

# Constructing the Basic Theoretical Framework of Kindergarten-based Curriculum Development: Definition, History, Characteristics and Approaches

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i4/21303>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i4/21303

**Published Date:** 12 April 2024

## Abstract

As an important part of the curriculum reform of basic education, the kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) plays an important role in early childhood education (ECE). KBCD can not only promote the construction of kindergarten curriculum system, but also the improvement of children's education quality. This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to analyze the basic theoretical framework of KBCD, which includes determining the topic, forming keywords, searching for literature, building & analyzing the themes, and forming conclusions. Ultimately, it was found that the basic theoretical system of KBCD in terms of definition, history, characteristics, and approaches has been constructed, but it needs to be continuously optimized and perfected in the face of the challenges of the post-epidemic era. This study is of great significance in that it not only provides a complete theoretical framework for KBCD definition, characteristics, and approaches, but also analyses in depth KBCD history, while the development history in Western countries and China are theoretically explained. These conclusions bring breakthrough significance and provide a theoretical basis for subsequent research.

**Keywords:** Kindergarten-Based Curriculum Development (KBCD), Kindergarten-Based Curriculum, Kindergarten Curriculum, Early Childhood Education (ECE)

## Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued *Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education* in November 2022, reaffirming the right of all children to early childhood education (ECE), and calling attention to this important stage of children's development. Kindergarten education has been widely valued internationally. According to China's *Regulations on the Work of Kindergartens* since 1989 and emphasised again in 2022, "Kindergartens are institutions that implement the care and education of children over the age of three. The kindergarten school system is generally three years, and the school-age children are generally from three to six years old. Kindergarten education is an important part of basic education and the basic stage of school education system." It can be seen that ECE is highly valued both internationally and in China, so what kind of curriculum can better improve the quality of ECE?

Kindergarten-based curriculum is a concept relative to "national curriculum", "local curriculum" and "school curriculum". The proposal of this concept means that kindergarten teachers have greater rights and responsibilities for curriculum development (Zhang & Xu, 2003). Kindergarten-based curriculum is derived from school-based curriculum (Huang & Xie, 2022), which is a combination of school-based curriculum and kindergarten curriculum. Kindergarten curriculum is a method to achieve the purpose of kindergarten education, and it is the sum of various activities to help children obtain beneficial learning experiences and promote their all-around physical and mental development (Feng, 2001).

In China, according to the *Basic Situation of National Education Development in 2022* issued by the Development Planning Department of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2022 (URL: 教育部发展规划司: 2022 年全国教育事业发展基本情况 - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站 (moe.gov.cn) , in 2022), the gross enrollment rate of ECE is 89.7%, an increase of 1.6 percentage points over 2021. There are 28.92 million kindergartens nationwide. A total of 4627.55 million children are receiving ECE in kindergartens nationwide. There are 324.42 million full-time kindergarten teachers nationwide, an increase of 1.67 percent over 2021. The qualification rate of full-time kindergarten teachers is 99.39%. The proportion of full-time kindergarten teachers with college degree or above is 90.30%. It indicates that China has a huge group of children and kindergarten teachers, a large number of various kindergartens, as well as huge population of children, so the kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) should be paid attention to in China's basic education system.

Although the kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) has been implementing for more than 20 years in China, there are still many problems that need to be improved. Many Chinese kindergartens have been implementing KBCD to varying degrees, of which some have established a systematic KBCD system but some still in the process of exploring. According to Ye (2022) and Cui (2011), the understanding of kindergarten teachers' curriculum concepts is biased and kindergarten teachers' theoretical knowledge of KBCD is insufficient. Therefore, the basic theoretical framework of KBCD is worthy of in-depth study. The innovation and development of kindergarten-based curriculum can promote the development of ECE. The KBCD represents the development direction of kindergarten curriculum and is of great

significance to ECE. In this paper, the authors discuss in depth the definition, history, characteristics of KBCD, as well as the widely used approaches of KBCD through Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, aiming to provide basic theoretical support and practical guidance for improving the quality of ECE and promoting the progress of KBCD in basic education. The basic theoretical framework of KBCD in this study is shown in Figure 1.

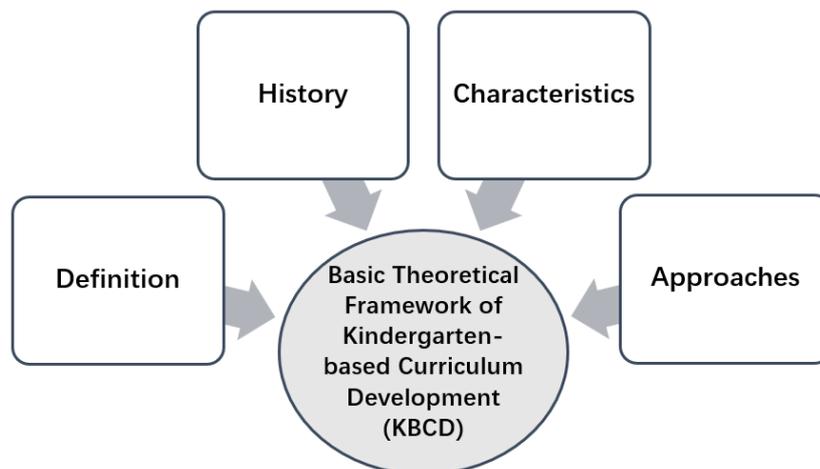


Figure 1 The Basic Theoretical Framework of Kindergarten-based Curriculum Development (KBCD) in this Study

### Definition of Kindergarten-based Curriculum Development

Kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) starts from school-based curriculum development (SBCD), which first appeared in the 1970s in some developed countries such as England and America, and it is a new curriculum development strategy. In the 1990s, China began to implement the three-level curriculum management system, that is, national curriculum, local curriculum and school curriculum. Schools also have decision-making power over the curriculum. Influenced by the school-based curriculum of primary and secondary schools, kindergartens began to develop the kindergarten-based curriculum. The KBCD is a process based on kindergarten. Many scholars have defined KBCD in previous studied.

Ye (2002) points out that the kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) is an activity that kindergartens implement in itself and establish an internal evaluation mechanism by selecting, adapting and compiling teaching materials or designing learning activities through cooperation with external forces in accordance with the history, current situation and development goals of the kindergartens. Zhang and Zhang (2010) advocate out that the KBCD is a curriculum development based on kindergarten, which is carried out according to the specific situation and different conditions of the kindergartens.

Song (2014) believes that the kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) refers to the joint participation of curriculum experts, teaching and research personnel, kindergarten principals, kindergarten teachers, parents, etc., by curriculum developers who comprehensively consider the developmental needs and physical and mental development status of children in the kindergarten and various resources in the kindergarten. It is a series of practical processes of setting objectives, selecting contents, organizing practical teaching activities and evaluating the kindergarten-based curriculum.

Liu (2022) defines kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) as a process of constructing and developing the content and process of kindergarten-based activities with

the participation of children, kindergarten teachers, parents and relevant experts based on the actual situation of kindergarten-based activities. Different scholars have different emphases on the definition of KBCD. In general, KBCD is a curriculum development activity in the kindergarten environment, with kindergarten teachers as the main part and multi-party personnel participating, with the purpose of promoting the personalized development of children and enriching the curriculum system of various kindergartens.

### **History of Kindergarten-based Curriculum Development**

The kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) has a long history of development in Western countries and China. KBCD in Western countries has priority development, then China has followed after. As part of the basic theoretical framework of KBCD in this study, the history of KBCD in Western countries and China is analyzed in detail here.

#### *(1) History of KBCD in Western Countries*

In 1973, the school-based curriculum development (SBCD) concept was first proposed by Furmark, Mac Millan and others at an international curriculum seminar at the University of Ulster in Ireland (Wu, 2004). Hereafter, kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) began to be developed in Western countries. Western countries do not have the concept of pure kindergarten-based curriculum, and they do not have the strict three-level curriculum management system of "national-local-school" like China, kindergartens themselves often have great autonomy in curriculum development. It can be said that kindergarten-based curriculum can be directly equated with kindergarten curriculum in most Western countries. But this is not to say that the national will does not play a role in the development of kindergarten curriculum. On the contrary, Western countries and local governments generally put forward policy requirements for curriculum development, which plays a guiding role.

On the one hand, the United Kingdom, has issued the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* in 2000, which puts forward requirements for education in six areas of early childhood development. The U.S. Head Start Program has developed a "*Head Start*" *Child Development and Learning Framework* since 1965 to provide guidance for kindergartens to adjust the curriculum. In Northern Europe, Sweden also has national kindergarten curriculum standards, according to which the kindergarten curriculum can be adjusted and set. These are the requirements for curriculum development at the national level. On the other hand, Victoria, Australia revised the *Curriculum Standard Framework* in 2022, which stipulates the curriculum content in eight areas, which is the embodiment of the requirements for curriculum construction at the local level.

In terms of specific curriculum development, kindergartens play a major role in western countries. In general, kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) was presented for the first time in Western countries and has been explored and practiced for many years. Many countries have emphasized the importance of KBCD through education and curriculum official documents, put forward requirements for the quality of KBCD. Kindergartens can give full play to their own creativity within the given framework of national and local. The objectives, structure, content and specific implementation of the kindergarten-based curriculum are determined by kindergartens themselves.

*(2) History of KBCD in China*

The studies of kindergarten curriculum in foreign countries started much earlier than in China, and even the early curriculum development of China is from the advanced ideas and models of foreign countries. China needs to strengthen the communication with foreign academic circles and actively active learning. But at the same time, China should also realize that KBCD needs to be based on local reality, so copying without discriminating is not a direction worth advocating.

From the founding of New China in 1949 to the end of the 20th century, China's kindergarten curriculum standards have been unified by the MOE nationwide, the MOE through a series of documents to kindergarten curriculum objectives, content, methods and other mandatory requirements, kindergartens do not have too much autonomy in curriculum and teaching (Liu, 2022). With the influence of the development of the world curriculum and the actual demand for the modernization of China's kindergarten curriculum, the kindergarten-based curriculum has become a popular research field in China since the 1990s.

The development of Chinese kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) originates from school-based curriculum development (SBCD). After the country determined the system of three-level curriculum management in the 1990s, kindergartens began to develop kindergarten-based curriculum (Liu, 2022). The existing researches in China mainly include the following two aspects: the researches on the value of KBCD; the researches on the influencing factors of KBCD (Chen, 2023).

*Researches on the Value of KBCD*

As for the real meaning of the study of kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD), experts have different views. Yang and Yin (2006) propose that one of the basic principles of the study of practical kindergarten-based curriculum is that teachers should not only formulate and implement the curriculum, but also develop and research the curriculum by themselves. The research of practice kindergarten-based curriculum realizes the orientation of "humanized" teaching process, realizes the people-oriented, promotes the growth of children and teachers, and the research and development process of kindergarten-based curriculum practice is the process of teachers' cognition of the classroom, and then produces their own teaching.

Yu (2004) believes that the kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) is an inevitable requirement for scientific and democratic ECE. It is believed that the pursuit of the development of kindergarten-based curriculum should be suitable for specific kindergartens, and a good kindergarten curriculum should be kindergarten-based. The construction of kindergarten-based curriculum can promote the development of children, kindergarten teachers and parents, and also improve the quality of kindergartens (Zhang, 2013). Therefore, KBCD can not only promote the development of children in all aspects, but also promote the development of kindergarten teachers. This shows that KBCD is of great value to both children and kindergarten teachers.

*Researches on the Influencing Factors of KBCD*

The kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) is influenced by many factors. Chen and Yan (2001) point out that the conditions for KBCD are to have a clear and unique

kindergarten-based purpose and educational philosophy. Kindergarten management is built on the basis of democracy, science and openness, the most important point is to have a group of high-quality kindergarten teachers.

Qin (2007) points out that the limitation of kindergarten teachers' own quality has become the bottleneck of KBCD. KBCD is a systematic work including curriculum objectives, curriculum content, curriculum implementation plan, curriculum evaluation system, which requires relevant professional knowledge and technology. The theoretical literacy of kindergarten teachers in China directly affects the application of KBCD. Therefore, in the process of KBCD, kindergarten teachers' professional development will have a great impact on the quality of KBCD and ECE quality.

### **Characteristics of Kindergarten-based Curriculum Development**

The kindergarten-based curriculum is a curriculum established on the basis of the foundation of the kindergarten, which refers to the basics and current situation of the kindergarten, involving the conditions of the kindergarten style, teachers, principals, communities and parents. Its core is the current situation, realistic needs, growth environment and development characteristics of children's development in the kindergarten (Xu, 2002). Therefore, KBCD is different from school-based curriculum development (SBCD) in primary and secondary schools and has the uniqueness of kindergarten.

Scholars have consistent views on the characteristics of KBCD, and generally believe that KBCD should be treated with a democratic, open, diverse and flexible attitude from the perspective of children (Cheng, 2003; Zuo, 2007; Xiang, 2010). According to Ge (2018), KBCD is child-centered, emphasizing the needs of children, advocating teaching children in accordance of their aptitude and individualized teaching, emphasizing the diversified development of children, and emphasizing the active participation of children.

Moreover, Liu (2022) believes that the characteristics of KBCD include the following aspects: dynamic generation, harmony in diversity, multi-participation. The following is a detailed analysis of these three characteristics.

#### *Dynamic Generation*

The kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) is the process of curriculum generation. For reference to Dewey's view that education has no purpose, the development of kindergarten-based curriculum should not presuppose a fixed purpose, if it must be set, it can only be the course itself, that is, the experience gained by children in the curriculum implementation is the purpose of kindergarten-based curriculum development. The generative nature of KBCD determines that the curriculum is constantly changing. Contrary to the traditional textbook development, KBCD should not produce rigid text (Liu, 2022).

Children's interests and needs will change in the creation of the curriculum, and the objects of children's activities need to be constantly adjusted in the curriculum progress, all of which determine that KBCD is a dynamic process. Children's development is a continuous reorganization and transformation of existing experience, which is not static and immutable. Children are making progress every day, and the objects they face are also changing every day. Even if it is an eternal thing, children's understanding of it will change with time.

Therefore, KBCD should also be a process of dynamic generation, an open system, and a movement of continuous development.

### *Harmony in Diversity*

In today's world, the values of differentiation and diversification are advocated. KBCD not only recognizes the differences between children and kindergartens, but also respects and advocates such differences, believing that it is such differences that bring boundless imagination and infinite vitality to education. The difference is the manifestation of the difference in KBCD. Harmony is the essential pursuit of promoting children's all-round development behind such differences. Harmony without distinction is the essential characteristic of the KBCD (Liu, 2022).

The children in education face diverse differences, different kindergartens also have different conditions for running schools, the existence of differences is an objective fact. Different kindergartens have different school-running ideas, different management modes, different teachers and different realistic conditions. The above differences are the factors that lead to the diversity of KBCD. From the perspective of child development, children because of their different ages, often cognitive, emotional, personality and social development levels have great differences, even if the age of children, due to the difference in family environment, physical conditions, it is impossible to be a thousand people. The difference of kindergarten-based curriculum is also the external manifestation of the difference of children.

### *Multi-participation*

The kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) must involve both kindergarten teachers and children. In addition, the KBCD also needs a lot of support from family and community curriculum resources. Different from primary and secondary school students, early children in addition to receiving education in kindergartens, more living habits, personality formation, social development need to be cultivated in the family and society, so KBCD should include parents and communities. It is a practical feature of KBCD to bring together various forces to form educational forces and jointly promote children's development (Liu, 2022).

### **Approaches of Kindergarten-based Curriculum Development**

The kindergarten-based curriculum in Western developed countries has been relatively mature, and many classic kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) approaches have been formed, such as the High/Scope Curriculum in the United States and the Reggio Curriculum in Italy, which have an important influence on the development of kindergarten curriculum in the world.

First of all, there is a more representative KBCD approach such as High/Scope Curriculum in the United States, which was developed at High/Scope Perry School in Michigan, USA. The development of the curriculum was first started in 1962. The theoretical basis of the curriculum is Piaget's cognitive development theory (He, 2012). The High/Scope Curriculum is a comprehensive curriculum grounded in current research. It is designed to support and guide kindergarten teachers to build trusting relationships with learners so they feel confident to explore and exercise their creative imagination through purposeful play.

In addition, Italy's Reggio Curriculum is also one of the popular kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) approaches in recent years, the Reggio Curriculum was created after World War II, is under the leadership of the founder Loris Malaguzzi, relying on the cooperation of teachers, communities, and under the strong funding of the local government to complete. The most prominent feature of this Reggio Curriculum is its process and generation. The curriculum is based on the specific conditions of children and kindergartens, and there is generally no preset course content and no designed activity plan. Organization and implementation mainly rely on the "Project Approach" or "Project Work" (Wiltshire, 2016). This KBCD scheme is very consistent with the current world mainstream curriculum development concept, so it has been widely disseminated and studied all over the world (Wechsler et al., 2016).

China is a vast country, with different levels of development and regional cultures in different regions, various curriculum resources available around each kindergarten, diverse actual conditions in kindergartens. Based on China's early childhood education (ECE) situation, combining with the specific and objective environment of kindergartens in different regions, China should apply and integrate the international outstanding kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD) approaches to promote the development of KBCD with Chinese specificity.

### **Conclusion**

The final finding of this study is that, as for the definition of kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD), in general, KBCD is a curriculum development activity in the kindergarten environment, with kindergarten teachers as the main part and multi-party personnel participating, with the purpose of promoting the personalized development of children and enriching the curriculum system of various kindergartens. In addition, as for the history of KBCD, the KBCD has a long history of development in Western countries and China. KBCD in Western countries has priority development, then China has followed after. On the one hand, KBCD was presented for the first time in Western countries with school-based curriculum development (SBCD) concept was first proposed in 1973 and has been explored and practiced for many years. Many countries have emphasized the importance of KBCD through education and curriculum official documents, put forward requirements for the quality of KBCD. Kindergartens can give full play to their own creativity within the given framework of national and local. On the other hand, KBCD originates from SBCD in China. After the country determined the system of three-level curriculum management in the 1990s, kindergartens began to develop kindergarten-based curriculum (Liu, 2022). The researches on the value and influencing factors of KBCD are the two main research aspects of KBCD in China.

Moreover, as for the characteristics of KBCD, it's different from school-based curriculum development (SBCD) in primary and secondary schools and has the uniqueness of kindergarten. Researchers generally believe that KBCD should be treated with a democratic, open, diverse and flexible attitude from the perspective of children (Cheng, 2003; Zuo, 2007; Xiang, 2010). According to Ge (2020). Dynamic generation, harmony in diversity, multi-participation are three recapitulative characteristics of KBCD. Finally, as for approaches of KBCD, many classic KBCD approaches have been formed internationally, such as the High/Scope Curriculum in the United States and the Reggio Curriculum in Italy. Based on

China's early childhood education (ECE) situation, combining with the specific and objective environment of kindergartens in different regions, China should apply and integrate famous international KBCD approaches to promote the development of KBCD with Chinese specificity. In conclusion, a basic theoretical framework of KBCD is analyzed and built.

In response to the findings of this study, the researchers make the following recommendations: KBCD is an important part of the kindergarten curriculum in the ECE, and its theoretical basic research should be continuously carried out and updated with the development of The Times and educational reform. In the post-epidemic era, with the rapid development of educational science and technology and artificial intelligence (AI), KBCD faces many challenges. These challenges are also ways to optimize KBCD, including information technology integration, interdisciplinary integration, personalized learning, teacher professional development, and educational policy support. To sum up, at present, after years of research, KBCD has developed a sound basic theoretical system, including definition, history, characteristics and approaches. However, KBCD still focuses on the traditional research direction, and its basic theoretical framework lacks of updating and upgrading combined with the above new challenges, which will be a new research trend of KBCD.

### **Research Significance**

This study deep analyses the theoretical framework of kindergarten-based curriculum development (KBCD), which is far-reaching and involves home-kindergarten cooperation, comprehensive development of children, kindergarten curriculum system, professional development of kindergarten teachers in the theoretical and practical domains.

First of all, kindergarten-based curriculum (KBCD) is multi-subject participation, and the participation of parents can strengthen the communication between parents and kindergartens. However, many parents lack the basic knowledge of ECE and KBCD. This theoretical framework can promote parents' knowledge and understanding of KBCD, so that the development of KBCD can better meet the needs of parents and children, and form a good atmosphere of home-kindergarten cooperation.

Secondly, the development of children is the starting point and purpose of KBCD, KBCD is developed with children as the core. This theoretical framework repeatedly emphasizes the importance and central position of children from different aspects of KBCD, providing a solid theoretical foundation for promoting the adaptability, comprehensiveness and interestingness of KBCD based on children. As for adaptability, this theoretical framework facilitates the adjustment of KBCD to the needs and developmental levels of children of different ages, ensuring that curriculum content and activities are appropriate and meaningful for children. As for comprehensiveness, this theoretical framework of KBCD promotes all aspects of children's physical and mental development, including intellectual, language, social, emotional and physical aspects, providing them with comprehensive opportunities for learning and growth. As for interestingness, this theoretical framework improves KBCD to design a variety of teaching activities and games, stimulate children's interest in learning, and cultivate their curiosity and spirit of exploration.

Thirdly, kindergarten curriculum system refers to a set of systematic curriculum framework provided by kindergartens for children, aiming at promoting children's all-round development

in all aspects. As an important part of the kindergarten curriculum system, KBCD is the requirement of the development for kindergartens in the new era, and it is also the concentrated embodiment of the uniqueness of kindergarten curriculum. This theoretical framework has enriched the theoretical basis of KBCD, help to promote the development of KBCD, and eventually optimize the construction of the kindergarten curriculum system.

Finally, kindergarten teachers are the main developers and implementers of KBCD, which is the key to guarantee the effect and quality of KBCD. Therefore, the professional competency of kindergarten teachers needs to be continuously optimized to meet the new demand for KBCD in the development of society. However, the KBCD theoretical basis of kindergarten teachers is not optimistic. This theoretical framework can improve the KBCD theoretical literacy of kindergarten teachers and provide basic guarantee for their professional development.

To sum up, this study enriches the basic knowledge of the current KBCD theory, lays a foundation for the future KBCD research, has important significance in many aspects. Whether in theory or practice, the KBCD theoretical framework of this study plays an important role in home-kindergarten cooperation, comprehensive development of children, kindergarten curriculum system, professional development of kindergarten teachers. Ultimately, it promotes the development of ECE and basic education in the world.

### **Conflict of Interests**

In this research, authors have no economic relations with other people and external organizations. The authors don't receive the funding from any organizations. In terms of practice, this study provides theoretical guidance for the practical operation of kindergarten-based curriculum development at the competence level.

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