



MODULE CODE: EDCE7020

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT: 2

STUDENT NAME: Linghua Zeng

STUDENT NUMBER: 2308290

Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Exploring the Teaching Practices of Nursery School Teachers in Wales: A Cross-Cultural Inquiry from a Chinese Early Childhood Educator's Perspective

1.Introduction

In recent years, the field of preschool education in China has increasingly attached importance to the "child centred" education concept, and has promoted Kindergarten Based Curriculum Reform in many regions, emphasizing teachers' individual observation and development understanding of children as an important means to improve the appropriateness and quality of the curriculum. Taking Guangxi, my hometown, as an example, many kindergarten teachers regard the competition of kindergarten teachers' skills competition held by Guangxi Education Bureau as the focus of teacher development. Before 2021, the main projects of the kindergarten teacher skills competition are "curriculum design" and "simulation teaching"; After 2021, it will be changed to "children's behaviour observation and support" and "half day activity design and demonstration" (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Department of Education, 2019; 2021). The change of this provincial key event has also led many kindergartens in Guangxi to list "observing children" as the key direction of curriculum construction, trying to cultivate observation as the core skill of teachers, and based on the development of a more "child centred" curriculum system. However, my interview with teachers in Guilin in Guangxi in 2024 found that many teachers were difficult to balance collective teaching and individual observation. Scholars' researches also showed that collective teaching was still one of the main forms of teaching organisation in kindergartens in China (Zhu, 2006; Li et al. 2011), making it difficult to implement the role of "teachers as observers".

In this context, the Foundation Phase education framework implemented in Wales provides me with an enlightening practical model to promote the professional development of Chinese teachers. Since its full implementation in 2008, the course has emphasized game-based inquiry learning, cross-domain integrated curriculum structure, and continuous responsive interaction mechanism between teachers and children (Welsh Government, 2015). Under this framework, the role of teachers has been redefined: they are not only organisers of teaching activities, but also keen observers and environmental guides. They need to dynamically adjust teaching content and strategies according to children's interests and behaviour (Taylor et al., 2015; Wainwright et al., 2019). This kind of "observation based" teaching regulation mode is highly consistent with the "child-oriented" curriculum concept emphasized in the current Chinese preschool education reform.

Although the Foundation Phase curriculum system is becoming more and more mature in Wales and has gradually formed an education model to support children's lifelong learning, the existing scholars in China still pay relatively limited attention to it. At present, the only studies on Foundation Phase in Wales on chinaknowledge.com mostly focus on the analysis of policy documents, and lack of empirical research and analysis of teaching behaviour on how to implement observation mechanism and game teaching in front-line teaching. There are a lot of academic gaps.

Based on this, this study adopts the qualitative research method, goes deep into the Nursery School in Wales, and systematically explores how teachers carry out game teaching, implement children's observation and adjust teaching strategies under the framework of Foundation Phase through classroom observation and teacher interview. This study aims to restore teachers' professional practice and thinking path in the real situation, and provide cross-cultural experience for the reform of preschool education in China, especially the construction of teachers' ability in Kindergarten Based Curriculum in Guilin.

Around this goal, this study will focus on the following four core issues:

1. What are the characteristics of the structure and organisation of Nursery School under the framework of Welsh Foundation Phase curriculum?
2. How do teachers design and implement game-based learning activities in this framework?
3. How do teachers define and perform their teaching roles in the process of game teaching?
4. How do teachers systematically observe, record and analyse children's learning behaviour and make teaching responses accordingly?

Through the discussion of these issues, this study will form a clear and specific understanding of the Nursery School in Wales, and provide new possibilities for expanding the path of teachers' professional development in China through the understanding of "understanding through the lens of 'the Other'".

2. Research Methodology

The research method used in this study consists of three core components: Interpretative Philosophical Framework, Reflective Thinking and Qualitative Research Design. This combination is not only highly consistent with the research issues of this study in theory, but

also provides a path for cross-cultural researchers to deeply understand the phenomenon of education in practice.

2.1 Interpretivism

Interpretivism aims to help researchers understand the meaning of teaching behaviour constructed by teachers in a specific cultural and educational context, rather than objectively measure the behaviour itself. Interpretivism emphasizes that social reality is not a natural object, but the result of people's subjective construction in the process of interaction (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This view is particularly important in educational research, because teachers' teaching behaviour is often affected by their educational philosophy, cultural background and institutional environment.

In Wales's preschool education system, game teaching, the concept of child centredness and the relationship between teachers and children form the basis of its educational practice, but these contents are difficult to be fully understood only by observing the appearance. From the perspective of Interpretivism, researchers can better focus on "why teachers operate like this" and "what is their understanding of their own operation". As William (2024) pointed out, interpretivist research does not seek universal laws, but focuses on how individuals understand their own behaviour in context.

As a Chinese researcher, I entered the Welsh education scene from a cross-cultural perspective to observe the teaching practice of local teachers in the curriculum. The subjectivity emphasized by Interpretivism recognizes that the identity, experience and cultural background of researchers will have an impact on understanding, which also provides a theoretical basis for the subsequent introduction of "Reflective Thinking".

2.2 Reflective Thinking

Reflective Thinking is one of the important research methods in this study, which will run through the whole process of research design, implementation and analysis. Alvesson, Sköldberg and Davies (2009) pointed out that Reflective Thinking requires researchers to critically examine research methods and continuously examine their position and influence in the process of knowledge production. Especially in cross-cultural studies, it is difficult for researchers to completely break away from the values and understanding framework shaped by their original cultural system, and these potential presuppositions often have a far-reaching impact on the observation perspective and meaning interpretation.

My current knowledge system of preschool education is formed in China, and my understanding of "teacher responsibility", "effective teaching" and "child observation" is also

based on this context. Taking this existing cognition into the Nursery School classroom in Wales is bound to have an impact on my way of observing and understanding local teachers' behaviour. This difference in understanding between cultures may not only lead to cognitive conflict, but also remind me of the need to maintain a high degree of consciousness and self-awareness in the process of research.

Therefore, before the research officially begins, I will systematically sort out my own experience structure and identify the judgement presupposition that may affect observation by writing research notes of Reflective Thinking; In the process of data collection and analysis, I will synchronously record my personal feelings, understanding changes and perspective adjustments, and compare these subjective tracks with teacher interviews and classroom observation data in the analysis stage to form a multi-dimensional interpretation path.

As Creswell and Poth (2023) emphasized, Reflective Thinking is not only the "ethical core" of interpretative research, but also an important mechanism to ensure the transparency and credibility of research. It enables researchers to constantly revise their self-understanding in the cross-cultural context and avoid cultural misreading and subjective assumptions. In this study, Reflective Thinking is not only a research strategy, but also an open and honest academic attitude. As the research process is highly dependent on my subjective observation and experience participation, its results may not be directly extended to all Chinese teachers, but it will be an important cognitive reconstruction process for me, and will also lay a critical and pluralistic foundation for future research practice.

2.3 Qualitative Approach

In terms of research design, this study uses Qualitative Research methods, combining observation and interview to obtain data. The Qualitative Method emphasizes that researchers enter the actual site and are guided by integrity, process and interpretation, so as to capture the real dynamics and significance of educational behaviour (Patton, 2015). This study focuses on how Welsh teachers design and implement playful activities in their daily teaching, how to observe children's behaviour and make teaching responses accordingly, which are highly dependent on the perception of the situation and the capture of on-site details, and are not covered by questionnaires or quantitative tools.

Bryman (2016) pointed out that one of the core values of Qualitative Research lies in its "openness" - it allows research questions to develop naturally in the process, and allows data to lead researchers into an unpredicted direction. In this study, I plan to observe the teaching

scene, record the use situation and changes of teachers' teaching strategies, and conduct field interviews after the key behaviours or strategies, so as to obtain the understanding and explanation of teachers themselves. This alternate and mutually supportive way of observation and interview enables me to get a description of the behaviour level and understand the value orientation behind the strategy.

It should be pointed out that although Qualitative Research cannot draw broad conclusions, it can provide a more in-depth and closer understanding of the specific environment, which is particularly valuable for the study of education in different cultural backgrounds. For this reason, this method is the most suitable research method for research objectives and research ideas.

3. Research Tools

In order to effectively respond to the research questions in this study, especially the teachers' behaviour logic, role positioning in game teaching and how to observe children and make teaching decisions. Therefore, I choose observation and interview as research tools for data collection.

3.1 Observation

The observation method enables me to go deep into the classroom and systematically record the teacher's teaching behaviour, reaction mode and the specific process of interaction with children. Observation is not only a technology of reading and recording, but also an interpretive process. It records through long-term contact and immersion, and enables researchers to capture the cultural background and professional thinking trajectory in teachers' behaviour (Cohen et al. 2018).

3.1.1 Non-participant Observation

Non-participatory observation emphasises that researchers should maintain the status of bystanders and the naturalness of the research scene, so as to record the real teaching behaviour and classroom interaction mode. This method is suitable for capturing teachers' behaviour activities in the daily state and avoiding the role change caused by the intervention of researchers. Cohen et al. (2018) pointed out that non-participatory observation helps to maintain the "natural state of behaviour" in educational research, thus making observation more reliable and explanatory.

In this study, I will use non-participatory observation to record how teachers organise game learning in the most authentic daily teaching, how to identify children's interest and development signals in different situations, and how to make teaching responses through

verbal and non-verbal ways. This observation method is suitable for identifying the adaptability and diversity of teachers' strategies, which helps me deeply understand how teachers connect game activities with educational goals, and can directly respond to research questions 2 and 4.

In addition, non-participatory observation also constructs a basic text to provide background and content for subsequent interviews.

3.1.2 Participant Observation

Although non-participatory observation emphasises the objectivity of "watching", in order to better understand and integrate into the new culture teaching situation, moderate participatory observation can help me more effectively establish trust and understand the "internal logic" of teaching culture. Kawulich (2005) believes that participatory observation does not mean fully integrating into the classroom, but observing teachers' emotions, judgements, rhythms and pressures in limited interaction, so as to more truly understand the background of teachers' behaviour decisions.

In this study, I will be familiar with teachers' work rhythm and teaching terms through participatory observation, and observe how teachers establish a relationship with children and how to deal with minor events in daily teaching. This participation not only improves the cultural understanding of the data, but also enables me to more accurately grasp the educational intention behind the behaviour when recording teachers' behaviour.

Participatory observation also helps to understand the "role transformation" of teachers in daily teaching, such as from organiser to guide, from observer to responder, which is the core content of research question 3.

3.1.3 Complementarity of Two Kinds of Observation Methods

Non-participatory observation emphasises the objective record of "natural behaviour", while participatory observation helps to understand Welsh teachers' behaviour in depth. Bryman (2016) pointed out that the key to observation is not to choose a "better" way, but to flexibly use methods according to the research objectives to improve the situational adaptability and multidimensional explanatory power of research.

In this study, I will use non-participatory observation as the main data collection method to ensure the naturalness and objectivity of the recorded teaching behaviour. I will try to reduce subjective intervention, avoid role interference, and truly present teachers' teaching choices and behavioural logic. I will try my best to remain non-participatory, especially in the early stage of the study, to ensure that the observation is based on the teaching culture of Welsh

teachers, rather than my Chinese education experience. As the research advances, after I understand the classroom culture of Welsh Nursery School education, I may try to apply local observation skills for a deeper understanding in the middle and later stages.

This arrangement reflects the respect for the "other culture", avoids applying the perspective of Chinese preschool education research to the Welsh classroom, and ensures the cultural embeddedness and explanatory validity of the research.

3.2 Interview

As an in-depth tool to understand the thinking, beliefs and experience of the research object, interview is an important supplementary mechanism of this study. The "behaviour fragments" obtained in the observation cannot directly explain the intention and value behind them. Only through the language interaction with teachers can we restore the internal logic of teaching choice. The interview not only helps to understand the behavioural meaning, but also helps to verify the researchers' preliminary judgement, and reflects the methodological characteristics of "constructing meaning from the perspective of the other" in the interpretative research framework (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview takes the research goal as the core of the interview and gives teachers the space to express their experience, thinking and feelings. It is an important way to understand the thinking behind the educational behaviour. Bryman (2016) believes that the reason why semi-structured interview is suitable for educational research is that it has the characteristics of "theory guidance but experience openness", and can transform abstract research problems into empirical narration.

In this study, I will conduct more in-depth interviews with the teachers of the Nursery School in Wales through the scenes and teachers' behaviours found in the observation, combined with the experience gained during the observation. Through these interviews, I hope to capture the true logic of teachers' "why do this" in the process of education, especially in the fields of free games, unstructured learning and individual guidance.

The semi-structured interview will be mainly used to answer research questions 2 and 3, that is, how teachers organise teaching and how they understand their professional positioning in the teaching process.

3.2.2 Field Interviews

In addition to the planned in-depth interview, this study will also adopt the "field interview" method, that is, to have a short dialogue with teachers shortly after a teaching event. Spradley

(1980) pointed out that the advantage of field interviews is that they can capture the most immediate reactions and judgements of teachers, especially after sudden situations, non-standard teaching strategies or important behaviour choices.

In teaching, teachers often need to respond quickly, such as dealing with children's unexpected behaviour, adjusting the rhythm of activities, controlling the dynamics of the group, etc. These decisions are difficult to be accurately reproduced in standard interviews. Through field interviews, I can better understand the basis of teachers' judgement, so as to respond to research question 4 on the mechanism of children's observation and immediate response.

3.2.3 Complementarity of Two Types of Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide macro understanding and in-depth interpretation, while on-site interviews emphasise situational improvisation and response mechanism, which support the data integrity of the study from different dimensions. Creswell & Poth (2023) believes that the use of diversified interview methods can improve the interpretation tension of data and enable researchers to have higher adaptability and sensitivity in the face of complex social behaviours.

4. Sampling

In the selection of sample strategy, this study uses purposeful convention sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the active selection of participants who are most likely to provide rich data, typical or experience density according to the research questions and objectives; Convenience sampling emphasises the selection of research objects from existing sample groups on the basis of realistic accessibility and resource conditions (Patton, 2015). Cohen et al. (2018) further pointed out that this combination strategy is practical in practical education research, especially in situations where the field acquisition conditions are limited, but researchers have clear selection criteria for samples.

The sample selection of this study must meet the requirements that the research site belongs to the Foundation Phase education system. Considering that as a foreign researcher, I have a high threshold of access to the Welsh Nursery School education site, convenience sampling provides me with a feasible field acquisition mechanism.

In practice, I plan to select a Nursery School in Wales where the Foundation Phase framework is clearly implemented as the research site through the introduction of the course tutor. After initial contact with the director of the Nursery School or the academic coordinator, I will introduce the research purpose, content and data collection methods in

detail through a formal meeting, and assist them in evaluating whether the Nursery School is suitable for research and observation. Once a preliminary consensus is reached, I will work with the Nursery School to select suitable teachers, managers, children and parents as samples.

It is worth noting that although this convenient sampling method has significant advantages in context adaptation and research depth, it also has the problems of poor extrapolation and limited sample representation. Creswell and Poth (2023) pointed out that in qualitative research, sample selection does not aim at quantifying universality, but focuses on generating "information rich cases" that can explain a cultural practice or educational phenomenon.

Although the teachers and Nursery Schools selected in this study cannot cover the practice of all Nursery Schools in Wales, their situational typicality and teaching experience density help to generate in-depth explanatory data and provide effective reference for cross-cultural education understanding.

In general, the purposive convenience sampling strategy provides a theoretical and practical sample framework for this study. It not only ensures the logical fit between the research object and the research problem, but also respects the cultural sensitivity and operational reality in the field of education research. From the perspective of interpretationism, the significance of samples lies in "understanding", which is a practical response to this idea.

5.Ethics

This study is planned to be conducted in the education field, and involves children's observation and teacher interview, so ethical considerations are particularly important. In this study, I will strictly follow the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) and Trinity St David's School in Wales to ensure that the dignity and rights of participants are always respected and put in the first place.

Firstly, informed consent is the most basic ethical premise of this study. All relevant participants will receive a detailed research explanation letter before participating in the study, specifying the purpose of the study, the activities involved, the purpose of the data and their rights (including the freedom to refuse and withdraw at any time). The respondents are required to sign a written informed consent and will not be assessed or judged in any form during the study. In the link involving children's observation, I will communicate with the Nursery School in advance and obtain the written authorisation of parents or guardians. Observation activities will be strictly limited to the open teaching process led by teachers,

and will not contact or interfere with individual children, and all materials will be presented anonymously.

Secondly, in order to protect the privacy of participants, all identity information in the study will be processed with codes, and the interview records and observation notes will be stored in the encrypted electronic system for research purposes only, without any form of public display. According to the principles of "data anonymity" and "contextual fuzziness" proposed by Cohen et al. (2018), I will blur the school characteristics that may be identified in the teaching situation when writing the report to avoid identity exposure due to case details.

In addition, the role relationship of researchers in Nursery School also needs special treatment. Teachers may regard researchers as "evaluators" or "external experts", which will affect their teaching behaviour. Therefore, I will clarify my role at the initial stage of the study, indicating that I am not an intervenor and do not evaluate teaching, but a researcher who takes learning and respect as the premise to participate, so as to minimise the impact. Through the above strategies, this study will carry out effective teaching practice exploration within the ethical framework to ensure that every participant can participate in the research process in respect, protection and understanding.

6.Data Analysis Method

This study will adopt the data processing method of thematic analysis as the core, which is not only highly consistent with the interpretative position held by this study, but also very suitable for dealing with the qualitative data with complex structure and multiple meanings in the context of cross-cultural teaching (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In practice, I will analyse the data with the help of the six-stage process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First of all, I will familiarise myself with the data by repeatedly reading the verbatim transcript of the interview and observation notes, mark the initial impression, and keep recording inspiration and problems in reading. Then, I will use the open coding method to classify the content involved in teaching behaviour, children's observation, teacher's response and so on, and sort out the initial coding classification.

On the basis of preliminary coding, I will try to identify and integrate themes such as "teacher regulation strategy", "observation as teaching response" or "role transformation". In the process of analysis, I will keep returning to the original data to check whether these topics are really in line with the actual situation, gradually clarify the core content and scope of each topic, and finally write a more explanatory analysis report.

The reason why I choose topic analysis is that it gives researchers sufficient space to explain, so that I can sort out the professional cognition and cultural orientation naturally grown in teachers' own language without presupposing the theoretical premise. As Nowell et al. (2017) emphasised, topic analysis is particularly effective in cross-cultural research, which can guide researchers to generate an understanding close to the context of the research object, rather than relying on the application of external frameworks.

In order to improve the reliability and traceability of the analysis, I will compare the interview content, observation records and reflexive thinking logs, and review the final analysis conclusion through theme comparison and consistency analysis. Ensure the transparency of the research process and avoid potential position deviation from misleading the interpretation results.

To sum up, thematic analysis, with its clear logic, operational flexibility and in-depth explanatory power, provides a solid and inclusive data analysis framework for this study, which is an indispensable key link in the research methodology.

7. Conclusion

This study proposes to explore the practical practice of Welsh Nursery School teachers in game teaching and child observation from the perspective of Interpretivism, combined with reflective thinking and qualitative methods. Through systematic observation and interview tools combined with theme analysis strategies, and from the perspective of Chinese preschool education researchers, an in-depth dialogue with preschool teachers in Wales can not only promote the improvement of the researchers' professional skills, but also provide reference materials for Chinese preschool education scholars to understand different preschool education concepts.

Reference

Alvesson, M., Sköldberg, K. and Davies, S. (2009) *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2024) *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. 5th edn. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research methods in education*. 8th edn. London: Routledge.

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2023) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Education Department (2019) *Notice on hosting the 2019 regional primary and secondary school and kindergarten teacher teaching skills competition* 关于举行2019年全区中小学幼儿园教师教学技能大赛的通知. Available at: http://jyt.gxzf.gov.cn/zfxxgk/fdzdgknr/tzgg_58179/t3127412.shtml (Accessed: 27 March 2025).

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Education Department (2021) *Notice on hosting the 2021 regional kindergarten teacher skills competition* 自治区教育厅关于举办2021年全区幼儿园教师技能大赛的通知. Available at: http://jyt.gxzf.gov.cn/zfxxgk/fdzdgknr/tzgg_58179/t9951593.shtml (Accessed: 27 March 2025).

Kawulich, B.B. (2005) 'Participant observation as a data collection method', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2).

Li, H., Wang, X.C. and Wong, J.M.S. (2011)

‘中国学前教育课程改革：基于教师信念与实践的视角 Early childhood curriculum reform in China: perspectives from examining teachers’ beliefs and practices in Chinese literacy teaching’, *Chinese Education & Society*, 44(6), pp. 5–23.

Nowell, L.S. *et al.* (2017) 'Thematic analysis: striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Patton, M.Q. (2015) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 4th edn. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Spradley, J.P. (1980) *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Taylor, C., Joshi, H. and Wright, C. (2015) 'Evaluating the impact of early years educational reform in Wales to age seven: the potential use of the UK Millennium Cohort Study', *Journal of Education Policy*, 30(5), pp. 688–712. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2014.963164> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Wainwright, N. *et al.* (2019) 'Playful pedagogy for deeper learning: exploring the implementation of the play-based Foundation Phase in Wales'. [*Insert journal name if available*].

Welsh Government (2015) *Foundation phase framework – Hwb*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-2008/foundation-phase/foundation-phase-framework/> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

William, F.K.A. (2024) 'Interpretivism or constructivism: navigating research paradigms in social science research', *International Journal of Research Publications*, 143, pp. 2708–3578. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47119/ijrp1001431220246122> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Zhu, J.X. (2006) ‘对幼儿园课程改革的所见所闻和所思（下） Reflections on kindergarten curriculum reform (Part II)’, *幼儿教育*, 09, pp. 4–6.

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com/>) on 25 April 2025 to check my work using the prompt(s):

1. Please check the following text for grammar and make sure I used English style spelling.
2. Please help me translate the following sentences to English and make sure using English spelling.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.