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An Exploration of Preschool Curriculum Learning Areas in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: Learning areas are a common organizational approach in early childhood education classrooms in Taiwan. Rather than functioning merely as spatial arrangements, learning areas represent a child-centered curricular philosophy that emphasizes children's active engagement with the environment through autonomous choice and hands-on exploration. This article investigates the development and pedagogical foundations of curriculum learning areas within Taiwan's early childhood education system, and aspires to enhance the overall quality of preschool curricula in Taiwan, fostering young children's holistic development across linguistic, cognitive, aesthetic, scientific, and socio-dramatic dimensions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Class teaching involves placing children in classes, dividing the learning content into teaching subjects, and delivering these teaching subjects within a specified number of hours. Learning areas are a common organizational approach in early childhood education classrooms. Rather than functioning merely as spatial arrangements, learning areas represent a child-centered curricular philosophy that emphasizes children's active engagement with the environment through autonomous choice and hands-on exploration. Rooted in constructivist theory, this approach assumes that children construct knowledge through interaction with materials, peers, and teachers. Specifically, learning areas are multifunctional zones intentionally designed within early childhood classrooms to support self-directed learning. Each area is organized according to children's developmental needs, interests, and abilities, and includes diverse materials that invite exploration, problem-solving, and social interaction. Typical learning areas include a literacy or reading corner, a block area, a science exploration area, a dramatic play area, and an art area. These environments are structured to promote autonomy, decision-making, and sustained engagement (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Lin & Shih, 2025; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). From a socio-cultural perspective, learning areas also function as mediational spaces in which children co-construct meaning through social interaction and guided participation. Empirical studies have shown that well-designed learning areas enhance children's cognitive flexibility, social competence, and

intrinsic motivation (Rogoff, 2003; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Therefore, learning areas should be understood not only as a classroom management strategy but as a pedagogical framework grounded in developmental and socio-cultural theory.

2. THE MEANING OF LEARNING AREAS

In Taiwan, learning areas, also referred to as learning "corners," constitute the domain-specific activity spaces intentionally structured within early childhood educational environments. These spaces are pedagogically designed by teachers in alignment with thematic units or curricular focal topics, and are further informed by systematic observations of children's learning dispositions, developmental needs, and emerging interests. Within each area, diverse materials—including toys, instructional resources, and real-life objects—are purposefully arranged to afford opportunities for observation, exploration, manipulation, inquiry, and active engagement. Through such spatial and material organization, learning areas function not merely as physical settings but as dynamic pedagogical contexts that support children's autonomous participation and meaning-making (Deng, 2026). In recent years, a significant number of preschools in Taiwan have shifted toward learning-area-based curricula that emphasize children's autonomous exploration. This pedagogical orientation reflects a broader movement toward child-centered education, positioning young learners as active constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of instruction. Grounded in constructivist learning theory, such curricular arrangements provide spatially and materially organized environments in which children engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and meaning-making through hands-on experiences and social interaction. From a curriculum reform perspective, the adoption of learning-area-based free exploration represents not merely a methodological adjustment, but a paradigmatic transformation in early childhood education. It signals a reconfiguration of pedagogical authority, redistributing agency from teacher-directed instruction to child-initiated activity, and foregrounding the importance of autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and experiential learning. Consequently, this curriculum model warrants sustained scholarly attention and critical recognition, particularly in relation to its epistemological assumptions, implementation challenges, and implications for educational equity and quality in Taiwan's early childhood education landscape (Deng, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2017, 2026; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978; Wu, 2024). Figures 1 to 4 show the planning of the preschool learning areas.

Figures 1

Figures 2

Figures 3

Figures 4

3. THE CHARACTERISICS OF LEARNING AREAS

The naming and classification of learning areas are generally based on young children's physical and psychological developmental characteristics, as well as the functional attributes of different learning materials. In practice, these areas can be broadly categorized into six major types. This classification not only reflects developmental considerations but also embodies a commitment to multiple intelligences and holistic development in curriculum design (Deng, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2026).

3.1 Language Learning Areas

This learning area provides a variety of age-appropriate books and picture books in reading area. Picture books play a vital role in the lives and learning of young children. The reading area also encourages young children to read independently and listen to stories, which helps in developing language skills and cognitive abilities. Language learning areas include reading corners and audiovisual sections equipped with picture books, storybooks, audio materials, multimedia resources, word cards, stamps, and writing tools. These areas aim to create a language-rich environment in which children develop listening, speaking, reading, and emergent writing skills through meaningful engagement with texts and symbolic systems. Through contextualized experiences, children gradually construct early literacy awareness and narrative competence (Crawford, Roberts, & Lacina, 2024; Deng, 2026; Kaur et al, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2026).

3.2 Cognitive and Mathematical Learning Areas

Cognitive learning areas (e.g., mathematics or manipulative areas) provide mathematical and intellectual development materials such as number cards, clocks, weighing scales, beads, rods of varying lengths, and classification or matching games related to weight, proportion, and quantity. Through hands-on manipulation and play-based activities, children develop foundational number concepts, logical reasoning, and problem-solving abilities, thereby constructing the basis for abstract thinking (Deng, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2026). Figure 5. Planning of the mathematics area in a preschool classroom.

Figure 5.

3. 3 Artistic Learning Areas

This learning area equipped with easels, paints, brushes, clay, and other materials, allowing children to express their creativity and develop their artistic talents and hand-eye coordination. Artistic learning areas include art corners, creative studios, drawing areas, and clay modeling spaces. These areas offer diverse art materials and tools that encourage children to make independent choices and engage in creative expression. Emphasizing sensory exploration and imaginative production, artistic learning areas support the development of aesthetic sensitivity, creativity, and emotional expression (Deng, 2026; Kaur et al, 2024; Lim, Wu & He, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2026). Figure 6. Planning of the art area in a preschool classroom.

Figure 6

3.4 Music Learning Areas

This learning area offers various musical instruments and materials, allowing children to engage in musical activities to develop auditory skills, rhythm, and self-expression. Music allows children to express their emotions and ideas in a non-verbal way. Creating their own rhythms or melodies can be a powerful form of self-expression. Music learning areas, such as music corners or rhythm sections, are equipped with simple percussion instruments (e.g., wooden fish, bells, shakers, castanets, drums, and triangles) and children's songs. Through rhythm imitation, ensemble performance, and improvisation, children cultivate rhythmic awareness, musical perception, and the ability to express feelings and emotions through sound (Deng, 2026; Kaur et al, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2026; Zuhal YIMAZ, 2017).

3.5 Natural Science Learning Areas

Early childhood science education is not merely the transmission of factual knowledge; rather, it is an inquiry-driven process that nurtures young children's innate curiosity and cognitive development. Young children often learn about the world through exploratory play. Research shows that adults can either facilitate or impede children's learning through exploratory play, depending on the manner in which they get involved: For example, directly instructing children what to do when facing a novel artifact may discourage them from further exploration and discovery learning. This learning area provides simple science experiment materials and natural objects, encouraging children to explore the mysteries of nature through observation and experiments, fostering their curiosity and investigative spirit. Natural science learning areas (e.g., science corners, nature areas, animal care areas, and planting areas) provide materials such as globes, magnifying glasses, magnets, funnels, aquariums, seeds, and insect boxes. These areas emphasize discovery, observation, experimentation, and inquiry-based exploration, fostering children's curiosity about natural phenomena and supporting the development of early scientific thinking (Deng, 2026; Kaur et al, 2024; Juan & Shih, 2026; Shih, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2026; Uğraş, Çakır, Zacharis & Kalogiannakis, 2025; Yu, 2022).

3.6 Play and Dramatic Role-Play Learning Areas

His learning area features props like a play kitchen, doctor kits, and store setups, allowing children to engage in role-playing games, which enhance social skills, language abilities, and imagination. Play and dramatic role-play areas include toy corners, housekeeping areas, drama stages, and block construction areas. Equipped with dolls, puppets, role-play props, costumes, and construction materials, these spaces allow children to represent lived experiences through imitation and symbolic play. Through collaborative interaction and negotiation, children develop social competence, emotional understanding, and an emerging sense of social norms (Deng, 2026; Kaur et al, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2026). Figure 7. Planning of the Dramatic Play Area in a Preschool Classroo

Figure 7

4. REFLECTIONS

The development and learning throughout the life of a person is largely determined by the early childhood education. Preschool curriculum design and implementation has a substantial impact on the way in which the young children learn, acquire social-emotional skills, and build their identities. The ECEC Curriculum Framework (2017) has become a rather holistic and

applicable approach to the early childhood learning process because it focuses on both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning. In contrast to old-fashioned curricula, which might focus on academic success, the Taiwanese one is based on two major principles: the idea of assisting children in their holistic development and the understanding of cultural value systems that define learning (Juan et al., 2025; ; Ministry of Education, 2026). This combined strategy is indicative of a developing world wide agreement that successful early childhood education should be able to serve the many-dimensional aspects of child development and yet be sensitive to the cultural conditions. Learning areas are a common organizational approach in early childhood education classrooms. Rather than functioning merely as spatial arrangements, learning areas represent a child-centered curricular philosophy that emphasizes children's active engagement with the environment through autonomous choice and hands-on exploration. Rooted in constructivist theory, this approach assumes that children construct knowledge through interaction with materials, peers, and teachers. Specifically, learning areas are multifunctional zones intentionally designed within early childhood classrooms to support self-directed learning. Each area is organized according to children's developmental needs, interests, and abilities, and includes diverse materials that invite exploration, problem-solving, and social interaction. Typical learning areas include a literacy or reading corner, a block area, a science exploration area, a dramatic play area, and an art area. These environments are structured to promote autonomy, decision-making, and sustained engagement (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Bredekamp & Copple, 2009; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). From a socio-cultural perspective, learning areas also function as mediational spaces in which children co-construct meaning through social interaction and guided participation. Empirical studies have shown that well-designed learning areas enhance children's cognitive flexibility, social competence, and intrinsic motivation (Rogoff, 2003; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Therefore, learning areas should be understood not only as a classroom management strategy but as a pedagogical framework grounded in developmental and socio-cultural theory. There is an emerging trend of integrating play-based learning and compartmentalized subject-based education in early childhood education across the globe. It has been shown that play-based learning became widely popular as the effective pedagogical intervention in the early childhood education that has been documented to influence cognitive development such as memory, problem-solving, language acquisition, and attentional abilities. The Taiwanese framework operationalizes such principles by using a systematic but loose structure of learning areas that helps teachers to create meaningful experiences to preschoolers. The knowledge of how these learning areas are applied in the Taiwanese context and how they are operationalized in the real classroom practice is also insightful into the modern-day preschool education. The paper will offer an in-depth discussion of the learning areas of preschool curriculum in Taiwan (Kohli, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2017; Wang, & Shih, 2022; Ye & Shih, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

Preschool classroom innovation can involve finding unique ways to present material to children. Engaging children with the material will support their understanding of the broader implications of what they learn and how it relates to their lives. Contemporary preschool curriculum frameworks emphasize the importance of promoting children's holistic development, thereby focusing on both academic and non-academic learning areas (Bautista et al, 2016; Morris, 2018). The categorization of learning areas into six major types reflects a developmentally grounded and pedagogically intentional approach to early childhood curriculum design. Rather than functioning merely as physical divisions within the classroom, these learning areas constitute structured yet flexible environments that support children's holistic development across linguistic, cognitive, artistic, musical, scientific, and socio-emotional domains. Each category responds to specific developmental needs while simultaneously fostering integrative learning. Language areas cultivate emergent literacy and communicative competence; cognitive and mathematical areas strengthen logical reasoning and conceptual understanding; artistic and musical areas nurture creativity, aesthetic sensibility, and emotional expression; natural science areas stimulate inquiry, observation, and early scientific thinking; and play and dramatic

role-play areas promote symbolic representation, social interaction, and identity formation. Collectively, these areas embody a child-centered philosophy that values exploration, autonomy, and experiential learning. Moreover, the design and implementation of learning areas reflect contemporary perspectives in early childhood education that emphasize active engagement, meaningful interaction with materials, and the co-construction of knowledge within social contexts. When thoughtfully planned and dynamically facilitated by teachers, learning areas become pedagogical spaces where children not only acquire foundational skills but also develop curiosity, confidence, and a disposition toward lifelong learning. Thus, learning areas should be understood as an integrated curriculum framework that supports comprehensive development, rather than as isolated activity zones. Their effectiveness ultimately depends on intentional design, responsive teaching, and an educational vision that recognizes young children as active, competent learners (Deng, 2026; Kaur et al, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2026; Shih, 2018).

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