A Qualitative Exploration of Game-Based Activities in Picture Book Reading: Voices and Practices from Bilingual Kindergartens in China

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study delves into the integration of game-based activities within picture book reading sessions in bilingual kindergartens across China. Employing a dual-method approach, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with six kindergarten teachers and classroom observations by two academic experts. The combined approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of this educational fusion's pedagogical strategies, tangible outcomes, and associated challenges.

The findings highlight educators' ability to align game mechanics with book themes cohesively, consequently amplifying student engagement and comprehension. Challenges surfaced, particularly in aligning games with narrative nuances and managing student competitiveness. Despite the contemporary shift towards technology in Early Foreign Language (EFL) education, the study accentuates the sustained importance of traditional picture book readings, especially when intertwined with interactive games.

This investigation offers a refined lens on EFL pedagogy, underscoring the harmonious integration of modern game-based techniques with core reading practices in bilingual kindergarten settings.

Keywords:Game-Based Activities; Picture Book Reading; Bilingual Kindergartens; Interactive Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

As the 21st century unfolds, education across the globe is witnessing an unprecedented convergence of traditional pedagogies and innovative methods. A standout amongst these methods is game-based teaching, which has swiftly evolved into a vanguard of modern instruction, fostering enhanced engagement and deeper comprehension. The global educational community, buoyed by a plethora of research, acknowledges that game-based techniques—both digital and non-digital—cater to varied learning styles, encourage active participation, and cement retention (Yeung et al., 2016; Yoon, 2013). Language acquisition, particularly English language learning, has seen a significant infusion of these methods, driving improved outcomes, especially among young learners.

Digital games, with their interactive platforms and immersive environments, offer learners a dynamic space where linguistic elements can be explored, understood, and practised in diverse scenarios. The instant feedback, adaptive learning paths, and captivating narratives inherent to many digital games make them particularly appealing. These digital platforms effortlessly blend auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning, providing a rich tapestry of experiences that mimic real-world language interactions.

On the other hand, non-digital games, which often involve physical board games, card games, and role-playing activities, provide a tactile, hands-on approach to learning. They emphasize peer interactions, promote cooperative learning, and often require learners to employ critical thinking in real time. For young learners, especially in the context of picture book reading, non-digital games can bring stories to life, facilitating a deeper connection with characters, themes, and linguistic structures.

UNDER PEER REVIEW

China, in its educational odyssey, reflects a microcosm of these global trends but with unique challenges and aspirations. The nation's burgeoning emphasis on English language proficiency has led to an early and intense focus on innovative English teaching methodologies in its academic corridors. As parents and educators increasingly recognize the importance of early English exposure, bilingual kindergartens have become crucibles of experimentation and innovation (Lan et al., 2011; Lee & Lee, 2015).

Amidst this fervour, picture books have emerged as formidable tools in the arsenal of English educators in China. Their illustrative narratives present a gateway to the English language, bridging the gap between a young learner's native cultural context and the expansive world of English. However, while picture books have proven their mettle, the integration of both digital and non-digital game-based strategies to augment picture book reading remains a territory not fully charted in China.

It is here that the study identifies a palpable research void. While parts of the world have embraced the confluence of game-based strategies and picture book reading, understanding this confluence's nuances within China's unique sociocultural and educational landscape is crucial. The landscape becomes even more intricate with the interplay of digital technologies, such as e-books and digital pens, transforming the essence of reading sessions (Chen et al., 2016; Korat & Or, 2010).

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

The study is anchored by two primary objectives aimed at elucidating the game-based teaching landscape within bilingual kindergartens in China. Initially, the research endeavours to determine how educators integrate digital and non-digital game-based methods into picture book reading sessions, delving into the adopted techniques, challenges faced, and perceived outcomes within China's distinctive educational milieu. Furthermore, the research seeks a granular analysis of classroom dynamics, pinpointing the alignment between teachers' instructional objectives and actual classroom practices during these enriched sessions. Stemming from these objectives, the research questions have been framed as follows:

1. How do bilingual kindergarten teachers in China integrate game-based activities—both digital and non-digital—into picture book reading sessions, and what challenges and outcomes do they perceive?

2. How do actual classroom dynamics during these sessions align with teachers' intentions and perceptions?

By probing these questions, the study aims to unravel the complex tapestry of game-based learning strategies within China's bilingual kindergarten landscape. It seeks to shed light on best practices, challenges, and the interplay of digital and non-digital modalities in enhancing English language acquisition. In doing so, the research hopes to provide valuable insights that could guide educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in their quest to shape future-ready, globally competent learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Foreign Language (EFL) learning has been extensively researched over the years, revealing a rich tapestry of methodologies, tools, and parental involvement dynamics. At the heart of this discourse is the balance between embracing technological tools and maintaining traditional methods such as picture book readings, all while understanding the influence of home environments and parental contributions.

Deckner, Adamson, and Bakeman's (2006) foundational work emphasized the shared reading dynamics between children and their mothers. Their focus on this bi-directional contribution provides a preliminary understanding of how early language acquisition is influenced by the shared interaction between parents and children.

While traditional reading dynamics have maintained their importance, a paradigm shift was introduced by Korat and Or (2010), who highlighted the transformative potential of e-books. As they studied parent-child interactions, a significant observation was that new technology, like e-books, influences the dynamics, suggesting a blend of technology and tradition for EFL learners. This perspective aligns with Chen, Tan, and Lo (2016), who showcased how modern tools like digital pen technology can significantly enhance reading fluency in English language learners.

However, even amidst technological advancements, the value of traditional picture book reading remains undeniable. For instance, Collins (2010) emphasized that storybook readings considerably boost English vocabulary in EFL preschoolers. Furthermore, Birketveit (2015) demonstrated that picture books can encapsulate culture and visual literacy, making them

UNDER PEER REVIEW

a multifaceted tool in the EFL learning context. This multi-dimensionality of picture books is reinforced by Montag, Jones, and Smith (2015), who illustrated the significant role vocabulary in such books plays in shaping language learning trajectories.

Amidst discussions of methodologies and tools, parental involvement and the home environment emerge as pivotal components. Choi (2012) brought to light the profound influence of a mother's literacy beliefs on picture book reading interactions. Moreover, Lan, Torr, and Degotardi (2012) added depth to this discourse by probing the motivations behind Taiwanese mothers' involvement in home-based English teaching. This strand of research underlines the importance of parental roles, an aspect further elucidated by Choi et al. (2019) as they showcased how mothers can be instrumental in bolstering children's interest in learning English.

A closer look at more Asian localized settings, such as South Korea, revealed intriguing findings. Kang et al. (2019) highlighted the widespread use of English educational media in South Korean homes, underscoring the need to assess its efficacy on young learners.

To better synthesize the vast body of work, the following table encapsulates key studies in the domain of EFL learning:

Table 1: Past Research on Game-Based Teaching and Picture Book Readings

Year	Author(s)	Key Findings	Identified Research Gaps
2006	Deckner et al.	Both child and maternal contributions during shared reading affect language and literacy outcomes.	Deeper understanding of shared reading dynamics on child's language acquisition.
2010	Collins	Storybook reading significantly boosts English vocabulary acquisition in ELL preschoolers.	More methods to further vocabulary acquisition in early EFL learners.
2010	Korat and Or	New technology (e.g., e-books) modifies parent-child interaction dynamics.	Exploration of diverse digital tools and their effects on early EFL learners.
2012	Choi	Mothers' literacy beliefs impact interaction during picture book reading with preschoolers.	Sparse data on parent-child dynamics in EFL home learning environments.
2012	Lan et al.	Taiwanese mothers teach English at home based on various motivations.	Understanding motivations behind parental involvement in EFL teaching.
2015	Birketveit	Picture books foster culture and visual literacy in EFL contexts.	Limited focus on cultural representation in EFL picture book choices.
2015	Montag et al.	The vocabulary in picture books is key for language learning statistics.	Need for a comprehensive study on vocabulary choices in EFL picture books.
2016	Chen et al.	Digital pen technology improves oral reading fluency for English-language learners.	Need for integrating modern tech tools in EFL learning environments.
2019	Choi et al.	Mothers play a vital role in increasing children's interest in learning English.	The importance and influence of maternal involvement in early EFL contexts.
2019	Kang et al.	English educational media at home is widely utilized in South Korea for young children.	Assessment of the efficacy and impact of home-based English media on learning.

Table 1 presents a comprehensive synthesis of seminal research in the EFL domain spanning from 2006 to 2019. The research topics therein evolve from shared reading dynamics, as discussed by Deckner et al. (2006), to the role of emerging technological tools in language acquisition, as outlined by Korat and Or (2010) and Chen et al. (2016). There is a conspicuous trajectory within these studies, directing attention towards content, methods, and learning environments.

Given the highlighted gaps, the present study's inquiry into game-based activities in bilingual kindergartens in China distinctly positions itself to offer rich insights. For instance, while Collins (2010) and Montag et al. (2015) emphasize the content of reading materials, this study innovates by probing the integration of games, potentially offering a fresh methodological dimension to vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, the emphasis on technology in studies by Korat and Or (2010) and Chen et al. (2016) can be juxtaposed against the game mechanics and activities in this research, perhaps suggesting a natural progression from digital tools to interactive pedagogies.

Furthermore, while the research by Choi (2012) and Lan et al. (2012) delves deep into home-based learning dynamics and parental roles, the current investigation zooms into classroom settings, casting light on teacher-led strategies and interventions. This shift in focus can potentially unravel new dynamics and pedagogical nuances, enriching the discourse on classroom-based EFL learning environments. Additionally, in a world where cultural representation, as noted by Birketveit (2015), and the utility of educational media, as observed by Kang et al. (2019), become increasingly pivotal, the setting of Chinese bilingual kindergartens in this study becomes even more relevant, potentially offering cross-cultural insights and best practices.

In summary, Table 1 not only chronicles the evolution of EFL studies but also foregrounds research gaps that the current investigation ambitiously aspires to address, further enriching academic discourse in the domain.

2.1 Importance and Roles of Game-Based Activities in Learning

Game-based activities have increasingly come to the forefront of pedagogical strategies, particularly in the context of Early Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The essence of these strategies can be traced back to the idea that students are more engaged and invested when they find the learning process enjoyable and relevant (Yeung et al., 2016). This perspective has been reaffirmed by various research initiatives exploring the confluence of game dynamics with traditional teaching approaches.

First and foremost, game-based activities align with the tenets of active learning. They enable students to take ownership of their learning experience, fostering a deeper connection with the content. As Yoon (2013) articulates, game-based techniques cater to diverse learning styles and promote participation, making the learning process more holistic. When students are active participants, retention and comprehension naturally improve.

Furthermore, the integration of digital and non-digital game strategies has transformed traditional picture book reading sessions, an evolution that resonated with Lan, Torr, and Degotardi (2011). Digital games, often praised for their immersive environments, provide learners with a dynamic arena where linguistic elements can be playfully explored. This environment mirrors real-world language interactions, making the learning process more contextual and relatable.

Conversely, non-digital games, often rooted in tangible tools like board games or role-playing scenarios, emphasize direct peer interactions. As Collins (2010) and Birketveit (2015) discuss, these interactions in the EFL context can breathe life into stories, helping students forge a deeper connection with characters, themes, and linguistic structures. Furthermore, they promote cooperative learning, often requiring students to collaborate, negotiate, and problem-solve in real time, which are crucial skills in any language acquisition journey.

Within classroom settings, these game-based activities can be seamlessly integrated into lessons. For instance, at the beginning of a session, a short game might activate prior knowledge or set the stage for new content. In the middle of a lesson, games serve as practice arenas where students can apply newly acquired knowledge. Towards the end, a review game might consolidate the day's learning, ensuring that concepts are firmly grasped.

However, the crux of the game-based approach lies not just in its implementation but also in its alignment with lesson objectives. As Korat and Or (2010) and Chen et al. (2016)suggest, technology and game mechanics should be intertwined with the curriculum seamlessly. Whether it's practising vocabulary, understanding grammatical structures, or exploring cultural nuances, the game-based activitiesneed to serve the lesson's primary goals.

In conclusion, as the academic landscape navigates the intricate balance between technology and tradition, game-based activities emerge as a bridge, melding the best of both worlds. With the right strategies, as echoed by the studies cited, these games can elevate the learning experience, making it more engaging, contextual, and impactful.

3. METHODOLOGY

UNDER PEER REVIEW

This study, grounded in a qualitative research framework, delves into the nuances of pedagogical strategies and the practical dynamics surrounding the integration of game-based activities in picture book reading sessions within bilingual kindergartens in China. The study finds its academic foundation in the works of Lan, Torr and Degotardi (2011).

3.1 Participants

The research cohort comprised both teachers and independent observers. Table 2 indicates that a total of six educators from three handpicked bilingual kindergartens in China formed the primary respondents, chosen particularly for their innovative application of game-based activities during picture book sessions. These educators underscore the pivotal role of bilingual teaching methods in early education. Additionally, two expert observers were incorporated into the study, tasked with providing an impartial assessment of all participating kindergartens.

Table 2: Participant Profile

Participant ID	Role	Gender	Age	Education Level	Kindergarten	Game Type (Digital/Non-Digital)	Teaching Years in Kindergarten
T1	Teacher	Female	23	Bachelor	1	Digital Games	1
T2	Teacher	Female	25	Bachelor	1	Non-Digital Games	3
T3	Teacher	Female	34	Master	2	Both	8
T4	Teacher	Female	30	Master	2	Both	6
T5	Teacher	Female	28	Bachelor	3	Digital Games	3
T6	Teacher	Male	26	Bachelor	3	Non-Digital Games	3
O1	Observer	Female	33	Master	All	N/A	N/A
O2	Observer	Male	32	PhD	All	N/A	N/A

3.2 Data Collection

Utilizing a multifaceted approach, this study employed semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to holistically capture the pedagogical dynamics of game-based activities in bilingual kindergartens. The interview design, inspired by Choi (2012) and Lan, Torr and Degotardi (2011), aimed to glean insights into the educators' motivations for game integration, their perceived advantages, potential challenges, and tangible outcomes. Furthermore, these interviews provided a window into the strategic planning and real-time execution of the teaching sessions. To ensure a balanced collection of both specific and spontaneous responses, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, a strategy endorsed by Birketveit (2015) and Chen et al. (2016). This format proved pivotal, enabling participants to richly convey their on-ground experiences.

Parallelly, classroom observations, framed by Piper et al.'s (2012) methodology, focused on monitoring the integration of game-based interventions, capturing student reactions, and assessing shifts in engagement or comprehension due to game-centric modules. These observations were also instrumental in recording real-time challenges faced by educators and their adaptive strategies. Emphasizing the vitality of direct classroom interaction, this observation technique magnified the real-time dynamics of teaching, a stance championed by scholars like Korat and Or (2010) and Leone and Leo (2011).

3.3 Data Analysis

To ensure a robust analysis, the collected interview data underwent a meticulous transcription process. Each response was documented verbatim, setting the stage for in-depth thematic analysis—a technique held in high regard in EFL research, as echoed by Ahn (2017) and Na and Rhee (2017). The primary goal here was to distil recurring themes, spanning teacher motivations, strategies, challenges, and tangible educational outcomes. Concurrently, the observational data, analyzed through the lens of Lan et al. (2012)'s framework, sought patterns related to student engagement, game-based strategy efficacy, and any immediate challenges that educators navigated during their sessions.

UNDER PEER REVIEW

4. RESULTS

The findings derive from the invaluable input of a diverse set of participants, each of whom was instrumental in shedding light on the use of game-based activities during picture book reading sessions within bilingual kindergartens in China.

Table 3 Interview Findings: Themes and Responses

Theme	Quotes/Responses
Integration Strategies	"I relate the game mechanics to the theme of the book." T2 "Each game is chosen based on the essence of the story." T3 "Sometimes it's hard to find a game that truly complements the book." T4
Perceived Success	"Kids loved the 'Food Sorting Race' from 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'." T2 "I've received positive feedback, especially from the 'Monkey See, Monkey Do' activity."T3 "Sometimes, the excitement from the game makes them forget the actual storyline." T6
Challenges	"Balancing fun and learning is sometimes a challenge." T1 "I've faced issues when game outcomes didn't align with the story." T2 "It's a challenge to ensure every child is engaged during the game." T3 "Some children get overly competitive, detracting from the learning experience." T5
Impact on Comprehension	"Games certainly boost comprehension. They're interactive story recaps." T1 "Through games, children live the story, enhancing understanding." T2 "However, there are times when the game overshadows the core message of the story." T5
Preparation Time	"I usually need several hours to design and test a game-based activity." T3 "Sometimes I feel I spend more time on the game than on teaching the actual content." T4

Table 3 indicates that the utilization of game-based activities in picture book reading sessions has its advantages and challenges, as gleaned from the interviews with kindergarten teachers.

1. Integration Strategies:
The strategies for integrating games into reading sessions vary among teachers. While T2 emphasizes the alignment of game mechanics with the book's theme, T3 chooses games that resonate with the story's essence. However, finding an apt game can sometimes be a daunting task. T4 mentioned the occasional difficulty in finding a game that genuinely aligns with a book's narrative or message.

2. Perceived Success:
There's no denying the appeal games have among the students. T2 recalls the positive reception of the "Food Sorting Race" game, inspired by "The Very Hungry Caterpillar." Similarly, T3 has witnessed favourable feedback from the "Monkey See, Monkey Do" activity. Yet, it's essential to ensure that the game doesn't overpower the book's storyline. T6 highlights a concern where children's excitement over the game sometimes makes them lose track of the actual narrative of the story.

3. Challenges:
Every teaching strategy comes with its set of challenges, and game-based learning is no exception. T1 spoke about the intricacy of striking a balance between ensuring the session remains educational while also being entertaining. T2 has experienced situations where the game's outcomes didn't perfectly align with the story, which can send mixed signals to the students. For T3, the most pressing challenge is to ensure that every child remains engaged during the game. Adding to these challenges, T5 pointed out that some children could become overly competitive, which shifts the focus from learning to merely winning.

4. Impact on Comprehension:
The consensus among teachers is that games significantly enhance story comprehension. T1 views games as interactive story recaps that reinforce the narrative. From T2's perspective, these games offer students a chance to relive the story, further cementing their understanding. However, there's a need for caution. T5 warns about instances when the game, despite its educational intent, might overshadow the primary message or moral of the story.

5. Preparation Time:
Designing game-based activities demands a notable investment of time and effort. T3 typically spends several hours designing and testing a game-based activity to ensure it aligns with the reading session's goals. This sentiment is echoed by T4, who sometimes feels that the preparation for the game might take away from the time dedicated to actual content teaching.

In conclusion, while game-based teaching methods offer engaging ways to enhance comprehension and make reading sessions more interactive, they require careful planning and execution to ensure they complement rather than overshadow the main reading content.

Table 4 shows that the integration of game-based activities into picture book reading sessions has been scrutinized through the keen eyes of two observers, O1 and O2. Their observations offer a comprehensive understanding of the classroom dynamics, engagement levels, and the effectiveness of this teaching methodology.

Table 4. Observational Findings: Classroom Observations

Observation Category	Key Observations
Classroom Setup and Materials	Classroom layout adapted for game activities. Booksare always accessible. Noted by O1. Sometimes, the number of materials can be overwhelming for younger kids. Observed by O2.
Teacher's Facilitation	Teachers always stressed the game's relevance to the book. Active involvement was evident.Observed by O1. In some instances, it took longer to explain the game than to play it. Noted by O2.
Student Engagement	Attentiveness during game introductions was seen across classes. Relating game outcomes back to the story was evident. Observedby O1. There were instances where students were more focused on winning the game than understanding its relation to the story. Noted by O2.
Learning Outcomes	Clear connections between game and story. "Aha!" moments frequent. Recorded by O1. A few kids seemed to miss the correlation between the game and the book, focusing only on gameplay. Observed by O2.
Overall Classroom Dynamics	Balanced fun and learning atmosphere. Predominantly positive atmosphere across sessions. Noted by both O1 and O2. In some cases, the game caused a bit of chaos, and a longer time was needed to get back to a calm state. Observed by O1.

1. Classroom Setup and Materials:
Both observers took note of the classroom's strategic layout to accommodate game activities, with O1 emphasizing the consistent accessibility of the book. O2, on the other hand, brought up a concern; for younger kids, an abundance of materials could sometimes become overwhelming, potentially causing distractions.

2. Teacher's Facilitation:
The importance of connecting the game's purpose with the book's narrative was always highlighted by the teachers, as observed by O1. However, O2 pointed out an operational hiccup; there were sessions where explaining the game's rules took longer than the actual gameplay, hinting at a potential need for simplifying game mechanics or enhancing explanatory methods.

3. Student Engagement:
Students' attentiveness during game introductions was a universal observation made by O1, indicative of their interest and eagerness. O1 also highlighted students' ability to draw connections between game outcomes and the story. However, O2 pointed out a potential pitfall. While games undoubtedly engage students, the competitive nature sometimes sidetracked them from understanding the game's relevance to the story, making them more focused on winning.

4. Learning Outcomes:
One of the primary objectives of introducing game-based activities is to enhance comprehension. O1 noted frequent "Aha!" moments, implying moments of realization and connection between the game and the story. However, O2 observed that a subset of kids seemed more engrossed in the gameplay rather than understanding its connection to the book, suggesting a need for clearer reinforcement of learning objectives during these activities.

5. Overall Classroom Dynamics:
Both observers concurred on the predominantly positive classroom atmosphere resulting from the integration of games. The blend of fun and learning was palpable. However, there were instances, as pointed out by O1, where the exhilaration from the game led to a chaotic environment. The aftermath required a bit more time for the teacher to reinstate calmness and order.

In a nutshell, while the introduction of game-based activities in reading sessions has invigorated the learning process and piqued student interest, there are challenges to address. Balancing game excitement with educational outcomes, simplifying game rules, and ensuring a smooth transition from game to regular classroom activities are areas that could further enhance the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach.

In the study of bilingual kindergartens in China, the integration of game-based activities into picture book reading sessions and their resultant dynamics was explored. The research revealed that teachers tactically blend game mechanics with book themes, as demonstrated by remarks from T2 and T3, though challenges arise in finding congruent games, as noted by T4. While games typically received positive feedback, such as the reactions to "Food Sorting Race" and "Monkey See, Monkey Do", concerns emerged. Specifically, T6 highlighted occasions where games overshadowed the core narrative. Furthermore, although games bolstered comprehension, they occasionally diverted focus from the primary message, and their preparation sometimes consumed substantial instructional time. Classroom observations corroborated these perceptions, underscoring both the adaptability of setups for games and the challenges in maintaining engagement, especially when games spurred heightened excitement. In sum, game-based activities in these kindergartens enhance engagement and comprehension, but their integration demands meticulous planning and moderation to ensure a balance between entertainment and educational value.

5. DISCUSSION

Interpreting the results in light of the literature review, it is clear that bilingual kindergartens in China have incorporated a fusion of modern pedagogical approaches, incorporating game-based activities into picture book readings. This amalgamation seems to be the latest iteration in the trajectory of EFL teaching strategies. While Deckner et al. (2006) established the importance of shared reading dynamics between parents and children, the current findings suggest that game-based interactions facilitated by teachers can also significantly influence language acquisition. The study, therefore, builds upon the foundational works by offering a teacher-centric dimension to the discourse.

Korat and Or's (2010) emphasis on the transformative potential of e-books resonates with the study's findings, emphasizing the balance between traditional and modern teaching aids. However, where e-books were lauded for their influence on parent-child dynamics, game-based activities in the classroom context augment the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers. This draws a parallel with Chen et al.'s (2016) work on integrating digital tools, such as digital pens, which enhance reading fluency. Just as those technological advancements were integrated into the learning process, game-based methods, both digital and non-digital, can potentially offer similar enhancements.

The research also contrasts with Collins's (2010) and Montag et al.'s (2015) findings on the significant vocabulary boost from storybook readings. While their focus was primarily on the content of the reading materials, the current study innovatively expands this by highlighting the role of interactive games in vocabulary acquisition. It brings forward a fresh methodological perspective, suggesting that vocabulary acquisition can benefit from a more dynamic and interactive approach rather than relying solely on content.

Furthermore, Choi's (2012) and Lan et al.'s (2012) extensive exploration of home-based learning dynamics emphasized parental roles, especially mothers, in EFL learning. The present study complements this perspective by shifting the

UNDER PEER REVIEW

spotlight to classroom settings and teacher-led strategies. This expanded viewpoint suggests that while parental interactions remain crucial, the teacher's role in shaping bilingual language acquisition, particularly in kindergartens, is equally paramount.

In drawing comparisons, Birketveit's (2015) emphasis on cultural representation in picture books becomes especially relevant. As bilingual kindergartens in China navigate a dual linguistic and cultural landscape, the game-based approaches might also cater to cultural nuances, providing students with a richer, more contextual learning experience.

Lastly, while Kang et al. (2019) highlighted the prevalence of English educational media in South Korean homes, the present study underscores the pedagogical implications of such media when incorporated into the classroom environment. This comparative angle is essential, as it nudges towards understanding the impact of game-based and media approaches across different Asian contexts.

In essence, the findings of this research, juxtaposed against the existing literature, underscore a promising evolution in EFL pedagogy. While blending traditional and modern approaches, it is evident that game-based activities in bilingual kindergartens in China could become a benchmark for EFL teaching strategies, provided the associated challenges are meticulously addressed. The study bridges the literature gaps and offers a fresh dimension to the discourse, emphasizing the dynamism of teacher-led strategies and the potential of interactive learning environments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand the integration of game-based activities within picture book reading sessions in bilingual kindergartens in China. Key findings revealed that merging traditional reading methods with interactive games enhances student engagement and comprehension. However, challenges such as aligning game mechanics with the book's narrative and striking a balance between competition and comprehension emerged.

In the broader academic landscape, this investigation contributes vital insights to the evolving discourse on Early Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It highlights the potential of integrating modern pedagogical techniques with traditional practices to create immersive learning experiences. Educators are urged to ensure strategic game selection, resonating with reading materials while also being mindful of potential pitfalls.

For future research, a deeper exploration into effective game mechanics, comparative studies across different cultural kindergartens, and longitudinal assessments of students' language proficiency would be beneficial. Yet, it is imperative to recognize the study's limitations, particularly its sample size and focus primarily on teacher strategies.

In sum, while challenges persist, this study illuminates a path for re-envisioning EFL teaching, suggesting the potential of a synergized approach to enhance both engagement and comprehension in bilingual educational settings.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the study's findings on game-based activities in bilingual kindergartens, several recommendations emerge. It's imperative for educators to strategically select games that align with picture book themes strategically, ensuring an enriched balance between engagement and comprehension. Periodic assessments can further optimize this balance. Given the competitive nature of games, fostering a classroom environment that promotes healthy competition is essential. To enhance cultural resonance in a bilingual setting, games should be chosen with cultural nuances in mind. Parental feedback mechanisms can provide valuable insights, enhancing the game-based approach. Furthermore, consistent technological upgrades, like updating e-books and digital pens, ensure that students access top-tier interactive learning tools. Lastly, problem-solving workshops for educators can address challenges, fostering a collaborative and adaptive teaching model. In essence, a structured and flexible approach to game integration can transform the EFL pedagogical landscape in bilingual kindergartens.

PEER REVIEW

CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines and standards of Taylor's University. Ethical approval for the research, including the recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis, was obtained from Taylor's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the commencement of the study. All participants provided informed consent, and their privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process. The research procedures followed relevant guidance and rules.

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UNDER PEER REVIEW

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UNDER PEER REVIEW