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Building Educational Environment in the Child-Centered Perspective: A Survey in Preschools in Thai Nguyen City, Thai Nguyen Province, Vietnam

Abstract

Building an educational environment at a preschool has a direct influence on the quality of children's education, shaping its own values in the organizational culture of each school. This study aims to clarify what work needs to be done to build an educational environment from a child-centered point of view? What are the requirements for preschool teachers and principals? How have preschools in Thai Nguyen city, Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam built an educational environment? Theoretical research methods are used to have a theoretical model of building an educational environment from a child-centered point of view. The survey method by questionnaire combined with observation and unstructured interviews was used with a survey sample of 10 managers and 50 teachers to find out the above situation in preschools in Thai Nguyen city, Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam. Building an educational environment should pay attention to the physical environment in the classroom and outside the classroom, the psychosocial environment, all of which must be based on the needs of the child and create the most favorable conditions for the child to develop. The survey shows that preschools in Thai Nguyen city perform well in the contents with an overall GPA of 3.51/4.0 and are ready to welcome children back to school after more than 3 months of suspension because of the covid epidemic and summer vacation.

Keywords: Environment, Education, Child-centered, Preschool Children, Preschool.

Introduction

Preschool education is the first level of education in the Vietnamese national education system. The goal of preschool education is to comprehensively develop children physically, emotionally, intellectually, and aesthetically, to form the first element of personality, to prepare children for first grade (Vietnam Education Law, 2019).

Kindergarten is a preschool educational institution in the national education system of Vietnam, which has the task of organizing the nurturing, care and education of children from 3

months to 6 years old according to the educational preschool program by Kindergarten issued by the Minister of Education and Training (Charter of Kindergarten, 2020).

In order to perform well the tasks and achieve the goals of the school level, preschools are always interested in building an educational environment in the school. The environment is clean, safe, with an appropriate and convenient arrangement of playing and learning areas in the classroom and outdoors, which is meaningful in the physical development of children, satisfying the cognitive needs, opening expand children's

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understanding and stimulate children to be active and creative. An open and friendly communication environment between teachers and children, between children and children, and between children and the surrounding environment will create the best opportunities for children to develop (Sau et al., 2020).

A child-centered educational environment is an active environment that children participate in building with teachers, an educational environment based on the needs, interests and abilities of each child (Bondarenko et al., 2020). Building a child-centered educational environment is building a physical environment and a social environment that creates opportunities for children to learn in different ways through the main activity in preschool like playing, creating conditions for children to learn by playing and play by learning.

There are many different authors who have researched on the role of the environment and building the educational environment. The learning environment determines academic success and directly affects student achievement (Aghamolaei et al., 2014; Bakhshi et al., 2014). The educational environment creates favorable conditions for the personality of preschool children to develop (Belousova, 2015). Building a positive learning space has a positive effect on language development, communication and the formation of prerequisites for reading and writing to prepare children for first grade (Tauriņa, 2020). Some studies are interested in the construction of the physical environment in education, such as the setting of classroom space factors, the effectiveness of the use of facilities, etc. (Do et al., 2019; Kok et al., 2011; Vo, 2021). Some other studies are interested in building a psychosocial environment such as the communication environment between students and students, and between teachers and students in the classroom (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Belousova, 2015; Fayzullaeva, 2020; Romanova et al., 2019; Voronina et al., 2020); especially with the development of science and technology, virtual environments such as social networks facebook, twitter, online learning environment google classroom affecting students are also mentioned (Aydin, 2012; Aydin, 2014; Bondarenko et al., 2020; V. Butova et al., 2019). In general, the research goes into quite a lot of specific issues of building an educational environment.

Studies have shown the role and influence of the educational environment on the development of a good personality of students (children), but have not yet identified the elements constituting the educational environment and the requirements for building an educational environment. Building a positive educational environment in preschool has not been mentioned. On the other hand, suggestions for

building an educational environment often start from the development trend of modern society, educational goals or the interaction between teachers and children, not really starting from the beginning. Children's needs and children's participation in building the educational environment has not been shown. The author's article will clarify such issue associated with a specific location.

The question is, what should be built in order to have a positive educational environment in preschool? What are the requirements for preschool teachers and principals? How preschools in Thai Nguyen city, Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam have built an educational environment. This study aims to understand the readiness of schools when the new school year begins soon and children are about to return to school after more than 3 months of stopping school due to the covid epidemic and summer vacation.

The article focuses on clarifying the structure of the educational environment and the requirements for building an educational environment, surveying practice in preschools in Thai Nguyen city, Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam.

Literature Review

The Concept and Structure of the Educational Environment

The educational environment in a preschool is a combination of necessary and necessary natural and social conditions and directly affects the care and education of children in preschool and the effectiveness of this activity in order to contribute to the success of the goals and tasks of educating and taking care of children.

There are different conceptions of the structural division of the educational environment. The educational environment that creates psychological safety for learners includes: The educational environment is free of psychological violence in the interactions of the people in it; contributing to satisfying the need for personal trust and communication, gives participants a sense of belonging and contributes to their mental health (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015); students' expectations of the ideal educational environment emerged in four main themes including school atmosphere, teaching, human aspects (with three subthemes including teachers, students, and school staff) and non-human aspects (with two subthemes including educational equipment and physical environment, (Aghamolaei et al., 2014). If we consider the educational environment as the interaction between teachers and children, it can be divided into four areas: intellectual, personal, communicative, and cooperative (Belousova,

2015). The popular division in Vietnam is to divide the educational environment in schools into the physical environment (inside the classroom, outside the classroom), the mental environment (the psychosocial environment) (Hoang Thi Dinh, 2017; Vo, 2021).

In preschool, the physical environment includes equipment, utensils, toys, and space for the organization of children's daily activities. The physical environment provides children with good opportunities for them to satisfy their operational needs and develop comprehensively in terms of material, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and social aspects (Nguyen Thi Ut & Huynh Tan, 2020). The mental environment (also known as the psychosocial environment) in the preschool is built on the basis of the pedagogical atmosphere in the school, the interaction relationship between adults and children (teachers, staff, officials, staff in the school, young parents, etc.).

Content of Building a Child-centered Educational Environment in Preschool

For children, a clean and safe environment, with an appropriate and convenient arrangement of playing and learning areas in the classroom and outdoors, plays a great role not only in the physical development of children but also in satisfying children's cognitive needs, expand children's understanding, stimulate children to be active and creative. An open and friendly communication environment between teachers and children, between children and children, between children and the surrounding environment will create opportunities for children to share and express their feelings, aspirations and wishes with their teachers and their friends. Thanks to that, teachers will understand children better, children understand each other better, children love their school, class, teachers and friends. For preschool teachers, building a suitable educational environment will be a means for them to develop ideas for organizing educational activities suitable for each child and age. For preschool principals, building child-centered education is a factor that creates the success of the management process, helping managers achieve educational management goals. Establishing cultural goals in the school, which is meant to promote other successful activities. Building an appropriate educational environment contributes to satisfying the children's play and activity needs. Thereby, the child's personality is formed and comprehensively developed. Contents of building a child-centered educational environment include.

Building Physical Environment

The environment inside the classroom: There are rooms that ensure the regulations, arrangement and decoration of the space in a reasonable, aesthetic and friendly manner. There are corners for children to operate that are arranged conveniently, reasonably, flexibly and easily to meet the needs and interests of children's play activities. There are a variety of tools, toys, and materials for children to work on, which are interesting for the development of children and are arranged in an attractive and reasonable manner.

The environment outside the classroom: There are outdoor activities corners/area that are properly planned, designed, safe, clean and beautiful, creating opportunities for children to be active.

Building a Mental Environment (Psychosocial Environment)

The environment is built according to the child-centered point of view that will support and stimulate children's interest in playing, creating conditions for children to learn through play. Building a spiritual environment in preschool, principals and preschool teachers need to pay attention to: (1) Developing rules and regulations in communication and behavior of members in communication and dealing with children - in the process of organizing activities to care, nurture and educate children, teachers must show love, friendliness and closeness to children; (2) Develop rules and regulations in communication and behavior of children with children, children with teachers, children with other members of the preschool; (3) Building positive and friendly relationships between members of the preschool and children - build positive, friendly relationships between children and children, children with teachers, children with other members of the preschool.

Requirements for Building a Child-centered Educational Environment in Preschools

In order for the educational environment in a preschool to really have a positive educational impact on children, it is necessary to ensure the following requirements:

The design of the educational environment must be oriented towards the comprehensive development of children in order to achieve the goals of preschool education and the goals of the end of age, and at the same time suitable for the purpose of organizing child care and education activities; ensuring aesthetics, safety, creating a feeling of being loved, respected, and meeting legitimate needs.

Arrange and arrange play areas, indoor and outdoor activities in accordance with the theme, convenient for the use of teachers and children. It is necessary to plan the existing space of the school to allocate the area for activities suitable to the age, interests, abilities, etc. of the children and suitable for the general activities of the class, group or individual activities.

Ensure sufficient and diversified types of materials, equipment, utensils and toys suitable for each topic; clearly show the cultures of ethnic groups to create opportunities to participate and apply the knowledge and skills learned by children in building an environment and stimulating the all-round development of children (Tan hoi & Thi Thu Chung, 2020).

Always create opportunities and expand social communication relationships between children with many people to help children be confident, positive and interested in educational activities for comprehensive development; collect and create more games by regularly changing the way they play, the rules of the game to encourage children to participate, actively play - practice - experiment with different types of equipment, utensils and toys; encourage children to create their own toys and games according to their own ideas; organize for children to participate in free play activities, contests, festivals, etc. for children to experience.

Focusing on raising awareness for parents and the community about the meaning of building an educational environment in preschool; create more opportunities for families and communities to participate in school activities; building positive relationships with young families, closely coordinating with families and communities in child care and education; respecting the differences and needs of each family to have collaborations with each family in the care and education of children in various forms and methods to attract parents and the community to participate effectively in construction of an educational environment in preschools.

Methods, Subjects, Scope and Research Results

Methods, Subjects and Scope of the Survey

Surveying the actual situation of building the physical and mental environment in preschools according to the contents described in Section 2.2. The survey sample is 50 teachers, 10 principals and vice principals at 5 public preschools in Thai Nguyen city, Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam (Quang Trung Kindergarten, 19.5 Kindergarten, Thinh Dan Kindergarten, Gia Sang Kindergarten, Dong Quang Kindergarten). We use a questionnaire and the items of the

survey are determined according to 4 levels, from high to low, corresponding to a score of 4 to 1. Using the combination of observation and unstructured interview methods. some teachers to better understand their way of doing things. The study period was from April 2021 to August 2021.

To determine the distance between the levels of the scale, the author calculates the scale score using the formula: (Maximum score - minimum score): number of levels. So the scale distance is: (4-1): 4 = 0.75 points. Level 1 (Weak, Poor) from 1 to 1.75; Level 2 (medium): from 1.76 to 2.5; Level 3 (fair): from 2.51 to 3.25; Level 4 (good): from 3.26 to 4.

- The average score for each entry in the tables is calculated using the formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x_i k_i}{n}$$

Explanation: \bar{x} is the mean value of each criterion of a problem; x_i is the score for each criterion ($x_1 = 3, x_2 = 2, x_3 = 1$); k_i is the number of people scoring in each criterion; n is the total number of people who participated in the assessment ($n = k_1 + k_2 + k_3$).

- The overall mean value for each questionnaire was calculated according to the formula:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum \bar{x}_i}{N}$$

Explanation: \bar{X} is the average value for a problem; \bar{x} is the mean value of each criterion; N is the total number of criteria for a problem.

Result

Total survey was 60 people, including 8 administrators (principals, vice principals) and 50 teachers. The structure is as follows:

Table 1.

Description of the Number of Survey Samples

	Total	Tỷ lệ (%)
	60	100
Gender		
Female	60	100
Male	0	0
Age		
20 - 30 years old	24	40,0
31 - 40 years old	24	40,0
41 - 50 years old	12	20,0
Over 50 years old	0	0,0
Training degree		
Intermediate	5	8,3
College	10	16,7
University	41	68,3
Master	4	6,7
Job position		
Principal	5	8,3
Vice principal	5	8,3
Teacher	50	83,3

About gender: 100% female in which 80% (preschool training standards are university standards and above the standards of training are 40 years old or younger, 75% meet the degree).

Table 2.

Summary of Opinions on Building an Educational Environment from a Child-centered Point of View in Preschools in Thai Nguyen City

No.	Survey content	Comments								Average point
		Good		Fair		Medium		Weak, Poor		
		QTY	%	QTY	%	QTY	%	QTY	%	
1	Building the environment inside the classroom									
1.1	Arrange learning materials, materials, utensils, toys in the activity corner.	30	50	15	25	15	25	0	0	3,25
1.2	Utensils, toys, materials are changed and added in accordance with the children's activities and interests.	30	50	20	33,3	10	16,7	0	0	3,33
2	Building the environment outside the classroom									
2.1	Learning materials, toys and vehicles are specific to each corner/area, creating opportunities for children to participate in activities;	25	41,7	20	33,3	15	25	0	0	3,17
2.2	Toys, learning materials, equipment in corners/operational areas ensure safety and hygiene.	40	66,7	15	25	5	8,33	0	0	3,58
2.3	Arrange areas for children to play, live and study outdoors	30	50	25	41,7	5	8,33	0	0	3,42
2.4	The height of the wall system, the width of the gate and the signboard;	50	83,3	5	8,33	5	8,33	0	0	3,75
2.5	Area for placing propaganda boards, parent mailboxes.	50	83,3	10	16,7	0	0	0	0	3,83
2.6	Sanitation of water, air, food safety.	40	66,7	15	25	5	8,33	0	0	3,58
3	Develop rules and codes of conduct in preschools based on the spirit of cooperation and child-centeredness									
3.1	Develop rules and regulations in communication and behavior of preschool members with children.	40	66,7	10	16,7	10	16,7	0	0	3,50
3.2	Develop rules and regulations in communication and behavior of children with children, children with teachers, children with other members of the preschool.	40	66,7	10	16,7	10	16,7	0	0	3,50
4	Building positive, friendly relationships based on a child-centered spirit									
4.1	Build positive, friendly relationships between members of the preschool and children.	40	66,7	20	33,3	0	0	0	0	3,67
4.2	Build positive, friendly relationships between children and children, children with teachers, children with other members of the preschool.	35	58,3	20	33,3	5	8,33	0	0	3,50
	GPA									3,51

The results in Table 2 show that the overall average score is 3.51 but it is not uniform among the evaluation contents. The highest rating belongs to the construction of the environment outside the classroom. "The height of the wall system, the width of the gate and the signboard" (3.75); "Area for placing propaganda boards, parent mailboxes" (3.83). The worst are the prepared content about supplies and toys in and

out of the classroom. "Learning materials, toys and vehicles have specific types for each corner/area, creating opportunities for children to participate in activities" (3,17); "Arrange learning materials, materials, utensils, toys in the activity corner" (3,25); "Utensils, toys, materials are changed and added in accordance with the children's activities and interests" (3,33).

Table 3.

Summary of Opinions on Ensuring the Requirements in Building an Educational Environment from a Child-centered Point of View in Preschools in Thai Nguyen City

No.	Survey content	Comments								Average point
		Good		Fair		Medium		Weak, poor		
		QTY	%	QTY	%	QTY	%	QTY	%	
1	Ensure an educational environment towards the all-round development of children.	30	50	20	33,3	10	16,7	0	0	3,33
2	Ensure aesthetics and safety to make children feel loved, respected and meet legitimate needs.	35	58,3	15	25	10	16,7	0	0	3,42
3	Ensure appropriate layout and arrangement of play areas, indoor and outdoor activities.	30	50	15	25	15	25	0	0	3,25
4	The school's space, allocating the area for appropriate activities.	30	50	20	33,3	10	16,7	0	0	3,33
5	Suitable materials, equipment, utensils, toys	30	50	15	25	15	25	0	0	3,25
6	Creating opportunities and expanding social relationships between children with many people helps children to be confident and positive.	25	41,7	25	41,7	10	16,7	0	0	3,25
7	Create opportunities for families and the community to be involved in school activities	25	41,7	20	33,3	15	25	0	0	3,17
	GPA									3,29

The results shown in Table 3 show that: The overall average score is 3.29 and there is not much difference in the evaluation level between the items. The most implemented and appreciated content is "Ensuring aesthetics and safety to make children feel loved, respected and to meet legitimate needs" (3,42 - Good). The lowest is "Create opportunities for families and the community to be involved in school activities" (3.17 - Fair).

Discussion

From the table of data in Table 2, it can be seen that the overall assessment of the content of building an educational environment in preschool is at a good level (3.51). The results of Table 3 also show that the principals, vice principals and teachers ensure the requirements in building an

educational environment at a preschool in Thai Nguyen city at a good level (3.29).

Building a physical environment outside the classroom is highly appreciated. Actual observations at Quang Trung Kindergarten, 19.5 Kindergarten, and Thinh Dan Kindergarten have shown that the schools have enough land to arrange areas for children to play, live and study outdoors in a scientific and appropriate manner: there is a gymnasium for children throughout the school and a sports area (basketball poles, climbing ladders); play area with outdoor toys (slides, swings, seesaws, ball houses); the area for planting trees and taking care of trees; outdoor stage area, grass planting area, flower growing area, ornamental tree planting, fruit trees, shade trees on the school grounds; the height of the wall system, the width of the gate and the signboard; area for placing propaganda boards, parent mailboxes, etc.

Building a classroom environment is also highly appreciated (though not to the same extent as building an environment outside the classroom). Observing the classrooms of Quang Trung Kindergarten, Dong Quang Kindergarten, Gia Sang Kindergarten, and Thinh Dan Kindergarten shows that the teachers have designed and built a classroom environment with many vivid colors, different ways, suitable arrangement. The play corners (eg. discovery corner, construction corner, etc.) are beautifully decorated and have toys, learning materials and vehicles specific to each corner. Utensils, toys, materials and learning materials are neatly and neatly stored in a place where children can see, easily get, and easy to store after use. Depending on the topic, the theme used, the toys and materials will be changed and supplemented accordingly.

In terms of building a psychosocial environment, preschools in Thai Nguyen city have done well to ensure a friendly, sociable and close communication environment between teachers and children, and between children and children. All 5 surveyed preschools have developed a cultural code of conduct at the agency, including a code of conduct between teachers and teachers, administrators and teachers, and teachers with children.

Besides the advantages, through unstructured interviews with some principals and teachers, we also learned some limitations that preschools in Thai Nguyen city are facing: The number of children per class is usually larger. According to regulations, equipment and toys for children's educational activities in preschool are only minimal, outdoor equipment is quickly damaged due to the rainy weather in the North of Vietnam. sunny and humid. Preschool teachers are under great pressure on the quality of children's education, the large number of children, etc., so it sometimes affects the building of a psychological environment for children.

Conclusion

The child-centered educational environment in preschool is an environment built on the characteristics, needs, abilities, and interests of the child. of activities to form and develop good personality. Building an educational environment at a preschool from a child-centered point of view is the process of designing and creating the necessary physical, natural and psychosocial conditions to meet the needs of children's abilities and interests in order to achieve good quality the goals of preschool education. A survey of the current situation in 5 preschools in Thai Nguyen city, Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam with 60 administrators and preschool teachers has shown that the schools are fully prepared and ready to

welcome children. This is an initial study, because in fact, the construction of an educational environment in preschools needs to be analyzed in relation to the management factors of the school principal, educational policies of preschool policies and the attention of young parents and local authorities at all levels. The conclusions drawn from the survey of 5 preschools may not be representative of all schools in Thai Nguyen city. A larger-scale study and study on the construction of the educational environment with the factors affecting this activity is needed.

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