



# The Influence of Physical Environment on Teachers' Emotions in Kindergartens and Suggestions for Improvement

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**Abstract.** With developments in society, there has been a growing emphasis on the suitability and comfort of work environments for modern individuals. Kindergartens are places where children learn and play but at the same time, they can also be perceived as challenging workspaces for preschool teachers. A comfortable and satisfactory working environment is known to improve teachers' performance and influence their emotions. While existing research has established that the physical environment in kindergartens plays an essential role in promoting children's physical and mental health development, they commonly neglected its impact on preschool teachers' emotional well-being. Notably, a considerable number of preschool teachers have voiced complaints regarding inadequate or inconvenient physical environments in kindergartens via social media platforms, which can lead to negative emotions and reduced work efficiency among teachers. Since the emotional state of preschool teachers can directly impact young children's physical and mental health development and affect the quality of preschool education, this study aims to investigate the relationship between physical environments in kindergartens and the emotions of preschool teachers and to propose practical recommendations for improvements based on real-world situations.

**Keywords:** kindergarten; physical environment; preschool teachers; emotions.

## 1 Introduction

With increasing attention paid to the development of preschool education in China, more kindergartens are being established and the team of preschool teachers is expanding. At the same time, the impact of the physical environment of kindergartens on the emotions of teachers is becoming increasingly prominent. Many teachers have vented their feelings about the impact of certain physical environments in kindergartens on their work and emotions on social platforms. In our past internship experiences, we also observed that some teachers were affected by the physical environment emotionally, which would affect their subsequent work. Therefore, this study focuses on three main questions; Does the physical environment of kindergartens necessarily affect the emotions of preschool teachers? Secondly, what type of impact is it, positive, negative,

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or other? Finally, based on specific cases, could effective improvement suggestions be proposed?

Next, two concepts will be defined based on the two main aspects of the current study.

## 2 Conceptual definition

### 2.1 Physical environment of kindergartens.

According to the "Cihai" dictionary, the term "environment" refers to the combination of social and physical conditions that surround human beings externally and upon which human beings rely for their survival and development <sup>[1]</sup>. Meanwhile, Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983) proposed the following definition of "environment" in their research on human development: "Environment refers to any time or condition outside the organism itself that affects or is affected by people's development.". In summary, the environment and humans have a correspondence between external and internal factors, and the two influence and change each other.

Many scholars have also given definitions to the concept of the physical environment of kindergartens.

Ru (2006) proposed that the physical environment of kindergartens includes all indoor and outdoor activity facilities and equipment, including buildings, courtyards, sports fields, green spaces, and related facilities and equipment such as kindergarten corridors, entrance halls, activity rooms, nap rooms, multi-functional rooms, and science development rooms. This also includes the decoration and layout of walls and windows, as well as the arrangement of those activity areas. Based on this, we can also refer to the physical environment as the explicit environment <sup>[2]</sup>.

Yang (2006) suggested that the physical environment of a kindergarten includes various places and materials, both man-made and natural in kindergartens, such as sand pits, green spaces, and large amusement equipment. The physical environment also includes teaching facilities and equipment arrangements in classrooms, dormitories, activity rooms, etc <sup>[3]</sup>.

Taken together, the "physical environment of kindergarten" in this study refers to the condition of all facilities, equipment, and other physical settings in kindergartens from the perspective of teachers. We emphasize the physical conditions and welfare benefits related to teachers.

### 2.2 Emotions of preschool teachers

Emotion is a common psychological and social phenomenon in people's lives. Since the seventies of the twentieth century, the study of emotions has gradually become a dynamic research field. In the book "The Psychology of Emotions" published by New Zealand scholar K.T. Strongman in 2003, there are more than 150 theories of emotions from psychology, philosophy, sociology, and other fields <sup>[4]</sup>. There are also many different schools of theories. For example, functionalist scholar Campos (1983) defined emotions as "psychological phenomena in the relationship between individuals and

meaningful events in environments", and cognitivist Lazarus (1991) defines emotions as "the organization of physio psychological responses to positive or negative information from the ongoing environment, which relies on short-term or continuous evaluation". Young, a scholar who focuses on the physiology of emotions, defines emotions as "the intense disturbance of emotional processes originating in mental states, which simultaneously shows bodily changes in smooth muscle, glands, and general behavior." [5]. It is noteworthy that the above researchers either emphasize the situational factors of individual emotions, the cognitive process of emotions, or the physiological representations of emotions, and their definitions and contents are quite distinctive. In this study, the researchers' understanding of emotions mainly adopts a functionalist perspective, defining emotions as the psychological phenomena in the relationship between individuals and meaningful events in environments.

The emotional state of preschool teachers refers to the psychological phenomenon of the relationship between preschool teachers and meaningful events in their environment. In other words, it refers to the relatively short-term physical and mental reactions to interactive events of personal significance to teachers while working in kindergarten [6].

### **3 Research aims and significance**

In contemporary society, there are preschool teachers complain about the physical environment in kindergartens, such as insufficient teaching materials and outdated media technology. These limitations have greatly affected the quality of education provided by preschool teachers. This is because teachers may hold negative emotions due to the restricted physical conditions and their needs and emotions being ignored by managers.

In recent years, research on the design of physical environments in kindergartens has mainly focused on the perspectives of children, emphasizing the importance of the physical environment for the development of young children while neglecting the needs of teachers. The work environment has a significant impact on the needs of teachers. If the needs for physical materials are not met, teachers' emotions will be rather low, which can significantly affect the quality of education. Moreover, current research primarily focused on emotional issues related to primary, middle, and high school teachers, with little attention given to preschool teachers.

During our internship, we observed that musical activities in the classroom were limited to singing nursery rhymes with no other forms of music available. Preschool teachers were distressed and anxious about preparing for musical activities during naptime because the kindergarten lacked essential equipment, such as xylophones, castanets, and bells, which are necessary for percussion activities. If teachers want to organize these activities, they would face limitations and the kindergarten did not purchase equipment regularly. To some extent, this has discouraged teachers from preparing music activities, which then also limited opportunities for young children to experience new instruments and different types of music and can ultimately reduce the quality of music education. We found that the fundamental difficulty was the shortage

of musical instruments, which affected teachers' emotions negatively and made them unwilling to innovate. As a result, they chose to stay unchanged. In other words, teachers' physical needs were not met, and the lack of an adequate physical environment in the kindergarten led to low teacher morale.

Therefore, this study aims to observe the physical environment in kindergartens from the perspective of teachers and their emotions, identify the weakness in kindergartens' environments, propose corresponding suggestions for improvements, create a good work environment for teachers in kindergartens, reduce their teaching and preparation pressure, lift their emotions, and ultimately enhance the quality of preschool education.

## 4 Research status and weakness

There are many factors influencing the emotions of preschool teachers. Sun (2020) <sup>[7]</sup> mentioned that "the main factors affecting the emotions of preschool teachers include support from policy, their own professional level, the environment of the kindergarten, and parental support.". Su, Tian, and Xu (2021) <sup>[8]</sup> also pointed out that meeting the psychological needs of preschool teachers will improve their emotions, and to achieve so, it is necessary to optimize the working environment of the kindergarten as a whole and enhance its humanistic care.

Referring to the literature, it can also be reflected that the environment of kindergarten plays an important role in whether the emotions of preschool teachers are positive or not, and has an important impact on preschool teachers. However, the gap is that although research has paid attention to the influence of the kindergarten environment on the emotions of teachers, it did not specifically address what impact the physical environment has on the emotions of preschool teachers. This is because the kindergarten environment not only includes the physical environment but also includes the mental environment.

It is difficult to notice the emotions of teachers because managers themselves may overlook teachers and neglect the management of the emotions of preschool teachers, and any related training may just be superficial. Wei (2020) <sup>[9]</sup> mentioned that "kindergarten managers should comprehensively analyze the working environment of kindergartens from the perspective of managers and from the level of system construction and humanistic care to establish a work environment that can inspire teachers' enthusiasm for work." Secondly, teachers may conceal their true emotions, which means it is difficult for others to understand and resonate with them. Jiang (2020) <sup>[10]</sup> pointed out the need to strengthen teachers' ability to express their emotions so that their emotions can be understood correctly.

Taken together, this study will focus on the real situation of the observed kindergarten. We will observe and study the impact of the kindergarten's material environment on teachers' emotions from the perspective of preschool teachers. Based on the observed results, corresponding suggestions will be proposed to create a good working environment for teachers and improve their work enthusiasm.

## 5 Conclusion

In our research process, we truly felt that although the managers of the kindergarten had already considered a lot for the preschool teachers and provided some good equipment for them, there were still some aspects that were not satisfactory. For example, we observed that teaching tools at Huimin Kindergarten were not sufficient, and teachers had to gather them from various sources. These factors and events could affect the teachers' emotions.

In short, based on the research results mentioned above, we learned that a good physical environment can promote the positive emotions of preschool teachers, which in turn will affect their motivation and work efficiency. Therefore, how to create a good physical environment became a main subject. I think we can consider the following aspects:

(1) Brainstorming. As the saying goes, "Two heads are better than one." The power and width of an individual's thinking are always limited. It is thus wiser to seek answers to problems among the public population, to brainstorm together, to bring up problems caused by inconvenient physical conditions at work, and jointly seek solutions.

For example, if a teacher reports that teaching materials are not sufficient, can a public warehouse be established to stock up on sufficient teaching supplies to facilitate teaching activities? When a kindergarten faces limited space due to its location in an area where each inch of land is precious, one possible solution is to develop an off-peak activity schedule through communication and negotiation among the relevant teachers.

(2) Go out and research. There is more than one kindergarten in the world. Managers can visit other kindergartens more often for communication and exchanges of ideas, learn the design of better physical environments in other kindergartens, and improve their own kindergarten.

In the process of our research, we also visited different kindergartens to understand and observe the environmental strengths and weaknesses of each one. We also found that each kindergarten has its own unique focus. Therefore, we suggest that managers go out and research to learn more about different settings.

(3) Discover problems and correct them in time. With the development of the kindergarten, problems are bound to arise. However, it is particularly important how we deal with these problems when they occur. When there are inconvenient issues related to the physical environment, we should correct them in a timely manner instead of postponing them.

Weaknesses and Suggestions:

(1) From the perspective of sample selection, I chose one to two kindergartens in Beijing city, which are not representative enough. There are few teachers and research participants involved, so there are great limitations. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of relevant literature for references. The existing literature mainly focuses on the study of teacher emotions or the impact of material environment on teaching, and there are very few available that had linked the two. The research methods we used were also somewhat limited, as emotion is a relatively subjective thing that requires more standardized measures for better assessment.

(2) The research method was not diverse enough, using only observational and

case study methods. Observational methods are influenced by subjective factors related to the observer, and case studies have specificity but lack universality. Therefore, we should consider more diversified research methods to assist our research. For example, questionnaire surveys and interviews can also be used.

(3) Due to the need for further improvement of our own theoretical knowledge, the case analysis was not very comprehensive.

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