community has been an important resource for curriculum design (Huang & Zhang, 2015). Research conducted by Fan (2020) has pointed out the governance dilemma (advocating school innovations but the strong influence of education) in directing educational practice, which is pertinent to this study. The difference is that this study provides an empirical and holistic view of the way in which the government influences educational practice. The role of teachers in educational practice has also been emphasised by Yang (2018). He indicated that meaning making is influenced by socio-cultural factors shaping the curriculum in China. However, this study supports the view that implementation consists of the process of teachers' internalisation to interpretation within ECE.

From the findings of this study, it can be argued that different levels of determinants shaped the indirect process of applying western educational ideologies in practice. For instance, the national level elements include socio-cultural impacts, the governmental influence, professional guidance and teacher training, the local level includes parental involvement and local community, while in the school level, teachers' internal elements and external factors (children's developmental stage, student number and feedbacks) has been presented. Interplaying with different levels of determinants, the epistemology of education and pedagogy of learning coexists with Chinese traditional culture and values. In-service training and professional guidance redefined the western education ideologies and approaches which influence teachers' understanding of educational practice. In terms of applying these ideologies and approaches into specific settings, considering the community situation and parental involvement in settings, there was an adjustment and adaptation of the suggested educational practice in each participating preschool. Teachers would use their understanding and children's developmental stage and feedback to arrange and conduct their practice. The mechanism of applying western ideologies and approaches into educational practice in participating settings is described in Figure 8. 5.

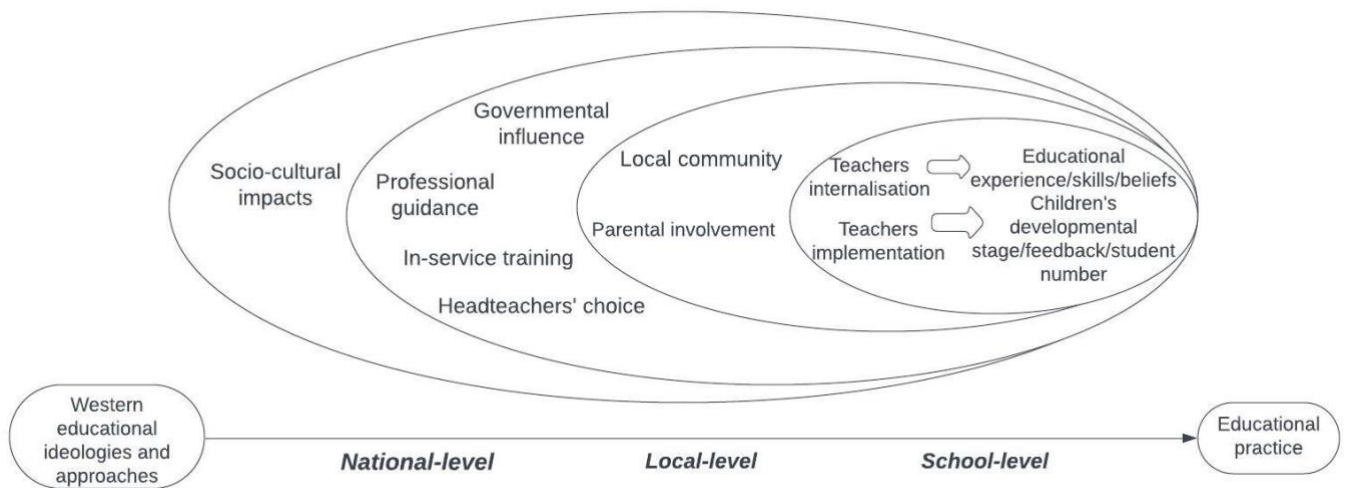


Figure 8.5 The mechanism of applying western ideologies and approaches into practice

### **8.3 Contributions**

This research contributes broadly to the existing body of knowledge on applying western educational ideologies and approaches in China, making specific and original empirical and theoretical contributions.

There is a distinct lack of studies examining factors influencing the application of western educational ideologies beyond the socio-cultural impacts in Shanghai. It is considered that this study is a useful addition to the growing body of empirical literature on ECE innovations combining various imported ideologies and approaches. In other words, the empirical research contributes to practical questions surrounding the implementation of a high-quality early childhood education (ECE) model that combines advanced western educational ideologies and approaches which are tailored to the Chinese local context. Curriculum innovation has been widely advocated in China (Huo, 2015), alongside a trend to try and improve the quality of western educational ideologies and approaches in different contexts (Zhao, 2018).

In terms of theoretical contributions, it is argued that in addition to socio-cultural impacts on practice, a hierarchical model is a key influence on the implementation of western educational ideologies and approaches into practice. In particular, (national and local) government influence through in-service training and governmental guidance impacting teachers' understanding of educational practice have also been highlighted. The theoretical framework describing the mechanism of 'theory to practise' has been renewed based on this study (figure 8.5).

### **8.4 Limitations**

This project has conducted ethnographic research exploring the mechanism of applying western educational ideologies and approaches in Shanghai public settings. Researching the application mechanism in Shanghai is not an easy undertaking, given the considerable complexity of its nature. The limitations of this study are detailed below.

Firstly, one inherent limitation with regard to ethnographic study relates to that of generalisability. This study focused on three public preschools in Shanghai, and issues of

transferability of the findings to other public preschools could arise. Chapter 3 discussed the choice of the three preschools to provide a better understanding of exploring the process of applying theories into different sites. In each preschool, there was one class of children, two class teachers and one head teacher taking part in this study. It is clear that findings may not be representative of other public settings in different parts of China. However, this study in its richness does offer insights that can be used to illuminate the situation in public preschools which share similarities in curriculum structure and content model.

Secondly, this study only took three scholars' philosophy of education and one specific approach into account as examples of 'western education ideologies and approaches.'. As stated in Chapter 2, the choice of these ideologies and approaches resulted from the pilot study and interviews with teachers. The findings relating to Chinese traditional culture and values also relied heavily on other literature and was not explored separately in this study. To have done so may have led to different interpretations as relying on the literature means some nuance may have been lost.

Thirdly, in this study, the researcher was the only coder when it came to analysing the data, as well as developing codes and themes. Therefore, there is, as always, the possibility of research bias in the analysis and interpretation of the data. However, the analysis closely followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis guidelines throughout the coding process, checking through the data several times to ensure the quality of coding, intra-rater reliability and the generation of themes.

Lastly, this study aims at exploring the mechanism of applying western educational ideologies and approaches into Chinese context. It is difficult to define what is western education ideologies are. This study has reviewed three philosophies and one approach to explore the application of these ideologies into practice. It may not clearly define the western educational ideologies. With the review of ECE development in China, it can be seen that the western educational ideologies and Chinese educational values have infused. It would be better if viewed how these educational ideologies have intertwined with each other and form the current modern education system.

### **8.5 Implications for further research**

Given the findings, the contribution of this study to debates surrounding applying western educational ideologies and approaches into specific context, and the limitations of this study as discussed above the following suggestions for future research may prove fruitful areas worthy of further exploration. Firstly, it may be deemed useful to quantify the determinants of the process of applying western educational ideologies and approaches in practice. It may be worth exploring to what extent these factors influenced the implementation of educational practice. In other words, the quantitative approach should be used to explore this mechanism. Governmental influence and socio-cultural impacts could also be further explored in a quantitative approach. Examining the impacts of factors at different levels would enable the researcher to understand the priority and ratio of factors in applying theories into practice.

Secondly, it would be interesting to conduct comparative studies in other locations, for example, within China to determine whether or not, and to what extent, they differ in terms of ECE practice and influences on practice. Yang conducted similar empirical studies in Shenzhen and Hong Kong. This study explores the situation in Shanghai. Both three cities are well-developed social-economically within China. It would be interesting to focus on areas where there is more concern relating to the quality of ECE e.g., in rural areas. This study only represents the mechanism suitable for such situation and period. In this case, further research can focus on similar study exploring the implementation of western educational ideologies and approaches in different places and periods.

Lastly, it will be worthy to explore any specific factors in other places and periods, as the outcomes of comparative research. The different factors influencing interpretation of the western educational ideologies and approaches might have close relation to the local socio-cultural situation.

As to the implications for policy and practice, the focus should be on the importance of hierarchical models and teachers' in-service training. Advocating curriculum innovation in preschools should involve careful consideration of teachers' understanding, prior experience and knowledge. One particularly pertinent point highlighted in this research was a lack of understanding of the ways in which theory could be utilised by teachers in their individual

practice. Consequently, in-service training for teachers, it should provide content explaining theories and their application in different contexts.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Information sheet for Headteacher



#### **Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools**

#### **Information sheet for Headteacher**

Dear Head Teacher,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully:

- **What is this project about?** *‘Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools’* is an ethnographic research conducted by XI DING, a PhD student at the University of York, UK. It will focus on examining the process of theory-practice in the implementation of western theories in urban Chinese cities in order to understand more fully the influence of the socio-cultural context on Early Childhood Education (ECE) practices in China. Three settings in Shanghai will take part in the study. In each setting one-class of 5-6 years old children, their teacher and the headteacher will be included.
- **What will participation in the study involve?** This study will last for about 2-3 weeks in each setting. The researcher, Xi Ding, will visit the class for data collection purposes. Visits to the setting will be in agreement with the class teacher. The

researcher will observe ordinary classes and activities that take place during the school day. With your agreement she will also make video recordings of pupils undertaking specific activities and may take photographs of the class for data analysis which may be used in the final thesis and subsequent presentations and publications. If there were any weekly teaching record loanable, she would like to take notes or some photos of the record without leaking them out. A short semi-structured interview will be conducted with the headteacher and the class teacher at the end of the school day (if appropriate) to discuss practices in the setting and any underpinning theories.

- **What will happen to the data collected?** The data that you provide (e.g. notes from observations, interviews, audio recording, setting documentation) will be anonymised and stored by code number. Any information that identifies you, the school and individual pupils will be stored separately from the data. The school, yourself, individual teachers and children will not be identified in any reporting and pseudonyms will be used. Any features which may identify the school in photos will be disguised.
- **What will happen to the provided data including how this will be stored, who will have access to it and how individuals' identities will be protected during this process?** All the provided data will be stored by XI DING personally. The original data will be stored on a securely password protected USB stick and a copy will be stored in a personal google drive account, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Only XI DING and supervisor Dr Louise Tracey will have access to the data. Data will be kept in identifiable format for about three years but data will always be anonymised since collection, ID numbers and assumed name will be used.
- **What happens if I change my mind?** Your school can withdraw from the study at any time during data collection or up to two weeks after data collection is completed by contacting XI DING (email: [xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk)).

This project has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the ethics committee in the department of Education at the University of York, United Kingdom. If you have any questions or concerns about the conduct of the study you can contact XI DING directly



(email: [xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk)), her supervisor, Dr Louise Tracey, (email: [louise.tracey@york.ac.uk](mailto:louise.tracey@york.ac.uk). Tel: +44(0)1904 328160) or the chair of the Education Ethics Committee, University of York (email: [education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk](mailto:education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk)).

The researcher, XI DING, would be delighted if your school could take part in this project. If you are able to participate please complete the consent form attached and return to the researcher by hand or via email.

Yours Faithfully

Xi Ding

[xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk)

## Appendix 2: Information sheet for Class teachers



### **Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools**

#### **Information sheet for Class teacher**

Dear teacher:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully:

- **What is this project about?** *‘Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools’* is an ethnographic research conducted by XI DING, a PhD student at the University of York, UK. It will focus on examining the process of theory-practice in the implementation of western theories in urban Chinese cities in order to understand more fully the influence of the socio-cultural context on Early Childhood Education (ECE) practices in China. Three settings in Shanghai will take part in the study. In each setting one-class of 5-6 years old children, their teacher and the headteacher will be included.
- **What will participation in the study involve?** This study will last for about 2-3 weeks in each setting. The researcher, Xi Ding, will visit the class for data collection. Visits to the setting will be in agreement with the class teacher. The researcher will observe ordinary classes and activities that take place during the school day. With your agreement she will also make video recordings of specific activities and may take photographs of the class for data analysis which may be used in the final thesis

and subsequent presentations and publications. A short semi-structured interview will be conducted with the headteacher and the class teacher at the end of the school day (if appropriate) to discuss any theories they have adopted in their setting and about their ECE practices.

- **What will happen to the data collected?** In this research, all data obtained from the headteacher, class teacher and students in your class will be anonymised. In order to distinguish students from each other, assumed names will be used to represent each student. The videos and interviews will be used for data analysis during this project and photos of children attending some classes or activities may be included in the final published thesis. The researcher, XI DING, would be delighted if you and students in your class could take part in this project.
- **What will happen to the provided data including how this will be stored, who will have access to it and how individuals' identities will be protected during this process?** All the provided data will be stored by XI DING personally. The original data will be stored on a securely password protected USB stick and a copy will be stored in a personal google drive account, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Only XI DING and supervisor Dr Louise Tracey will have access to the data. Data will be kept in identifiable format for about three years but data will always be anonymised since collection, ID numbers and assumed name will be used.
- **What happens if I change my mind?** You and the students in your class can stop taking part in the research at any stage. You and your students' names will not be used in any recordings or reporting of the research. You can also request that your data be removed from this project up to two weeks after data collection is completed by contacting XI DING on [xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk). If you have any concerns, you could also contact supervisor Dr Louise Tracey on email [louise.tracey@york.ac.uk](mailto:louise.tracey@york.ac.uk) or tel +44(0)1904 328160. You can also contact the chair of the Education Ethics Committee by email [philip.evans@york.ac.uk](mailto:philip.evans@york.ac.uk).

### Appendix 3: Information sheet for Parents



#### **Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools**

##### **Information sheet for Parents**

Your children are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not you want your children to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully:

- **What is this project about?** *‘Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools’* is ethnographic research conducted by XI DING, a PhD student at the University of York, UK. It will focus on examining the process of theory-practice in the implementation of western theories in urban Chinese cities in order to understand more fully the influence of the socio-cultural context on Early Childhood Education (ECE) practices in China. Three settings in Shanghai will take part in the study. In each setting one-class of 5-6 years old children, their teacher and the headteacher will be included.
- **What will participation in the study involve?** This study will last for about 2-3 weeks in each setting. The researcher, Xi Ding, will visit the class for data collection. Visits to the setting will be in agreement with the class teacher. The researcher will observe ordinary classes and activities that take place during the school day. With your agreement she will also make video recordings of your children and may take photographs of your children for data analysis which may be used in the final thesis and subsequent presentations and publications.

- **What will happen to the data collected?** In this research, all data obtained from the headteacher, class teacher and your children in each setting will be anonymised. In order to distinguish children from each other, assumed names will be used to represent your children. The videos and interviews will be used for data analysis during this project and photos of children attending some classes or activities may be included in the final published thesis. The researcher, XI DING, would be delighted if you could allow your children to take part in this project.
- **What will happen to the provided data including how this will be stored, who will have access to it and how individuals' identities will be protected during this process?** All the provided data will be stored by XI DING personally. The original data will be stored on a securely password protected USB stick and a copy will be stored in a personal google drive account, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Only XI DING and supervisor Dr Louise Tracey will have access to the data. Data will be kept in identifiable format for about three years but data will always be anonymised since collection, ID numbers and assumed name will be used.
- **What happens if I change my mind?** Your children can stop taking part in the research at any stage. Your children's names will not be used in any recordings or reporting of the research. You can also request that your children's data be removed from this project up to two weeks after data collection is completed by contacting XI DING on [xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk). If you have any concerns, you could also contact supervisor Dr Louise Tracey on email [louise.tracey@york.ac.uk](mailto:louise.tracey@york.ac.uk) or tel +44(0)1904 328160. You can also contact the chair of the Education Ethics Committee by email [philip.evans@york.ac.uk](mailto:philip.evans@york.ac.uk).

#### **Appendix 4: Consent form for headteachers**



### **Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools**

#### **HEADTEACHER CONSENT FORM**

Please initial each box and sign below:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw myself and the school at any time up to two weeks after data collection is completed without giving any reason by contacting XI DING on email [xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk).

I understand that the information collected about me, the teachers and children in the school may be used anonymously in reports and presentations and to support other research in the future, and may be shared anonymously with other researchers.

I agree that XI DING can visit the classroom and attend activities for research purposes and videos and photos can be taken in this setting.

I agree that collected information including records of video, photos and excerpts from interview transcripts can be published in the future, providing steps have been taken to ensure identifying features have been removed.

I agree to explain to all parents of children in the participating class and to inform XI DING of any parental opt-out from the study.

I understand that all data will be stored securely and kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

I agree to be interviewed for this study. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and I will be given the opportunity to comment on a written record afterwards by contacting XI DING (xd652@york.ac.uk).

I agree for my school \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in this research conducted by XI DING and I accept the eligibility terms and conditions as described above.

Signature of Head Teacher:

Name of Head-Teacher:

Date:

**Appendix 5: Consent form for class teachers**



**Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on  
Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early  
Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools**

**Class Teacher consent form**

Please initial each box and sign below:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw in two weeks after data collection completed without giving any reason by contacting XI DING on email [xd652@york.ac.uk](mailto:xd652@york.ac.uk).

I understand that the information collected about me will be used to support other research in the future, and may be shared anonymously with other researchers.

I agree that I will introduce this research to parents and inform them with any situations.

I agree that collected information including records of video, photos and excerpts from interview transcripts can be published anonymously in the future.

I agree that XI DING can attend some part of ordinary daily activities to collect information and videos or photos taking can be allowed during day-time in this setting.

I understand that all data will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

I agree that I can provide related pupil records to the researcher.



I agree for children in my class to take part in this research conducted by XI DING and I accept the eligibility terms and conditions as described above.

Signature of Teacher:

Name of Teacher:

School Name:

Date:

**Appendix 6: Opt-out Form for Parents and Guardians**



**Early Childhood Education Practice in Urban China: An Ethnographic Research on  
Exploring Early Childhood Educational Practice and Imported Western Early  
Childhood Education Theories Reshaped in Shanghai Public Preschools**

**Parent/Guardian opt-out form**

**If you do not permit your child's data (eg. as collected through observation, pupil monitoring, setting documentation) to be used in this study, please complete this form and return it to your child's teacher.**

**I do not** wish my child's related data to be used in this research project.

**I do not** wish my child's photos or images to be used in this research project.

Pupil's name:

School name:

Class teacher:

Parent's / Guardian's name:

Date:

## **Appendix 7: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Headteachers and Class teachers**

### **Interview questions for class teacher**

This interview will focus on your personal understanding of the ECE related policies and practices. In addition, it will also cover what you think of western ECE theories. Part of daily activities arrangements will be interviewed here. The whole interview will last for about 20 to 30 minutes which also depends on your answers.

### **Part one: General/Background Questions**

1. So, just to start off with, could you tell me a little bit about yourself as a teacher?  
Prompt: how long, what training / qualifications, how long been teaching this class?

2. Can you also tell me a little about this setting and your class?

Prompt: arrangement preference, materials, class time, your preference when something unexpected happen, different kinds of activities and how

3. Can you tell me a little about the current curriculum in this setting including setting policy, government regulations, how they are translated into practice in the classroom?

Prompt: strengths or anything unsuitable? Do you want any change? If so , why and how?

4. How much do you know about western ECE theories? What do you think of them?  
What kind of western theories impact your education beliefs and practice most?
5. How do you plan your session and children's playing time? Was it based on theories, guidance or just experience?

### **Part two: questions for daily activities and plan**

1. So, can you tell me a little bit about what you have planned for today's curriculum? What is planned?

2. And what is the aim of these arrangements, what kind of goals are you aiming to achieve?

Prompts: why? Government regulations, a need in the children, parental expectation, HT directive?

3. Why and how do you make such a kind of activity?

4. So, why have you specifically planned the activities in this way? Prompts: guidance/ policies/ personal experience/theories?

5. Do you have any preference when planning the daily activities and why?

6. Can you tell me how the role play/ individual play/ free play session today? What happened? Was that how you thought it would be when you planned it? If not, why not? Why do you act/say like xxx during the activity?

**Interview questions for headteacher:**

1. Can you tell me how the ECE policies and guidance has been put into practice?
2. What do you think of the current curriculum in this setting?
3. Can you tell me about the education aims in this setting?
4. What kind of factor has the most crucial impact on the ECE practices? and how does it influence the practices in your setting?

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