



Fostering Learning Motivation among Young Children in Taiwan: A Curriculum Design Perspective

Yi-Huang Shih

Center of Teacher Education, Minghsin University of Science and Technology, Hsinchu, Taiwan

Article DOI: 10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0301

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0301>

KEYWORDS: curriculum design, diverse learning activities, early childhood education, learning motivation, young children.

ABSTRACT: Within the context of early childhood education in Taiwan, the cultivation of young children's learning motivation concerns not only the degree of their individual engagement in learning, but also how curriculum design responds to their lived experiences, developmental needs, and cultural contexts.

Corresponding Author:

Yi-Huang Shih

This article aims to clarify what types of diverse early childhood educational activities teachers can design. The types of curriculum design discussed in this

Published: March 03, 2026

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license:

study include: (1) Children's structured and unstructured activities; (2) Children's indoor and outdoor activities; (3) Children's active and quiet activities.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is universally recognized as a critical phase in a child's development, laying the foundation for future academic success, socio emotional well-being, and lifelong learning (Erma Damayanti et al, 2024). Within the context of early childhood education in Taiwan, the cultivation of young children's learning motivation concerns not only the degree of their individual engagement in learning, but also how curriculum design responds to their lived experiences, developmental needs, and cultural contexts. In contrast to outcome-oriented or skills-based curricular models, approaching learning motivation through curriculum design emphasizes the role of children as active learners, as well as their sense of meaning, participation, and emotional connection throughout the learning process. This perspective also resonates with the principles advocated in the *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*, particularly the emphases on "child-centeredness," "valuing the learning process," and "learning through everyday life." To respond to the aforementioned principles of early childhood education, teachers' curriculum design must incorporate diverse learning activities in order to effectively stimulate young children's learning motivation. This article aims to clarify what types of diverse early childhood educational activities teachers can design (Juan, Shih & Kao, 2025; Kaur et al, 2024; Lin & Shih, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2024).

2. WHAT IS A GOOD EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Curriculum design in early childhood education should move beyond the mere arrangement of activities and instead focus on the construction of meaningful learning contexts. If curriculum is understood as the lived experience of children, then it is not a static plan but a dynamic process shaped through interaction among children, teachers, materials, and the environment. From this viewpoint, teachers are not simply transmitters of knowledge, but facilitators, co-learners, and reflective practitioners who thoughtfully respond to children's interests and developmental needs (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). A hands-on curriculum is therefore emphasized, as experiential learning has been shown to enhance young children's cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and intrinsic motivation (Bodrova & Leong, 2004; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Furthermore, the use of developmentally appropriate materials and equipment aligns with principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), which stress that learning environments must correspond to children's age-related characteristics, individual differences, and sociocultural contexts (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Thus, curriculum design in early childhood education should integrate theoretical knowledge of child development with practical strategies that foreground exploration, hands-on interaction, and age-appropriate learning environments in order to effectively foster children's motivation and holistic development. In other words, preschool teachers need to design diverse learning activities for young children. Learning activities must be selected with deliberate care and should reflect a balanced range of learning experiences (Juan & Shih, 2026; Shih, 2024).

3. A BALANCED OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S LEARNING ACTIVITIES

3.1 Children's structured and unstructured activities

Structured activities, often conceptualized as goal-oriented learning experiences, emphasize logical reasoning, problem-solving processes, and the acquisition of domain-specific competencies. These activities are typically teacher-guided and intentionally designed to scaffold children's emerging cognitive skills, such as numeracy, language development, and executive functioning. Within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, structured learning provides explicit support, modeling, and feedback, enabling children to progressively internalize new knowledge and strategies. In contrast, unstructured activities—frequently described as free play—are characterized by spontaneity, imagination, and open-ended exploration. During free play, children exercise autonomy, negotiate social roles, construct symbolic meanings, and engage in creative experimentation. Rather than following predetermined outcomes, unstructured contexts allow children to regulate their own learning trajectories, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation and adaptive problem-solving abilities. The Taiwan ECEC Curriculum Framework (2017) advocates a balanced integration of guided learning and exploratory play. It conceptualizes young children as active participants in knowledge construction and emphasizes holistic development across physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and aesthetic domains. From this perspective, structured and unstructured activities should not be positioned as dichotomous opposites; instead, they function as complementary pedagogical approaches. Structured experiences offer cognitive scaffolding and intentional skill cultivation, while free play nurtures creativity, resilience, and social competence. Effective early childhood education therefore requires systematic observation of children's individual learning styles, interests, and developmental needs. Through reflective curriculum planning, educators can design learning environments that intentionally interweave goal-directed instruction with open-ended exploration. Such balanced environments not only promote cognitive advancement but also cultivate creativity, collaborative capacity, emotional well-being, and a positive disposition toward lifelong learning. In the Taiwanese context, this integration aligns with the Framework's emphasis on child-centered pedagogy, thematic curriculum design, and the cultivation of whole-person development. Consequently, the interplay between structured and unstructured activities represents not merely a methodological choice, but a foundational principle in advancing equitable, developmentally responsive early childhood education. **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** illustrate structured activities for young children. In early childhood education contexts, structured activities

(**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**) typically refer to teacher-planned instructional experiences with clearly defined learning objectives and systematically organized procedures. Such activities emphasize goal orientation, scaffolding support, and conceptual development, enabling children to develop specific skills and understandings under guided instruction. **Figure 3** illustrates an unstructured activity. In early childhood education contexts, unstructured activities refer to child-initiated and self-directed experiences that are not governed by predetermined instructional steps or narrowly defined learning objectives. Such activities emphasize autonomy, creativity, and open-ended exploration, allowing children to construct meaning through spontaneous interaction with materials, peers, and their environment (Ministry of Education, 2017; Playground Centre, 2026; Shih, 2024).



Figure 1



Figure 2

**Figure 3**

3.2 Children's indoor and outdoor activities

Within the policy context of the Taiwan ECEC Curriculum Framework (2017), physical activity is conceptualized not merely as a means of promoting physical health, but as an essential component of holistic child development. The Framework emphasizes integrated learning across developmental domains, including physical movement and health, cognition, emotion, social interaction, and aesthetic experience. In this regard, daily engagement in both structured and unstructured physical activities aligns closely with the Framework's child-centered and play-based pedagogical orientation. Regular physical activity contributes significantly to preventing childhood overweight and reducing the risk of long-term health complications. However, beyond its physiological benefits, movement-based experiences foster motor coordination, spatial awareness, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and peer collaboration. The Framework advocates for developmentally appropriate practices that recognize young children as active constructors of knowledge; thus, structured physical activities—such as teacher-guided motor skill exercises—serve to scaffold emerging competencies, while unstructured free play enables autonomy, creativity, and self-regulation. Consistent with international recommendations suggesting that preschoolers engage in at least one hour of structured activity and one hour of free play daily. Taiwan's Framework underscores the importance of balancing guided learning with exploratory experiences. This dual emphasis resonates with sociocultural perspectives on learning, in which adult mediation and peer interaction are both central to development. Importantly, the Framework highlights the affective dimension of learning. Physical activities should therefore be meaningful, enjoyable, and culturally responsive. When children experience joy and competence during movement, they are more likely to develop positive self-concepts, intrinsic motivation, and lifelong health habits. In Taiwan's early childhood settings,

integrating movement into thematic learning areas—such as combining physical exploration with language storytelling or mathematical spatial reasoning—reflects the interdisciplinary spirit promoted by the Framework (Lazarev et al., 2024; Parenting.Firstcry.com, 2026; Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2024). **Figure 4** illustrates an indoor activity. In early childhood education settings, indoor activities refer to learning experiences that take place within the classroom environment. These activities are typically conducted in structured learning areas or small-group settings and may include guided instruction, collaborative tasks, or independent exploration. **Figure 5** illustrates an outdoor activity. In early childhood education contexts, outdoor activities refer to learning experiences that take place outside the classroom, such as in playgrounds, school gardens, or open outdoor environments. These activities provide children with opportunities for physical movement, sensory exploration, and direct engagement with nature.



Figure 4



Figure 5

3.3 Children's active and quiet activities

In early childhood education, achieving a balanced integration of active and quiet activities is fundamental to promoting children's holistic development. From a developmental systems perspective, children's learning is shaped through the dynamic

interaction between bodily movement, cognitive processes, and socio-emotional regulation. Rather than privileging one mode of engagement over another, a developmentally appropriate curriculum framework recognizes that both movement-based and reflective activities contribute synergistically to children's growth across domains. Active activities, characterized by gross motor engagement and high levels of physical coordination, play a crucial role in neurological and executive function development. Research indicates that physical movement enhances attention regulation, working memory, and inhibitory control in young children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Diamond, 2015). Outdoor play, climbing, dancing, ball games, and obstacle navigation provide opportunities for embodied learning, supporting what embodied cognition theorists describe as the integration of sensorimotor experience and higher-order thinking (Shapiro, 2019). In structured contexts, teachers may intentionally design cooperative movement tasks (e.g., relay games) to foster social competence and collaborative problem-solving. In unstructured contexts, spontaneous physical play supports autonomy, creativity, and peer negotiation (Bodrova & Leong, 2024).

Quiet activities emphasize sustained attention, fine motor coordination, and reflective meaning-making. Activities such as reading, drawing, puzzle-solving, block construction, and small-group dialogue foster symbolic representation and language development, aligning with sociocultural perspectives on mediated learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Shih, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that opportunities for focused, calm engagement contribute to self-regulation and early academic readiness (Blair & Raver, 2015). Quiet learning contexts also enable children to internalize social experiences and consolidate cognitive understanding. Importantly, effective preschool curricula do not dichotomize active and quiet experiences as opposing categories. Instead, they are organized within a rhythmic pedagogical structure that alternates between high-energy and low-energy activities. Such rhythm supports physiological regulation and emotional balance, helping children transition between states of arousal and calm (Perry, 2002; Shih, 2024). This balanced daily flow enhances attentional readiness and reduces behavioral dysregulation. Therefore, an integrated curriculum design that intentionally sequences active and quiet periods aligns with contemporary understandings of self-regulation and whole-child development. **Figure 6** illustrates an active activity. In early childhood education contexts, active activities refer to learning experiences that involve physical movement, dynamic engagement, and high levels of energy. These activities may include movement games, music and rhythm exercises, cooperative physical play, or interactive group tasks. **Figure 7** illustrates a quiet activity. In early childhood education contexts, quiet activities refer to learning experiences characterized by low physical movement and a calm, focused atmosphere. These activities may include reading, drawing, puzzle-solving, or individual table tasks.



Figure 6



Figure 7

4. CONCLUSION

In Taiwan, the government consolidated the kindergarten and daycare systems in 2012, and launched a new national curriculum framework, *Early Childhood Education & Care Curriculum Framework (ECECCF)*, as a guidance for quality early childhood education programs (Chang et al, 2021). The curriculum framework places particular emphasis on fostering children's intrinsic learning interests as a central component of pedagogical design and educational development. The cultivation of children's learning motivation requires more than increasing behavioral engagement or academic performance indicators. Rather, it necessitates a reconceptualization of curriculum as a relational, dynamic, and meaning-centered process situated within children's lived experiences and sociocultural contexts. Consistent with sociocultural theory and ecological systems perspectives (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978), children's motivation develops through reciprocal interactions among learners, teachers, materials, and environments. This article has argued that high-quality early childhood curriculum design is grounded in intentional pedagogical balance. Structured and unstructured activities, indoor and outdoor contexts, as well as active and quiet learning experiences should not be treated as dichotomous categories. Instead, they operate as complementary dimensions within a holistic developmental ecology. Structured activities provide cognitive scaffolding and guided participation that support executive functioning and domain-specific competence (Bodrova & Leong, 2024), while unstructured play fosters autonomy, creativity, and intrinsic motivation—core components of self-determined learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Similarly, balancing indoor and outdoor learning environments enhances both reflective cognitive engagement and embodied exploration. Empirical studies demonstrate

that physical activity contributes not only to motor development but also to self-regulation and attentional control (Diamond, 2015). Meanwhile, quiet, sustained engagement in literacy-rich and symbolic activities supports language acquisition and early academic readiness (Blair & Raver, 2015). The rhythmic alternation between high-energy and low-energy experiences further promotes physiological regulation and emotional balance, which are foundational to long-term motivational resilience. These principles align closely with the Taiwan Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2017), which emphasizes child-centeredness, learning through everyday life, and holistic development across domains. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), balanced curriculum design supports children's fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—conditions empirically associated with sustained intrinsic motivation. Ultimately, fostering young children's learning motivation involves cultivating environments where children experience agency, competence, belonging, and joy. When curriculum design intentionally integrates diverse learning modalities within a coherent developmental vision, it not only advances cognitive outcomes but also nurtures lifelong dispositions toward curiosity, resilience, and meaningful participation in society (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Finally, curriculum reform is a significant topic that often involves revising educational programs to better meet the needs of students, address contemporary challenges, and align with educational goals and values. Hence, changing the curriculum has been viewed as an effective way to change classroom practice and influence student learning to meet the needs of the ever-changing world. In the process of early childhood curriculum reform, preschool teachers need to develop a clear understanding of the various types of curriculum activity design. (Shih, 2025; Wang & Lin, 2025).

REFERENCES

1. Blair, C., & Raver, C. C. (2015). School readiness and self-regulation: A developmental psychobiological approach. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 66, 711–731.
2. Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2004). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education* (2nd ed.). Pearson.
3. Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2024). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education*. Pearson.
4. Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793–828). John Wiley & Sons, Inc..
5. Chang, C. W., Cheng, S. S., Chang, I. W., Liaw, F. R., Cheng, C. C. (2021). The development of Early Childhood Education & Care Curriculum Framework implementation evaluation scale in Taiwan. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 11, 4, p.377-395. doi.org/10.1556/063.2021.00041
6. Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs* (3rd ed.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.
7. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
8. Diamond A. (2015). Effects of Physical Exercise on Executive Functions: Going beyond Simply Moving to Moving with Thought. *Ann Sports Med Res*. 19;2(1):1011. PMID: 26000340; PMCID: PMC4437637.
9. Erma Damayanti et al (2024). Dynamics of early childhood education in Taiwan: A comparative study of traditional and innovative approaches. *Absorbent Mind: Journal of Psychology and Child Development*, 4 (1), 65-75.
10. Hirsh-Pasek, Kathy, and others, *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence* (New York, 2008; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Apr. 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195382716.001.0001>, accessed 20 Feb. 2026.

11. Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Eyer, D., Berk, L. E., et al. (2009). Einstein never used flash cards: How our children really learn—and why they need to play more and memorize less. Rodale.
12. Juan, C. Y., Shih, Y. H., & Kao, S. C. (2025). Wellbeing strategies for young children in Taiwan's Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework: A holistic approach in early childhood education. *International Journal of Research in Education, Humanities and Commerce*, 6(6), 370-375.
13. Juan, C. Y., & Shih, Y. H. (2026). Principles of science curriculum design for Taiwanese preschools: Three dimensions of integrating IEP into science learning for young children. *RA Journal of Applied Research*, 12(02), 99–105. <https://doi.org/10.47191/rajar/v12i2.01>
14. Kaur, K., Shih, Y. H., Liu, Y.-Y., Hsu, M. C., & Chang, C. L. (2024). An exploration on self-made teaching aids for learning areas in Taiwanese preschools. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Artistic Innovations*, 4(3), 0005. <https://doi.org/10.35745/ijssai2024v04.03.0005>
15. Lazarev, A., Nath, S., Nguyen, C. Q., Demian, A. M., Bertasi, R. A. O., Bertasi, T. G. O., and Pujalte, G. G. A. (2024). Sports and weight control in children. *Cureus*, 16(2), e53731. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.53731>
16. Lin, J. C., & Shih, Y. H. (2025). Teaching philosophy for children's learning: Inspiration from the Winnetka Plan. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Artistic Innovations*, 5(4), 8-16. <https://doi.org/10.35745/ijssai2025v05.04.0017>
17. Ministry of Education (2017). *The Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework*. Taipei: Ministry of Education.
18. Perry, B. D. (2002). Childhood experience and the expression of genetic potential. *Brain and Mind*, 3, 79–100.
19. Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. International Universities Press.
20. Parenting.Firstcry.com (2026). 30 Indoor and Outdoor Physical Activities for Kids. <https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/30-indoor-and-outdoor-physical-activities-for-kids/>
21. Playground Centre (2026). Unstructured vs structured play. <https://www.playgroundcentre.com/unstructured-vs-structured-play/>
22. Shapiro, L. (2019). *Embodied cognition*. Routledge.
23. Shih, Y. H. (2024). Learning for children in an educational enrichment: A perspective derived from Taiwan's Early Childhood Education & Care Curriculum Framework. *Frontiers in Education*, 9:1412972. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1412972
24. Shih, Y. H. (2025). Rethinking the goals of curriculum practice in primary and secondary schools in Taiwan. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Artistic Innovations*, 5(3), 11-17. <https://doi.org/10.35745>
25. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
26. Wang, C. Y., & Lin, Y. H. (2025). STEAM in early childhood education: teachers' curriculum design thinking and implementation self-efficacy. *Teachers and Teaching*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2025.2490833>