

Examining teacher's belief and practices in preschool outdoor play –  
A diverse case studies

By

Anitha Thiagarajam

E60105200017

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of diverse study was to locate the beliefs and practices in regards to outdoor play for early educators at three multiple preschool areas. Every area, situated at Klang district rendered a dissimilar playground surrounding which are natural, mixed and manufactured. School playground surroundings involved a natural environment with tree, grass and restrained stationery tools, a traditional, mainly implanted manufactured playground and natural with manufactured mix playground. For purpose of this study the concept early education refers full-day and half-day programs, for children ages group between 3 to 5 years old. Utilizing purposeful, greatest form of sampling, three teachers from every preschool were picked to participate, rooted on ages, total years of experience and education qualification. The Data collection technique is done using observation, by the method of measurement scale of preschool outdoor environment (Cusco & McGinnis,2005) semi structured interviews and document analysis is to get a general picture on the objective for every preschool concerning young one's practise on the playground and attain triangulation of details. Cross- case analysis was formed as the subsequent types of knowledge of themes: teachers organise, teacher beliefs, teachers practices and playgrounds features. Findings from the research shows that even though each of teachers appreciated the arrangement of outdoor play and observed their form and arch over their duty as supervisory, a dissimilarity prevailed on how the teachers participate with children and make use of the playground environment to make the best on children's learning. Teacher's execution varied from directing independently play to organising an activities and interconnection and associated with children to make a structure, scaffolding the learning. According to this research, the features of the playgrounds carry out and influence the teacher's interconnection and associate with young ones. Teachers who have more likeable mindset to loose element was more expected to involve loose element on the playground surroundings, and were observed as better take part in significant connection and associate with children.

Recommendations are given for administrator of early education and faculty of higher education.

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**Declaration page**

I certify that I complete this assignment by myself and it contains the findings of my own research. I have noted the depth and nature of work completed with cooperation with everybody associated in this work.

Signature: *Anitha Thiagarajam*

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Outdoor play has carried an important place in early childhood education since start of kindergarten and nursery centre in early 1800s. Letting children to exposed to natural and man-made components in their living surroundings will lead to social and cognitive skills development. Thus, playgrounds take part as a significant role in child development. Early teachers were considered as essential since they stimulated the concepts of children acquire by play. Long periods of sitting are not developmentally suitable for children. In different term, since teacher are limiting children's natural urge to be energetic when requesting them to sit in school, they should invent with periods of physical activities. Children today are more engaged with indoor play liken to outdoor tasks. The origin cause of this changes appeared to be the expansion used of technology and little or no approach to outdoor space of play. Orderly, to assist the quality outdoor play exposures for young ones, research is required to grasp the space between the interests of playing outdoors, teacher belief, view and the real practice of organising the outdoor play. By attending the experiences of early education teachers, observing real practice and studying strategy for playground operating, this study gives extensively understanding of present belief and practice of teacher regarding outdoor play.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As most of young children passing their time in early education surroundings, it is essential that these centre to give excellent outdoor surroundings like element of their routine schedule. Even though teachers seldom play a duty to design the outdoor playground, they perform a huge number of impacts beyond the setup and use of what the playground provides to strengthen the learning. These days, modern communities appear to forget the value of such environment for the growth of young children. Children today drain more time being trained

and assessed on literacy and math capability than learning through play and exploration, use imaginations and physical activity. The surrounding is a support for imaginative and cooperative play. In reality, exposure to outdoor surroundings supports the cognitive and intellectual growth which related to extensive learning. Hence, the environmental knowledge along play requires a guidance in the lives of children cooperatively with ideas and practices of communities. This research optimistically, will brighten the obstacle that might stopped teachers from executing finding of current study.

### **Objective of the study**

The goal of diverse case study was to examine the belief and practices of outdoor play for early education educator at three schools with multiple playground surroundings. I look to give in-depth study of each location and overall awareness including details that influence teachers in their decision making about the utilisation of outdoor playgrounds.

### **Research Question**

1. How does early education teacher explain their awareness and belief of outdoor play practice?
2. How does early education teachers organise for outdoor play as module of their curriculum?
3. What behaviours usually early teachers show during playground with their students?
4. How does the amenities of the playground surroundings influence teacher 's practice and belief?

### **Significance of study**

Early education teachers own a clear duty by giving outdoor play experiences for children. In parents do not give outside play experience for their children, the chances given by preschool environment are important. Different thinking of teachers concerning their duty and participation in young ones' play in their school playground effect children's opportunities from discovering outdoor surroundings. Since the total of children occupying majority of their hours in preschool it is important that these routine gives an opportunity for physical task with quality outdoor surroundings. The end result is an explanation of each teacher practice and belief linked to the mentioned various of playground and perception of common teacher practice thus belief over cases involving multiple playground surroundings. This research gives recommendations for teachers, parents, director and regulatory organisation. Practice and belief are established by experiences and expectantly this study will support by helping others to investigate the boundless learning chances in the outdoor surroundings.

### **Limitations of study**

The case study is restricted by limitations to express, practice and belief of teachers that qualified in the area with those experience ongoing professional growth on the current evidence root practise for early education. Particulars for this research was limited and gathered from three preschools in Klang. Observational data is limited since use of POEMS evaluation through outdoor play involvement assisted by every participant interviewed.

**Definitions**

The name is interpreted to give definition for some ideas comprise in this research.

**Early education** – the terms comprise full day and half day preschool for young one. The age between 3-5 yrs.

**Loose elements** – natural / manufactured, open - ended items, that young children can carry, handle and commonly use in various methods contain natural items like rocks, dry leaves, small wood and manufactures items like vessel, blocks and framework.

**POEMS** - Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

#### **Theoretical applications**

The research review points on value of outdoor play for preschool children playground surroundings and particularly teacher practices and belief in such surroundings. Many playground features, and standard regulations and centre method governing children's play on outside playgrounds, are reviewed. Play is critical for a child's cognitive development, as per to constructivist theory philosophy. Literature is begun with structure of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructive concept and Ajzen' (2019) planned behaviour concept. More research is needed to see if existing teacher attitudes and practises reflect the recent literature's high extent of importance of outdoor play and teacher participation, as well as the relationship between teacher beliefs and practises and the playground surroundings. Play consider critical for a child's cognitive growth, as per constructivist concept philosophy. Vygotsky (1978) viewed play as incorporating in all aspects of learning, stating that it benefited social growth, cognitive and emotional skills. According to the social constructivist structure, children's education experiences during outdoor play time may differ depending on the planned surroundings and interactions given by the teacher.

On the other hand, (Ajzen, 2019) theory of planned behaviour aiming to carry out multiple actions and behaviours that can be accurately estimated from attitude towards behaviour. This theory is connected to the current research that teacher requires to have a confident and belief of their duty in directing children for outdoor play in effort to scaffold skills in outside setting. However, do preschool teacher recognise the critical roles they play in allowing children to gain the welfare of investing time outdoors? The aim of this literature review to examine the prior context of outdoor play, the investigated advantages for children, varied playground surroundings and the teacher's duty on the preschool playground in influencing outside play.

## **Literature of review**

### **Learning - Play -based**

Many centuries, play comprises internationally acknowledged as critical to children's healthy growth and well-being. As it is child-centred, entertaining and inspiring, play is nearly a natural way for learning. There are too many studies to name that show the importance of play in every aspect of children growth, social, emotional, cognitive and physical. For example, Fesseha, E., and Pyle, A., (2016) states established thinkers and theorists like Frobel, Rousseau, Montessori and Dewey believed the basic satisfaction of facilitating children to direct their skills by individuality and combined play. Recent theorists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky believed that a child's basic conceptions are developed by play active participation with the surroundings. Vygotsky stressed through interactions with the child, the teacher serves as a facilitator during research, however Piaget focused understanding oneself is teacher's duty in preparing the surroundings (Fesseha, E., & Pyle, A., 2016).

### **History of Outdoor Play**

Early 1800s, Friedrich Froebel established the preschool and childcare centre, outdoor play has challenged a significant part in early childhood studies (Fesseha, E., & Pyle, A., 2016). Froebel emphasised that play should be the backbone of early education, featured an outdoor natural space in his kindergartens. During the latter half of the twentieth century, as academic requirements increased in education, the emphasis on outdoor play seemed to vanish. Prioritization of reading and math skills was taught to children in order to prepare them for later learning, often within the confines of the indoor setting. Added recently, after the publishing of H. Biltons book, *Taking the first steps outside* (2017) there has been a renaissance in national and worldwide programmes to experience children outdoors has materialised.

### **Outdoor Play- benefits**

The outdoors supplies a number of intellectual opportunities that were not always available indoors. Future more, Evans GW; et al., (2018) states more room for activity, nature and season changes, more privilege for healthy leisure connections and imagination learning are just a few of these benefits. Nevertheless, study has carried combined, entire child development in outside settings, containing field of academic learning, physical growth, social and emotional growth, the development of individuality and imagination plus the nourishing care for earth.

**Physical development.** Physical benefits are among the greatest well-known advantages of outdoor play for children. In this study, Gabriela Bento and Gisela Dias (2017) indicates that children engage in the most active play while they are outside, mainly because open space gives less restriction on child's gross motor movement than indoor surroundings. Also, Gabriela Bento & Gisela Dias (2017) found on playgrounds with jumping equipment and marking on ground, like those used on a path for running, children were much more physically active. In this research great concentrations of physical activity were easily noticeable in outdoor playground. On the other hands, Laerke Mygind ; Mette K; et al., (2021) pointed out that, good play experiences in an encouraging natural surrounding with tress and changeable landscape also been connected to more motor skills, like coordination and balance when contrasted to traditional playground with embedded fittings.

The outdoor playground provides many opportunities for both gross and fine motor ability to growth. For example, gross motor contains skills as jumping, running, lifting and bending. Whereas fine motor contains skills manipulate in constructive play. For example, (Zahra Fathirezaie; Kosar A; et al., 2021, p 157) claims fine motor skills growth is common in sand play and when loose element is attached to playground settings.

**Academic Learning.** Children utilise natural resources to show something completely contrasting when playing outside, like a soil in a pot turn to rice for lunch. This potential to

communicate is precisely linked with fundamental principles of learning and scripting. Similarly, Li, J.; Hestenes, L.L.; Wang, Y.C (2016) claims children who are capable of manipulating character in role play are more suitable capable to manipulate symbols in writing, reading and mathematics. On the other hands, children learn science, language and mathematic topics holistically as they investigate and observation in outdoor playground surroundings. (Jeon, H ,2019) Thus, the importance of the surrounding in contributing to academic learning must be considered.

**Curiosity and imagination.** Connecting with outside surroundings nature gives children direct experiences and knowledge as well as the capacity to self-direct their learning. The outdoor surroundings necessitate the use of all five senses, in contrast the indoor surroundings may necessitate to utilise only two, hearing and sight. When children are playing outdoor, they can touch the fallen leaf and see how it differs from more plants on the playground. The children may smell the leaf yet feel its appearance as well as observe the impact of weather changes on surroundings. This stimulating sensory environment fosters the growth of curiosity and imagination. This approach and situation describe the situation as Richard.L (2005), claimed that "Nature is necessary in proper growth of children's sensation, and hence for knowledge and creativity."(p.55). Conversely, in outdoor surroundings that stimulates and entices children curiosity, they are possible to growth their sensation of discovery.

**Social and emotional well-being** Social emotional skills has seen as crucial and connected with, curriculum skills for a healthy, entire child development (Truelove, S. and Bruijns, 2018). The outdoor playground is a location where children may practise social and emotional skills that will help them succeed in school later on. When given an opportunity as child centred -play, children discover themselves, independently from grown-up, and obtain social skills via communication with friends. Conversely in this approach Howard; J, et al

(2017) stated children discover to cooperate and to self-control and overcome as a result the children feel a sense of achievement and overall well-being.

**Opportunities for taking risks.** In this perception, risky activities entail a sense of uncertainty as well as a task that may be overcome. Jumping from huge boulders, swinging excessive, and riding bicycle at a quicker pace are all examples of dangerous play in the outdoor playground setting. In Canadian Public Health publication (2019) argued between risk and hazard. Hazards are potentially hazardous circumstances that might result in significant harm, like climbing layout with loose panel or sharp nails projecting from the layout. Whereas risks on the playground must be supervised and scaffolded by instructors as the kid navigates dangerous circumstances suitable for his or her level of development. (Www. cpha.ca/risk-hazard-and-play-what-are-risks-and-hazards.)

More recently after the publication on Canadian Public Health (2019), though it is a controversial issue, early development researcher believe children require the chance to engage in dangerous activities. Ellen, Ole & Rasums (2021) point out that the word dangerous show on negative feelings, yet “actuality is eagerness to participate in few risky tasks allows opportunity to acquire abilities, attempt original behaviours and eventually realise one’s capabilities” (p.3354). Teachers can keep an eye out for any risks on the playground and take the appropriate precautions to eradicate them.

**Playground Environments.** History. Public school playgrounds have maintained the same basic architectural patterns. Preschool grounds were initially created in a developmentally suitable manner, with a focus on play. According to Martinko, Katherine (2017), In Boston, the first outdoor playground for young kids was created in 1886, and it was congruent with the outdoor fun ideas, emphasising motor ability growth plus dissipating excess energy. It was a sand pile or “sand plot “designed after the sand pile offered for children's play. (Martinko & Katherine,2017). Till recently, good quality preschools based on child

development research have been remarkably undisturbed by the second theoretical track, which originally regulated park playgrounds and afterward public-school playgrounds.

This second theoretical track promoted physical fitness and had the most influence with the gigantic squid. In 1928, the National Recreation Association advised that preschool playgrounds have "a sandbox, six chair swings, a little slide, and a modest low climber."

(Fernelius C, & Christensen k, 2017, p.78) On the other hands, steel constructions from the 1940s, such as gigantic slides, seesaws, and jungle gyms. (Martinko & Katherine,2017)

**Current Playgrounds.** Modern play concepts have expanded on the early goal of preschool playgrounds on just releasing extra stamina and engaging in joyful movement. Considering the outside playground surroundings got an expansion of the indoor classroom and same significant aspect of the educational surroundings is regarded as critical to reaping the welfare of outdoor fun. Froebel argued that the outside surroundings, particularly children's activities, should be organised cautiously as the inside surroundings. (Ierstrup, I; & VDB; C.K (2017). However, (Stefania.S et al,2021, p.16) classified the outdoor surroundings like a teacher. They contended since physical settings educate children, it is critical to provide outdoor surroundings that give children many choices of tasks and allow possibilities for own control learning.

**Types of environments** Today's playgrounds for children different from traditional with variety of implanted appliance to open, 'eco-friendly' playgrounds that emphasise nature events. Generally, the surroundings must developmental suitable for little ones who will use it. As for good quality grading on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Revised Edition, centres require to offer a diverse range of exterior on the outside playground to inspire various modes of play, including block, sand and water play, and material for dramatic play in the outdoor surrounding area. (Chilton & Tony, 2018).

When stakeholders make decisions on buying appropriate playground equipment, they should examine aspects like children's academic, age and experience, their physical features, and skill development. However, in this approach, research claims that teachers are seldom consulted in playground planning. (Christensen, K., & Fernelius, C, 2017)

**Loose elements.** Natural elements that can be grabbed from the land, like dry leaves, wood and rocks, might be considered loose elements in a natural setting. Gull, C; S. L., & Rosengarten, et al (2019) examined that during playground what children show to teacher, a natural loose element gives an opportunity for interaction between them and develop cognitive skill. In this study, loose elements on the playground made of natural components gave teachers the opportunity to contribute to child-initiated engagement. Researchers also discovered that when children have access to loose elements and adult assistance, their play becomes more imaginative and continuous. (Gibson, L., Cornell, M., & Gill, T, 2017)

**Children's outdoor preferences.** Young ones often express that they like to play outside rather than indoors. This may be described by the range of child-centred activities available in the surrounding area. The role of play and the behaviours associated with it change depending on the playground setting and the features provided by the setting. Many studies have been conducted to determine place and how children choose to play when offered the option with variety playground surroundings. Ellen Almers. et al, (2020) discover that playing with implanted playground equipment like a slider, swings, and ladders was highly productive. Climbing, sliding, and jumping were common gross motor activities also on embedded equipment. Natural environments on playgrounds appear to give greater opportunity for children to engage in constructive play as well as imaginative.

### **Outdoor play - Teacher Beliefs**

Margaret Davies a theorist in 1997, examined eight preschools' educators to investigate their attitudes and belief surroundings educator's duty in outdoor play. He discovered the educator saw their duty as primarily supervisory, establishing a safe atmosphere for play and interfering only when necessary to divert dangerous or improper behaviour. This was straightforward from Davies' investigation that teacher felt children must allowed to occupied in activity on the playground without undue disruption from their teacher. When the observer saw the similar educator with children on the ground, the children's free play confirmed the educator's observed opinions. (Davies, 1997)

More study has been reported on the advantages of outdoor exposures for children, since 1997. Recent research, Lehte Tuuling, et al (2019) focused on the beliefs and practises of teachers. According to teachers, the outdoor environment provides vital chances for children's growth in overall domains of curriculum, educator engagement was critical in scaffolding this learning. However, these same teachers were seen on the playground with children, they are not detected communicating with children plus scaffolding discovering. In contrast, they had not been near to children during outside play. (Lehte Tuuling et al, 2019) Similar to Davies (1997) Lehte Tuuling, at al (2019) discover that the teachers consider their duty on the playground as supervisory. Teachers in current research did not view it was vital to organise for outside activities as indicated that they intended to offer children the same independence to play when they were young. The teachers believed in the significance of outdoor activities, but they "lacked awareness and motivation that would nurture the growth of their outdoor surroundings" in this study. Despite the fact that the design of each research was limited, they both demonstrate the persistent fact of lack preparation by teacher for outside play.

**Role of the teacher.** The teacher plays a critical in determining whether or not children in school participate in outdoor play on a routine schedule. On the other hand, several studies

show the reasons teachers usually prefer indoor learning task and low self-confidence with their ability to offer a dynamic outdoor situation.

For example, Beker, C et al (2017) states teacher cause for avoiding children to outdoor play are, weather situation like rain and prefer for indoors. In addition, Davies, R., and Hamilton, P. (2018) also claims that the challenging plan tools for outdoor playground had also been a barrier to teacher in delivering day-to-day outdoor playing. Most importantly, Manning, M., Garvis, S., et al (2017) founds that teacher with a more extensive academic background and professional training are more enthusiastic in providing outdoor play opportunities.

Although the previous studies remarked that the teacher was unaware of the importance of preparing an outdoor play area, the importance of having an outdoor play area should not be overlooked. This approach explores by Palavan, O. et al (2016), that teachers can promote knowledge with play by providing children adequate period to grow, supporting in the planning and monitoring of their play's progress, by offering themes as well as appropriate materials and toys to support their play. Ultimately, this study supports that the teacher's responsibility not just propose the child to outdoors, but to foster and grow this relationship.

**Beliefs on risk play.** In every play area, children seek dangerous types of play; but the natural playground provided more intense and adventurous play experiences. Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter et al. (2021) utilised an experimental approach to investigate how teachers' risk views influence elementary school children' playground experiences. The researchers noticed that teachers were unduly preoccupied with checking children, ensuring that children did not get injured, and exaggerating cautions when children engaged in less dangerous activities. It was claimed that teachers must create a stability when providing safety and empowering children to take part in interesting and challenging play whereas learning to handle risk.

## **Conclusion**

A literature review on children in outdoor play stress for an additional study on existing teacher beliefs and practises surrounding playground participation. Based on findings, children's possibilities to play and study outside are decrease. As a result of the increased demand for childcare, early education teachers are critical in giving children with many more opportunities to learn outside. As reviewed these needs children's healthy growth takes effort, opportunity, materials, and equipment for unrestricted creative play, free from excessive and overly cautious caregivers. According to current research, there is a gap between teacher knowledge and actual practise when it comes to structuring outdoor involvement for children. This research will aid in understanding early education teachers' existing ideas and practises on the utilization of the playground to enhance children's learning in all aspects of development in high-quality centres

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this diverse case study was to examine early education teachers' beliefs and practice about outdoor play for pre-schoolers. Three early schools, each with different playground surroundings, were studied for teacher beliefs and practises. Chapter Three describes the chosen research design and how it was used to gather and construct data. Then, detail of the three locations is provided, as well as the standards for selecting participants. My research questions are described and pertain to particular teacher beliefs on outdoor play, whether or not teachers prepare for outdoor play, how teachers understand their job when on the playground with young ones, and how playground aspects influence teacher beliefs and practice. To end this chapter, I present the research study's ethical considerations.

### **Research Method**

This qualitative case study was unique in that it examined at three separate bounded cases, or early education settings and it will improve the outer validity or generalizability of my findings. This study used a diverse case study research design since it emphasises on "how" and "why" queries connected to reality event of teachers' practices and belief regarding outdoor play. Three teachers were chosen at random from all locations, were observed while on the playground, and then interviewed utilising a semi-structured interview guide. By using the observational data, interview note and relevant documents like class time-table and parents and employee handbooks, I observed and analysed three various playgrounds surrounding in effort to gain a better understanding on the potential differences in how teachers operate outdoor play for preschool children.

## Sample

### Locations

In this study purposeful sampling was utilised to choose diverse cases, or early education centre, since this concept is strongly associated with design of qualitative research. Three rising early childhood education centres in state of Selangor with various playground surroundings were deliberately chosen for this study in order to well understand the circumstance of beliefs about outdoor play. Teacher beliefs and practises were observed and analysed on every location with the goal of providing a cross-case analysis, ultimately increasing the knowledge foundation of early childhood outdoor play, and providing overall findings to notify plan, practises, and approaches.

All three locations, categorised as Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 for privacy and confidential reasons, situated in Klang district are classified as quality, accredited by Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) for private institutions offering Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes. All three locations provide child-centred, developmentally appropriate and play-based education. I was familiar with Locations 1 and 3 because of my membership in "Persatuan Pengusaha Tadika Swasta Klang" (PPTSK). Due to my association with PPTSK, I had once met both centre principals and had visited location 1 and 3.

Location 2 also MQA accredited place, with a mix of natural and manufactured playground that were suggested by my friend. I ultimately chose location 2 because both natural and manufactured aspects were consisted within the same gated area, in fact the other site given two separate playgrounds, with natural abilities and manufactured abilities.

#### Location 1: Manufactured Playground

Location 1 is a corporate childcare branch that has been in operation since 2015. The centre has 80 children, aged 2.5 years to 6 years through full and half-day, operating from 7 morning to 6:00 evening on weekdays. After-school care is available from aged 5 to 12 years. The age