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## KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON AND USAGE OF PICTURE BOOKS IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN SHANGHAI

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KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON  
AND USAGE OF PICTURE BOOKS IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN SHANGHAI

By

Yuan Shi

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University of the Pacific  
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# KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON AND USAGE OF PICTURE BOOKS IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN SHANGHAI

## Abstract

By Yuan Shi

University of the Pacific  
2019

In Shanghai, an increasing number of parents believe that learning English at an early age will bring their children an advantage in future competition. As a result, kindergarten English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes have become popular in recent years. Although previous studies revealed that picture books are frequently used as teaching materials in kindergarten EFL classes, what is happening in these kindergarten EFL classes and the ways teachers use picture books to teach children English still remain largely unknown. To have a better understanding of the kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai, this study aimed to explore kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books in their classes, as well as the challenges they face.

Four experienced kindergarten EFL teachers selected by a criteria survey were invited to participate in this qualitative study. Data were collected from them by interviews, classroom observations and documents. Results showed that participants believed that picture books have linguistic, cognitive and cultural awareness values. Findings of this study also revealed the ways participants use picture books to teach children English and the challenges they faced.

Findings of this study were discussed in connection with previous studies of picture books, Krashen's language acquisition hypotheses, and Five Big Ideas on how children learn to read. This study also led to suggestions for further implications based on the findings of

teachers' reported challenges. Teachers faced great challenges in developing EFL classes, on self-development, and on building relationships with parents. To work on solutions to these problems and improve the quality of kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai, it was determined that both the Chinese government and kindergartens or language training institutions should make efforts to support teachers. Shanghai's kindergarten EFL classes are the product of market choices and are still in their beginning phase of development. As such, they need the support from those in all walks of life to better develop in the future.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Issue**

Under the influence of globalization, learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has gradually played an important role in China (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016; Xu, 2008; Zhu, 2011). Despite the fact that English is not an official language and is not generally spoken or encountered in China, being able to speak English as a second language is increasingly recognized as an important part of social status (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016).

More than a decade ago, English courses were only established for students in grade nine and above. To better meet the demands of global communication and cooperation, in the year 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a document to promote English learning by encouraging schools to set English classes into curricula from grade three (Zhu, 2011). Since then, English courses have been introduced to primary schools and even kindergartens to meet the needs of social and global development (Tao, 2010).

In China, although kindergarten is not included in the nine-year compulsory education system, it is promoted by the Chinese government as the fundamental education institution for preschool children from three to six years of age (Xu, 2008). In 2017, there were more than 254,9000 kindergartens in China and more than 46 million children were enrolled in those kindergartens (Chen & Fan, 2018). Due to the implementation of the second-child policy in 2015, the number of kindergartens is expected to keep on growing at a fast rate, especially in big cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou (Chen & Fan, 2018). In Shanghai, kindergartens generally set three grades for children: junior, middle, and senior. Each grade has three to nine classes, depending on the sizes of the kindergartens, and each class has 20-35 children (Chen & Fan, 2018). Classes for juniors last for 15-20 minutes, for middles 20-25 minutes, and for seniors 25-30 minutes (Xu, 2008).

Kindergartens in Shanghai are categorized into two types (Shen, 2006). The first type is public kindergartens which are sponsored by the government and recruit students who have local Hukou or residence permits from nearby neighborhoods. The public kindergartens in Shanghai charge 300-800RMB per month (approximately 42-114 U.S. dollars) for each student (Shen, 2006). The second type is private kindergartens. Recruitment by private kindergartens is not restricted by local governments, and they have their own decision-making power for which students they want to recruit (Shen, 2006). The quality of private kindergartens varies significantly in Shanghai. Some of the private kindergartens enjoy higher reputations than public kindergartens and they set very strict criteria for recruitment. To enter these famous private kindergartens, children need to pass oral tests such as counting numbers, telling stories, reading English words, etc. Some private kindergartens even ask parents to pass certain tests (Shen, 2006). The common characteristics of all private kindergartens is that they charge a very expensive fee for each student, from 2000RMB (approximately 285 U.S. dollars) to more than 10,000 RMB (approximately 1429 U.S. dollars) per month (Shen, 2006).

At the turn of the millennium, Shanghai started early childhood education reforms and has established the idea of “focus on childhood development” (Shen, 2006). Kindergartens are required to focus children’s growth and to foster a strong community culture and a study environment filled with love and respect (Shen, 2006). Children’s lifelong education, sustainable education, and psychological health are emphasized in Shanghai kindergartens (Shen, 2006). These reforms aim to transfer classroom practice into children-centered, teacher-facilitated, play-based teaching and learning (Shen, 2006). In Shanghai, kindergarten curricula are designed based on children’s development in the following areas: literature, math, social studies, science, character education, and physical education. Private

kindergartens have the decision-making power to add courses such as EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and Confucius's ideas into their curricula (Shen, 2006).

In the past several years, most private kindergartens in China set EFL courses in their curricula in order to attract more students (Hou, 2008; Liao, 2002; Zhu, 2011). Although EFL courses are not mandatory in public kindergartens' curricula, many public kindergartens offer EFL courses as extracurricular activities for their students according to parents' wishes (Xu, 2008).

The dramatic growth in the number of children learning English has aroused researchers' interests and thus triggered a great debate in China concerning whether English courses should be established in kindergarten curricula (Liao, 2002; Sheng, 2005; Sun, 2017). Researchers who hold positive attitudes toward kindergarten English education are supporters of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Sheng, 2005; Sun, 2017). They believe that second language acquisition should begin at an early age and children can acquire foreign language better than adults (Sun, 2017). Opponents argued that teaching children a foreign language in kindergarten will add burden to children and cause negative effects on their overall development, especially on the development of their first language (Liao, 2002). Since there is no consensus among researchers and educators on whether China's preschool children should learn English, no public kindergarten has English education in its curriculum. Only private kindergartens and private language institutions provide preschool children with English classes (Sun, 2017).

Although researchers are arguing about this issue, more preschool age children are entering EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms (Xu, 2008). Hoping their children have the best start in life, more and more parents believe children should learn English at an early age (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). Most parents choose the kindergartens with EFL courses or extracurricular activities for their children; others send their children to private

language institutions for early English training (Xu, 2008). This phenomenon indicates that the most urgent issue to discuss today is not whether preschool children should learn English or not, but how to provide children with the most efficient instruction in the EFL classrooms.

### **Problem Statement**

In this study, I focus on exploring kindergarten EFL teachers' views on using picture books as textbooks in their classrooms. To investigate the efficient ways of teaching kindergarten children English, it is necessary to know what is happening in the EFL classrooms. Without the guidance of government policy, most kindergartens design their English course curricula by learning from the experiences of those working in EFL classes in foreign countries or by cooperating with private language institutions (Li, 2009). As a result, unlike the primary schools and middle schools, kindergartens do not have standardized and unified textbooks for EFL classrooms; instead, various English picture books play the major role as textbooks in China's kindergarten EFL classrooms (Lv, 2015).

Researchers suggest that using picture books as instructional materials is one of the best methods of educating young children in preschool (Althouse, Johnson, & Michell, 2003; Bullen & Nichols, 2011; Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2007; Güneş & Güneş, 2011). By reading picture books, children acquire knowledge in an easy and natural way, according to those researchers. Ganea, Pickard, and DeLoache (2008) explored children's knowledge transfer and found that children around two years old naturally transfer newly learned concepts from books to real life and from real life to books if the picture and real-life object resemble each other. Ganea, Ma, and DeLoache (2011) conducted more specific experiments three years later in which they focused on children's learning and transfer of biological information from picture books to real animals. Results indicated that four-year-old children can acquire new "biological facts" from reading picture books, and their findings "point to



the importance that early book exposure can play in framing and increasing children's knowledge about the world" (p. 1421).

Previous studies revealed the great significance of using picture books to develop children's cognition and reading ability, but they only concentrated on children's learning of native language and literacy (Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2005). In recent decades, researchers gradually paid attention to the multifunction of picture books in early childhood education. Hansen and Zambo (2005) pointed out that "we use them [picture books] as one strategy to help students conceptualize the physical, cognitive, and socioemotional growth of children" and "to introduce principles, explain vocabulary, and encourage students to make connections between theory and practice" (p. 39). Several researchers emphasized the importance of using picture books to develop children's literacy, emergent biliteracy, oral language skills, and writing skills (Dias, 2010; Flynn, 2011; Hu & Commeyras, 2008; Williams, 2012). At the same time, some researchers explored other possible learning outcomes of using picture books. Van and Van (2009) described their experiences of successfully using picture books to develop five-to-six-year-old children's mathematics-related concepts. Elia, Van, and Georgiou (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore five-year-old children's mathematics learning outcomes of reading a picture book purposefully designed for teaching mathematics. Also, Hsiao's (2010) qualitative and quantitative research provides suggestions for teaching children artistic and creative thinking through picture books.

Limited research has been done in investigating the instructional value of picture books in EFL classrooms. The general premise of using them in EFL classrooms is that literature with pictures offers children the opportunity to acquire a second language in a meaningful and memorable context (Ghosn, 2002). In Korea, Linse (2007) found that due to their predictable features, picture books written for native English-speaking children can be

used in EFL classrooms to help students improve both oral language and literacy skills. In Taiwan, Sheu (2008) investigated the use of picture books and found three main educational values perceived by the teachers: linguistic value, the value of the story, and the value of the pictures. In mainland China, Lv (2015) illustrated that picture books are widely used in kindergarten EFL classrooms and she emphasized the importance of utilizing various resources, such as the environment and activities, to facilitate using picture books in EFL classrooms.

Although the above studies proved that picture books play an important role in early childhood education and EFL classrooms in some settings, what is happening in kindergarten EFL classrooms in Shanghai still remains unknown. To fill this gap, this study focuses on kindergarten teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books in EFL classrooms in Shanghai.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

In China, little is known about teachers' responses to the picture books kindergarten authorities choose for them or the way they use picture books as children's EFL instructional materials. Teachers play an essential role in EFL classroom activities. Their attitudes toward picture books and the methods they use directly affect children's learning outcomes (Lv, 2015; Tao, 2010). Without effective instruction, kindergarten students are unable to acquire a second language automatically through picture books. If teachers adopt inappropriate teaching strategies, students' learning motivation is possibly diminished (Li, 2009). Therefore, I conducted a qualitative study to explore kindergarten EFL teachers' attitudes and practices related to using English picture books in EFL classrooms.

This study was carried out to explore the use of picture books from the perspectives of kindergarten EFL teachers in Shanghai, i.e. to understand how they perceive the instructional values of picture books, and the way they use picture books as kindergarten children's EFL

materials, as well as the challenges, if any, they face in their practices. I hope this study can help researchers and educators better understand the kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai and kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books in their classes.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

The overarching research question of this study is this: What do kindergarten teachers in Shanghai think about the instructional value of picture books and how do they use them to instruct their students in EFL classrooms?

The sub-questions include:

1. What do Shanghai kindergarten teachers think about the linguistic, cognitive development, and cultural awareness values of picture books in EFL classrooms?
2. How do the teachers use picture books in their classrooms?
3. What challenges, if any, do the teachers have when using picture books to teach kindergarten students English?

### **Significance of the Study**

Chinese parents are eager to begin their children's EFL journey at an early age (Hou, 2008; Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). An increasing number of parents send their children to the kindergartens with English courses and believe that children can learn English efficiently in kindergartens. However, the EFL courses in China's kindergartens are still in their initial stage. Kindergarten authorities realize the importance of developing EFL curriculum to attract more students, but limited research outcomes do not offer them enough guidance on how to build up EFL courses (Li, 2009; Sheng, 2005; Sun, 2017), thus the need for more research such as this study.

Picture books are globally recognized as efficient reading material for preschool children and many researchers proved the effectiveness of using picture books to hasten young children's second language acquisition (Hadaway & Mundy, 1999; Hu & Commeyras, 2008; Lv, 2015; Sheu, 2008; Sheu, 2009). Different genres of picture books result in

different interactions between teachers and children. The interactions between teachers and children in EFL classroom have significant impact on children's language acquisition motivation. Although English picture books are commonly used in China's kindergarten EFL classrooms, teachers in different teaching contexts may use them in different ways.

Since kindergarten EFL classes are still in their initial stage in China, kindergarten EFL teachers face a number of challenges when they use picture books to instruct children (Liao, 2002; Tao, 2010; Xu, 2008). Tao (2010) reported that these challenges exist in every phase of the EFL class, including preparing a lesson, delivering a lesson and giving feedback to parents. His study found that preparing each lesson requires a great amount of time from teachers. Since there is no national curriculum or national teaching guidelines for kindergarten EFL classes in China, each kindergarten asks their teachers together with experts to develop their own curriculum for EFL classes, and this adds a burden on teachers. Tao (2010) also reported that in the phase of delivering a lesson, most new teachers reported that they lack confidence in delivering a lesson because there were limited demonstration classes for them to observe. Another challenge for teachers is to evaluate students' performance and give feedback to their parents. Since kindergarten EFL classes are still in their initial stage, parents do not know what their children need to learn in EFL classes and most parents think the only standard to evaluate their children's performance is the size of their vocabulary and ignore the other aspects. Xu (2008) found that many kindergarten EFL teachers are under great pressure. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct qualitative research to explore teachers' attitudes towards and their implementation of English picture books in kindergarten EFL classrooms in depth, as well as the exact challenges they face.

The findings of this study aim to contribute to an understanding of China's kindergarten EFL teachers' views about the instructional value of picture books, the skills they use, and the influences of picture books on kindergarten students' second language

development. This study could be a reference for kindergarten EFL teachers using picture books more effectively and for kindergarten authorities developing appropriate EFL curricula. I hope the findings of this study could also provide reference for policy makers to polish and update their teacher training guidelines so that they could better help kindergarten EFL teachers to fulfill their jobs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to better explore teachers' perspectives of using picture books to teach Chinese kindergartners English, this study is designed based on theories from two fields of study: second language acquisition and early childhood reading education. The Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967) and some of Krashen's five hypotheses regarding language learning and acquisition (Krashen, 1999) are fundamental in constructing the theoretical framework of this study from the aspect of second language acquisition. The Five Big Ideas in Beginning Reading (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008) are fundamental in constructing the theoretical framework of this study from the aspect of early childhood reading education. The Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1971) also provides theoretical support for using picture books to instruct children. Whether these theoretical stances hold up under the scrutiny of Shanghai kindergarten teachers' perceptions is part of this exploration.

To better understand preschool children's second language acquisition process, this study employs the Critical Period Hypothesis and some of Krashen's hypotheses regarding language learning and acquisition as theoretical bases from which to view the teachers' perspectives on the use of picture books. Proponents of the Critical Period Hypothesis believe that there is an important period of time in which children can learn a second language most efficiently (Lenneberg, 1967). The CPH was first proposed in 1959 by Montreal neurologists Wilder Penfield and Lamar Roberts. In 1967, Eric Lenneberg developed this notion by proposing brain lateralization at puberty as the mechanism that

closes down the brain's ability to acquire language (Lenneberg, 1967). He argued that young children are able to automatically acquire a given language from mere exposure to the target language environment. But after puberty, this phenomenon seems to disappear, and learners must learn a language with greater effort. One of the significant examples is that after puberty one's accent cannot change easily (Lenneberg, 1967). As Lenneberg proposed, learners acquire a second language better at early ages (Lenneberg, 1967).

Stephen Krashen, an expert in the field of linguistics, has made significant contributions to the theories of language acquisition and development (Krashen, 1981; Krashen, 1985; Krashen, 1999). His theory of second language acquisition is composed of five main hypotheses: "the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis" (Zheng, 2008, p. 53). The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis is the fundamental basis of Krashen's theory. He (1982) argued that second language acquisition and learning are two different independent systems. Second language *acquisition* happens automatically and subconsciously when children are naturally communicated with in the target language. This process is similar to children's acquisition of their first language (Krashen, 1981; Krashen, 1985; Krashen, 1999). In contrast, *learning* is a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge of the second language, such as intentionally learning the grammar rules of the target language. Krashen believed that acquisition is more important than learning (Krashen, 1981; Krashen, 1985; Krashen, 1999). Some of the other four hypotheses that are connected to the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and that relate to this study are discussed in Chapter 2.

The Five Big Ideas in Beginning Reading, which reveal the best way to instruct children to read, were proposed by the National Reading Panel of the United States (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). To help children become successful beginning readers, the

National Reading Panel was formed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the U.S. Department of Education according to U.S. Congress's requirement. The National Reading Panel invited researchers and educators to work collaboratively to review more than 100,000 studies available on how children learn to read and find out the most effective methods to instruct children to read. The findings of this research suggest that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are five essential factors to help children become good readers (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). This study examines if China's kindergarten teachers agree with these findings that these five ideas are essential factors in developing children's English reading ability and to what extent they apply these five big ideas when they teach children English with picture books.

To explore teacher's perceptions on using picture books in EFL classrooms, it is important to know why teachers choose picture books rather than other materials to instruct children. According to Dual Coding Theory, pictures and words together contribute to learners' acquisition of a language and sustain the learners' memory (Paivio, 1971). Paivio (1971) found evidence from psychological research to support that both visual and verbal information can represent content to be learned from the instructional materials. Learners process visual information and verbal information in different channels in their minds and code them to store the information. If the learners are provided with both kinds of information, they have a better chance to remember the target information (Paivio, 1971).

### **Delimitations**

In kindergartens, teachers use picture books to teach children different subjects, such as math, logic, painting, music, and a second language (English in Shanghai). In this study, I focused on EFL teachers who use English picture books as their teaching materials. The aim of this study was to understand teachers' attitudes about English picture books and the

methods they use and the challenges they face when using them. Therefore, I concentrated on interviewing teachers and observing their class activities. Children's class performance and their motivation for learning English were taken into consideration during the classroom observations, but their achievement was not be specifically evaluated.

This study involved four EFL teachers from different kindergartens in Shanghai. The study included four participants identified through an online survey from four kindergartens. The selected participants were willing to share their experience of using picture books to teach kindergarten students English and to tell their stories. The length of the study lasted for one month commencing July 2019.

### **Essential Definitions**

**Phonemic awareness:** The term phonemic awareness caught researchers' attention in the 1990s when they were conducting research in the field of early-literacy development and reading disabilities (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Phonemic awareness is a subcategory of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness refers to "the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes) independent of meaning" (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008, p.12). Phonemic awareness is "an awareness of individual sounds in spoken language and the ability to manipulate those sounds" (Sweeney, 2004, p.10). The focus of instructing phonemic awareness is on getting students to identify phonemes, blend phonemes to form words, segment words into phonemes, and add, delete, and substitute phonemes to make new words (Sweeney, 2004).

**Phonics:** Phonics is "the relationship between speech sounds and their spellings" (Sweeney, 2004, p.11). Phonics is different from phonemic awareness in that phonemic awareness focuses on listening to and speaking the phonemes while phonics focuses on the relationship between sounds and how they are written. One of the bigger difficulties in



phonics is that there are 44 phonemes (sounds) in the English language but only 26 letters (or graphemes). So, some sounds are represented by multiple letters (Sweeney, 2004).

Picture books: Arizpe and Styles (2003) define picture books as “[books] in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention” (p. 22). In most picture books, pictures and written texts depend on each other and together they compose the story, which enables readers to experience an undemanding journey to approach the literary world. Some picture books rely solely on visual cues without words, which “is often thought to be aimed at very young readers on account of the absence of written text” (Ramos & Ramos, 2011, p. 325). Wordless picture books include the books with only images, or with minimal text such as several words, a few labels or simple phrases which cannot construct grammatically structured sentences (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, & Zhang, 2002). In China’s kindergarten English classrooms, teachers generally use picture books with written texts instead of wordless picture books to teach children, because they believe with written texts children can better develop their early literacy skills (Lv, 2015). Therefore, in this study, picture books refer to the picture books with written texts corresponding to the pictures on each page.

### **Chapter Summary**

With the increasing demand of global communication, Chinese parents realize the importance of offering their children an earlier opportunity to learn English. In order to satisfy this demand, most of China’s kindergartens have established EFL courses or English extracurricular activities for children. Due to their special features, English picture books are widely used as kindergarten EFL materials. Previous research well justified the reasons for using picture books to teach children English. However, little work has been done to discuss kindergarten EFL teachers’ perceptions of using English picture books in their EFL classrooms. Therefore, it is necessary to fill this gap by conducting a qualitative study to

explore Shanghai kindergarten EFL teachers' views of the instructional value of picture books, the way they use them, and the challenges they face when doing so.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Influenced by globalization, English courses are gradually set into fundamental education curriculums in China (Xu, 2008; Zhu, 2011). However, little is known about what is happening in kindergarten EFL classes in China (Kang, 2007; Sun 2017; Tao, 2010). To bridge this gap, this study explores kindergarten EFL teachers' perceptions on using picture books to teach children English. This chapter firstly reviews Krashen's five hypotheses regarding second language acquisition and then reviews previous studies on the Critical Period Hypothesis and Five Big Ideas in Beginning Reading to find out which linguistic domains (e.g. phonology, lexis, morphosyntax, etc.) should be the focus of preschool children's EFL classes. Finally, this chapter reviews existing works on using picture books to instruct children.

### **Krashen's Five Hypotheses**

This study explores the teaching activities in EFL classrooms based on Krashen's theory of second language acquisition (SLA). An expert in the field of linguistics, Stephen Krashen has made significant contributions to the theories of language acquisition and development. His theory of SLA is composed of five main hypotheses: "the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis" (Zheng, 2008, p. 53). As soon as these hypotheses were raised, dissenters such as McLaughlin (1987) doubted them because these hypotheses were not clearly defined and cannot be tested. As he points out, "Krashen has not defined his terms with enough precision, the empirical basis of the theory is weak, and the theory is not clear in its predictions" (p. 56). Wheeler (2003) supported McLaughlin's opinion by arguing that Krashen's hypotheses are simple, clear, and comprehensive, but lack explanatory power and are too vague for teachers to implement in teaching activities. On the

other hand, these hypotheses were agreed upon and adopted by a great number of researchers in this field, and they are still very popular in SLA today (Littlewood, 1984; Ellis, 1985; Xiao, 2008; Payne, 2011). Researchers and teachers also reported their application of Krashen's hypotheses and proved the positive effects of these hypotheses (Lin, 2008; Xiao, 2008; Jing, 2009; Bahrani, 2011; Payne, 2011; Trottier, 2008). "Unlike some earlier theories about language learning, Krashen's theory on second language acquisition (SLA) has been stated in simple language--- in words the majority of teachers can understand, and uses examples from classroom practice" (Abukhattala, 2013, p. 128).

### **Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis**

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis is the fundamental basis of Krashen's theory. He pointed out (1999) that second language acquisition and learning are two different independent concepts. Learning refers to the process when learners are purposefully taught about certain linguistic knowledge, such as grammar. Acquisition happens automatically and subconsciously when children are naturally communicated with in the target language. This process is similar to children's acquisition of their first language (Krashen, 1981).

The significant difference between learning and acquisition, according to Krashen's hypothesis, is that learning focuses on linguistic forms while acquisition emphasizes the understanding of the meaning conveyed by the target language. Abukhattala (2013) pointed out that learning is a conscious process in which learners learn the rules of a language and focus on accuracy. In this process, formal and traditional teaching helps students learn through correction. Acquisition is a subconscious process in which learners pick up the language and results in accuracy and fluency. In this process, formal and traditional teaching does not help the learners, who acquire the language through automatic production (Abukhattala, 2013).

What happens in most Chinese classrooms is learning the form of language rather than acquiring the meaning conveyed by language (Zhu, 2011). Teachers use various methods to present linguistic points for students and reinforce their learning by repeated exercises. Even in kindergartens, many EFL teachers ignore children's acquisition process but emphasize children's learning of certain words and simple grammatical rules (Tao, 2010). Tao (2010) also suggested two main reasons for teachers' reluctance to use a communicative approach in kindergarten EFL classes. The first reason is that teaching language forms may be easier for teachers who themselves are not native speakers of the target foreign language. Secondly, as most kindergarten students' parents are at a low English proficiency level, they are unable to check their kids' learning outcomes by communicating with them in English, instead, checking kids' vocabulary size is a much easier way. As a result, teachers prefer to emphasize learning rather than acquiring in their classrooms (Tao, 2010).

According to Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, if teachers are able to create an acquisition-rich environment rather than a more traditional learning environment in kindergarten EFL classrooms, kindergarteners will probably acquire English much more easily. Picture books are good resources for teachers simulating a natural language acquisition atmosphere, but the way a teacher uses picture books determines whether students learn or acquire English in their classrooms.

### **The Natural Order Hypothesis**

Krashen's second hypothesis of SLA is the Natural Order Hypothesis. He suggests that a natural order exists in the acquisition of language grammatical structures, which implies that some grammatical rules are easier for learners to acquire than others (Krashen, 1999). But the natural order is not necessarily determined by the difficulty level of the grammatical rules; for example, one of the most frequently taught grammatical points for beginners is third-person singular of the simple present tense because educators suppose this

is easy for learners to master. However, mistakes are frequently observed even when advanced EFL students misuse the third-person singular pattern, omitting the final –s ending it most often requires. This is because third-person singular of the simple present tense is actually one of the last acquired linguistic points in the natural order of acquisition (Krashen, 2008). EFL learners acquire language structures in a predictable order regardless of the order of the grammatical points they are taught.

Nevertheless, in its application, Krashen pointed out that it is not necessary for teachers to discover and use the natural order and change the presentation order; instead, teachers should design the classes based on topics, situations and language functions (Krashen, 1999). The implication of the natural order hypothesis is that teachers should understand mistakes are inevitable in students' language acquisition process and especially in those structures acquired later in the natural order of acquisition. Teachers should provide students with more chances to be exposed to the target language structures.

### **The Monitor Hypothesis**

The Monitor Hypothesis is a central part of Krashen's five hypotheses (Abukhattala, 2013). The major function of the monitor hypothesis is to explain the relationship between learning and acquisition. Krashen proposed that the acquisition system is the utterance initiator, and the learnt knowledge works as the monitor which modifies and polishes their oral language output resulting from their acquired knowledge (Krashen, 1981).

The monitor functions when three conditions are met: sufficient time, focusing on the interaction's form less than its meaning, and knowing the rule in question (Krashen, 1981). Krashen pointed out that there are three types of monitor users. The first type is over-monitor users who do not trust their acquired competence and use learnt knowledge to modify every sentence they produce. This type of learner has high accuracy but low fluency in their oral language output. The second type of learner is under-monitor users. Contrasted

with over-monitor users, they are very talkative in both their native language and their foreign language(s) because they rely on acquired competence rather than learnt competence. They speak fluently but with low accuracy since they pay much attention to the meaning conveyed by their oral language at the expense of using correct form. The third type is optimal monitor users who use the monitor appropriately. This type of learner uses acquired competence together with learnt competence, thus combining fluency with accuracy (Krashen, 1981).

As the Monitor Hypothesis supposes that the only function of learnt competence is to modify acquired competence, it is among the most frequently criticized of Krashen's five hypotheses. McLaughlin (1987) pointed out that the Monitor Hypothesis ignores the important role of comprehension. Baker (1999) also disagreed with this hypothesis by arguing that Krashen ignored the role of monitoring in language reception and fails to prove evidence to support that acquired competence does not contribute to monitoring.

### **The Input Hypothesis**

The Input Hypothesis is regarded as one of the most important and widely applied hypotheses among the five (Abukhattala, 2013; Zheng, 2008). Through the input hypothesis, Krashen (1999) explained the acquisition process. He pointed out that acquisition happens when learners receive sufficient comprehensible input. To explain the concept of comprehensible input, he supposed the learner's level is "level  $i$ " and the next acquisition level is "level  $1$ ". If the learner wants to reach level  $1$ , he/she must receive the input of "level  $i+1$ " (as cited in Bahrani, 2011, p. 282). Teachers must give learners comprehensible input by instructing them a little beyond what their comprehension level is, i.e. when they are prepared to move from " $i$ " to " $i + 1$ ".

Krashen also introduced an important concept between input and output---the silent period. He pointed out that a learner is unable to produce any original statements immediately after receiving new input, and this period may last as long as the learner is ready

to produce. This silent period is necessary for learners to internalize the newly acquired competence (Krashen, 1985).

To apply the input hypothesis to classroom instruction, Krashen pointed out that the best methods are therefore those that supply “comprehensible input” in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are “ready”, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 54).

### **The Affective Filter Hypothesis**

Sufficient comprehensible input cannot ensure learners will acquire all of the information. An affective filter exists between input and acquisition, and in a high-anxiety learning environment that filter can be a hindrance in terms of allowing comprehensible input to be acquired. Krashen proposed a series of affective factors which can facilitate EFL acquisition, including motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety. Learners with high motivation, self-confidence, good self-image and a low anxiety level are more likely to acquire the input. These affective factors can have an effect on how high the affective filter is raised and whether it can block input from being acquired (Krashen, 1981).

### **The Critical Period Hypothesis and Five Big Ideas**

What should children learn and which linguistic domain should be the focus in an EFL class has gained attention from researchers and educators in China (Li, 2009; Liao, 2002; Sheng, 2005). Some kindergartens and private language training institutions focus on cultivating children’s speaking and listening skills, while others put emphasis on other aspects such as vocabulary and grammar (Li, 2009; Tao, 2010; Xu, 2008). This study employs the Critical Period Hypothesis and Five Big Ideas in Beginning Reading, in addition



to Krashen's hypotheses, as the basic theoretical frameworks from which to discuss the linguistic domains of kindergarten EFL classes.

### **Critical Period Hypothesis and Early EFL Learning**

The Critical Period Hypothesis is founded on the belief that there is a critical period of time for children to acquire language. From two years of age to puberty, children can easily acquire a language. As the learners grow up, this gift gradually fades away because their brains are losing plasticity (Lenneberg, 1967). The Critical Period Hypothesis is supported by the evidence provided by numerous studies using neuroimaging techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging and event-related potentials (Abutalebi, Cappa, and Perani, 2001; Kim, Relkin, Lee, and Hirsch, 1997; Neville, Mills, and Lawson, 1992; Weber-Fox and Neville, 1996).

However, other scholars have different opinions on the starting and ending age. Unlike Lenneberg, most of them did not propose a starting age but suggested the ending age could be 12, 15, 16 or 18. (Munoz & Singleton, 2011; Penfield & Roberts, 1959). In the field of second language acquisition, researchers have conducted a great number of studies to find out if there is a critical period of time in learning a foreign language (Butler, 2014).

Dissenters of the Critical Period Hypothesis in SLA believe that second language acquisition is not necessarily associated with first language acquisition and learners can successfully acquire a second language after puberty with sufficient amounts of input (Butler, 2014).

Even the researchers who support the Critical Period Hypothesis have different opinions on the exact age range of the critical period and the linguistic domains influenced by the Critical Period Hypothesis (Birdsong, 2006; Dekeyser, 2013). Based on 42 studies, Huang (2014) conducted a meta-analysis study to examine the age effects in both short-term and longer-term language learning. He proposed that old learners, rather than young learners, perform better in short-term learning. Munoz (2006) supported this finding by adding that

although older learners perform better than young learners in the short term, young learners can catch up by receiving around 700 hours of EFL instruction. Kwon (2006) conducted a large-scale evaluation study in South Korea and speculated that students who received early EFL education performed better than their counterparts in high school in language attainment and affective domains and the amount of time spent on English instruction was one of the key factors. In Japan, researchers also found out that early starters perform better than their counterparts because they receive instruction over a longer time (Butler & Takeuchi, 2008; Larson-Hall, 2008).

Not only the quantity of time of EFL instruction but also the content of EFL instruction affects learners' performance. Munoz (2006) pointed out that learners above 12 years old learn morphosyntax better than younger learners, but auditory learning was influenced by the amount of instruction rather than age. Coppieters (1987) found adults learners are more likely to make and less likely to detect grammatical errors in the target foreign language than those who learned the target foreign language during childhood. However, Larson-Hall (2008) conducted a study among Japan's college students and found out that students with early EFL educational experiences perform better than their peers in phonemic tasks, but they have no advantage in grammatical tasks. Therefore, an early EFL education cannot assure the language proficiency a child can achieve. Children's EFL learning results depend on the amount of instruction and the right choice of linguistic domains they receive in an EFL class; in other words, it is the quantity and quality of early EFL classes that influences children's learning outcomes.

On the phonetic level, Kuhl and her colleagues discovered that infants are able to acquire both native and nonnative phonetics between six months and one year old. But after one year old, a decline in phonetic discrimination occurs (Kuhl, Conboy, Padden, Nelson, and

Pruitt, 2005). In her TED speech, Kuhl also pointed out that children have the gifts of acquiring a second language but after seven years old, this talent declines (Kuhl, 2010).

### **Five Big Ideas in Beginning Reading**

In 1997, the U.S. Congress organized the National Reading Panel to review all the available research on how children learn to read in order to find the most effective evidence-based methods for teaching children to read. The findings were summarized into Five Big Ideas, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). These five domains are regarded as the key factors determining children's reading development and are suggested as the basis for effective reading curriculum and instruction design (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). This study employs Five Big Ideas as the theoretical basis for observing reading instruction in China's kindergarten EFL classes, to examine if these five domains are also the important parts in China's EFL kindergarten classes from teachers' perspectives.

**Phonemic awareness.** Phonemic awareness refers to “the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds” (Yopp, 1992, p.696). Phonemic awareness instruction is a process to help learners understand the sounds in the English language (Lane, Pullen, Eisele, & Jordan, 2002). In phonemic awareness instruction, teachers help students become aware of and manipulate sounds in spoken language by using the following activities: identify phonemes, blend phonemes to form words, segment words into phonemes, and add, delete, and substitute phonemes to make new words (Sweeney, 2004). With phonemic awareness, students are capable of breaking apart the sounds in a word and blending together the sounds to form words (Chapman, 2003).

The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) pointed out that students who received phonemic awareness instruction are more likely to do better later on in reading. Although

phonemic awareness instruction is generally regarded as a critical part of reading in English speaking countries, there is still disagreement on whether it is necessary in second language acquisition (Krashen & Hastings, 2011). One of the beliefs is that phonemic awareness develops naturally even without instruction in second language learning (Huang, 1999). In Taiwan EFL classes, Chu, Chang, Yu, Yu, Ting and Hu (2007) found that 3rd grade children's phonemic awareness develops at the same speed among three different groups they researched: a phonics training group, a phonics and phonemic awareness training group, and a control group. A similar study compared two groups of first graders in Taiwan EFL classes and got the same findings that children with phonics training and children with phonemic training achieved the same results on a phonemic awareness test (Zapparoli & Su, 2007).

Krashen and Hastings (2011) argued that phonemic awareness training has an impact on pronouncing words in isolation but cannot help learners to understand what they read. Although researchers argued about whether phonemic awareness training is necessary in learning English in an EFL class, they didn't deny the role that phonetic awareness plays in reading (Krashen & Hastings, 2011). The disagreement is mainly on the way to help learners acquire phonemic awareness, for example, Krashen & Hastings (2011) pointed out that phonemic awareness can be gained through training in phonics and through reading, especially by reading storybooks.

Phonemic awareness is one of the five big ideas in beginning reading proposed by the U.S. National Reading Panel. In the five big ideas, the distinction between phonemic awareness and phonics often causes confusion. The next part gives an explanation of phonics.

**Phonics.** Phonics refers to the relationship between individual sounds (phonemes) and their corresponding letters (graphemes) (Sweeney, 2004). Phonics instruction helps children understand the alphabetic principle and the systematic and predictable relationship

between letters and sounds (Sweeney, 2004). Children with phonics skills can use this principle to accurately read and write words, both in isolation and in passages (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2000).

The National Reading Panel (2008) proposed that systematic and explicit phonics instruction is critical for children's literacy development. Systematic phonics instruction refers to identifying a clear sequence of major letter-sound relationships from simple to complex, including both consonants and vowels (Sweeney, 2004). Explicit phonics instruction means teachers should have a plan for teaching children how to read and write words (Sweeney, 2004). Abundant research on phonics instruction has been done in first language acquisition, and evidence supports phonics instruction's critical role in language development (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). However, little work has been done in examining phonics instruction in EFL classrooms (Martinez, 2011). One of the difficulties in learning phonics is that there are 26 letters in the English alphabet but out of them there are 44 possible sounds (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). This problem is much more challenging in EFL classrooms because "if a bilingual's two languages share the same alphabet but have different pronunciations for the letters..., then there will be two conflicting pronunciations at the same time" (Jared & Szucs, 2002, p.225).

Apart from phonemic awareness and phonics, there are three other big ideas in beginning reading, including fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. They are discussed in the following paragraphs.

**Fluency.** Fluency is the ability to rapidly and accurately recognize words in a text with no noticeable cognitive effort and this process is automatic without conscious attention (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Children with fluency skills can quickly and accurately decode phonemes and graphemes and are able to identify familiar spelling forms to increase decoding efficiency (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Extensive research in both first language and second language acquisition has proved the important role of fluency in successful reading, and a great number of researchers have conducted studies on identifying effective ways to instruct reading fluency (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004). Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass and Gorsuch (2004) proposed that in EFL classrooms, extensive reading and repeated reading are two types of effective instruction programs to help learners develop their reading fluency and comprehension. Extensive reading is “an approach in which readers self-select materials from a collection of graded readers (books which have reduced vocabulary range and simplified grammatical structures) with the goal of reaching specified target times of silent sustained reading” (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004, p. 71).

Repeated reading is widely agreed by researchers as an effective approach to improve learners’ reading fluency in both L1 (English as first language) and L2 (English as second language)/FL (English as foreign language) context (Carver & Hoffman, 1981; Chomsky, 1976; NICHD, 2000; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004; Young, Bowers, & MacKinnon, 1996). Repeated reading focuses on requiring children to read and repeat a reading material, usually a passage or a story, for a certain number of times or until they achieve to certain level of fluency (NICHD, 2000). In this process, children encounter certain spelling words several times and their recognition of words and phrases are reinforced, which results in an increase of fluency and comprehension (Dlugosz, 2000; Taguchi & Gorsuch, 2002). Guided repeated reading, as proposed by NICHD (2000), is particularly effective in instructing children to read with fluency. In guided repeated reading, children may get the instruction as a modeling of fluent reading before they read by themselves, and this modeling can be presented by teachers as well as peers, parents and other adults (NICDH, 2000). In EFL classrooms, repeated reading and guided repeated reading have also proved to be effective by extensive studies (Blum, Koskinen, Tennant,

Parker, Straub, & Curry, 1995; Taguchi, 1997; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004). Children's reading fluency is also based on their vocabulary size. According to the National Reading Panel (2008), vocabulary is another important aspect in beginning reading development.

**Vocabulary.** Vocabulary mastery is fundamental in learning a language (Simmons & Kame'enui, 1997). Children's vocabulary knowledge is important for their school success, so vocabulary development is a fundamental aim for early school education (National Research Council, 1998). Children acquire vocabulary through conversations, independent readings, and instructed readings (Sweeney, 2004).

In China's EFL context, most children have no chance to acquire English words through daily conversation since English is not widely used in daily life in China (Sheng, 2005). Therefore, a great number of researchers suggested that teachers should speak English to create an immersion environment for children in preschool EFL classes and maximize the children's exposure to English (Atkinson, 1987; Turnbull, 2001). Other researchers disagreed with this suggestion and believed that children can learn a second language better when teachers use their first language to explain the language points (Levine, 2014; Littelwood & Yu, 2011; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002).

Using picture books to build children's English vocabulary is widely proposed by researchers (Sheu, 2009). Sweeney (2004) pointed out that teachers' vocabulary instruction on the key words before reading a picture book can facilitate children's vocabulary development. Repeated reading of a picture book can provide children with the chance of frequent exposure to the new words (NICHD, 2000; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004; Young, Bowers, & MacKinnon, 1996). Teaching word parts with selected picture books helps children to accumulate vocabulary and acquire longer and more complex words (Sweeney, 2004). Using context clues is another widely suggested strategy that teachers

should teach in their EFL classrooms to help children acquire the unknown words when they read picture books on their own (McKeown & Curtis, 1987). Vocabulary, together with phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency, play an important role in children's early literacy development. But a child who has these four skills is still not a good reader without the last but not least big idea--- comprehension.

**Comprehension.** Comprehension is the “construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.39). It is the essence of reading and reading without comprehension is meaningless (Durkin, 1993). Research on reading comprehension found that good readers are able to decode reading materials well and children's reading comprehension levels are closely related to the time they spend on reading (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Numerous research studies have been conducted to explore the most effective ways to instruct children on text comprehension skills (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2011) conducted a comparison study and found that teachers' reading aloud of a picture book or a story has a significant positive effect on children's reading comprehension. Durkin (1993) believed that it is important to give children explicit instruction on text comprehension, including teaching children to use certain cognitive strategies and reasoning strategies to solve problems in reading and that this can result in children's achievement of competent and self-regulated reading. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) recommended the following reading activities to help children develop reading comprehension: question answering, comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic/semantic organizers/story maps, question generation, and summarization. Aligned with these recommendations, Sweeney (2004) suggested that there are six effective text



comprehension strategies: monitoring comprehension, graphic and semantic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing.

### **Picture Books**

A picture book is a unique literary art form which enables adults to impart new knowledge to children in a natural way, especially when children are too young to understand adults' words or to communicate with adults (Hsiao, 2010). Using picture books as instructional materials is one of the best methods of educating young children of preschool age (Althouse, Johnson, & Michell, 2003; Bullen & Nichols, 2011; Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2007; Güneş & Güneş, 2011). Picture books are widely used as instructional materials in EFL classes (Hadaway & Mundy, 1999; Hu & Commeyras, 2008; Lv, 2015; Sheu, 2008; Sheu, 2009). This phenomenon has attracted much attention from English as a Foreign Language educators and researchers (Sheu, 2008). Researchers have provided rationales from different perspectives of using English picture books in the EFL classroom, such as transferring mechanical language learning to personal-involved contexts, revising vocabulary and grammar points in meaningful stories, and providing visual support for understanding the text (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2002; Collie & Slater, 1987; Ghosn, 2002; Johnston, 1994). What follows are reviews of previous studies on the development of using picture books in classroom instruction, including its definition, benefits, and applications in EFL classrooms.

### **Definition of Picture Books**

Although using picture books in kindergarten EFL classrooms is a new phenomenon in China, their use is not a new concept for everyone who is or was involved in kindergarten education. Arizpe and Styles (2003) define picture books as “[books] in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention” (p. 22). In most picture books, pictures and written

texts depend on each other and together they compose the story, which enables readers to experience an undemanding journey to approach the literary world.

Some picture books rely solely on visual cues without words, which “is often thought to be aimed at very young readers on account of the absence of written text” (Ramos & Ramos, 2011, p. 325). Wordless picture books include the books with only images, or with minimal text such as several words, a few labels or simple phrases which cannot construct grammatically structured sentences (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, & Zhang, 2002). Wordless picture books are combinations of “visual literacy (learning to interpret images), cultural literacy (learning the characteristics and expectations of social groups) and literacy with print (learning to read and write language)” (Jalongo et al., 2002, p. 168). Young readers who are too young to read benefit from reading wordless picture books together with adults, because reading wordless picture books requires readers to be actively involved in the process of decoding the series of pictures (Hu & Commeyras, 2008). On the other hand, the absence of verbal signs in wordless picture books could be a barrier for adults to instruct children, by reason that parents need the skills of interpreting pictures rather than reading through the words (Doonan, 1993).

For young readers, picture books are excellent reading materials to bridge their feelings and the literary word. As Wolf (2003) described, picture books use numerous pictorial elements to help children get the content and feelings without effort. Instead of directly telling the whole story with pictures, many authors intentionally leave gaps between the pictures and printed texts, in order to offer children the room to imagine the connections of images and words (Ghosh & Laird, 2011). In general picture books or wordless picture books, the proportion of images and written texts are not randomly assigned. They interact with each other through at least five ways: symmetry—words and images share the same importance, complementary--- words and images provide complementary meanings,

enhancement---words and images extend the meanings for each other, counterpoint--- words and images describe different things, and contradiction--- words and images imply opposite concepts (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). These complicated interactions between words and images enable children to develop a sophisticated cognition system in reading and helps them acquire the basic skills of understanding printed materials. Besides this advantage, there are other benefits of picture books in educating young learners in a variety of subjects.

### **Benefits of Picture Books**

Many researchers proved the effectiveness of using picture books to educate young children in language, literacy, mathematics, and even second language acquisition (Althouse, Johnson, & Michell, 2003; Bullen& Nichols, 2011; Danko-McGhee & Slutsky,2007; Güneş & Güneş,2011). Dual Coding Theory provides a theoretical basis for using picture books to instruct children in that pictures and words collaboratively work in learner's minds to facilitate their language learning and retention (Paivio, 1971).

Researchers suggest that using picture books as instructional materials is one of the best methods of educating young children of preschool age (Althouse, Johnson, & Michell, 2003; Bullen & Nichols, 2011; Danko-McGhee & Slutsky,2007; Güneş & Güneş, 2011). By reading picture books, children acquire knowledge automatically and spontaneously. Ganea, Pickard, and DeLoache (2008) conducted an experiment on 96 children from 15 months to 18 months old in order to examine their knowledge transfer. Ganea et al. found that the interaction between adults and children when they read picture books together involves two major activities: (1) adults define and label the objects in the picture book and provide more information about it; and, (2) adults encourage children to identify objects in the picture books based on their own knowledge gained from the real world. Children around two years old naturally transfer newly learned concepts from books to real life and from real life to books if the picture and object resemble each other (Ganea, Pickard, & DeLoache, 2008).

Ganea, Ma, and DeLoache (2011) conducted more specific experiments three years later, in which they focused on children's learning and transfer of biological information from picture books to real animals. The results indicated that children four years of age can acquire new "biological facts" from reading picture books, and their findings "point to the importance that early book exposure can play in framing and increasing children's knowledge about the world" (Ganea, Ma, & DeLoache, 2011).

Previous studies revealed the great significance of using picture books to develop children's cognition and reading ability of native language and literacy (Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2005). In the past decade, researchers paid attention to the multifunction of picture books in early childhood education. Hansen and Zambo (2005) pointed out that "we use them [picture books] as one strategy to help students conceptualize the physical, cognitive, and socioemotional growth" and "to introduce principles, explain vocabulary, and encourage students to make connections between theory and practice" (p.39).

Many researchers also emphasized the importance of using picture books to develop children's literacy, emergent biliteracy, oral language skills, and writing skills (Dias, 2010; Flynn, 2011; Hu & Commeyras, 2008; Williams, 2012). Researchers also explored the other possible learning outcomes of using picture books. Van and Van (2009) described their experiences of successfully using picture books to develop five to six-year-old children's mathematics-related concepts. Elia, Van, and Georgiou (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore five-year-old children's mathematics learning outcomes of reading a picture book purposefully designed for teaching mathematics. Hsiao (2010) pointed out that picture books do not only facilitate children's reading and writing cognition, but also contribute to children's art appreciation development. When children were purposefully instructed to appreciate picture books, their sense of visual elements and art materials, spontaneous

drawing behavior, and general artistic and creative thinking would be significantly developed (Hsiao, 2010).

As the value of using picture books is becoming more widely recognized globally, various kinds of picture books in the market are waiting to be picked up for children. Parents' criteria for choosing picture books raised the interests of both book writers and researchers. McNair's (2011) qualitative research revealed that when adults choose picture books for children, they take children's preferences and needs into consideration. If they do not have enough time to read through each picture book, the title and cover of picture books probably affect adults' decision of which book(s) to purchase. Other factors also influence adults' selection of picture books, such as children's gender and interests.

### **Picture Books and EFL Development**

With digestible chunks of text, short and simple sentences, interesting content, and assistant images, picture books almost possess all the important elements of being an ideal primary second language textbook (Hadaway & Mundy, 1999). As a result, they have been preferred among EFL educators and learners for a long time. Nevertheless, compared with the research in other aspects, limited research has been done on investigating the effective instructional methods of using picture books in EFL classrooms.

Using picture books as supplementary materials in secondary EFL classrooms has proved to be effective in the U.S. Hadaway and Mundy (1999) offered three suggestions for teachers and educators applying picture books in literature-based units. Firstly, teachers should pay attention to both external and internal connections between picture books and target learning textbooks. Secondly, the selection of picture books to some extent determines whether the program will be successful or not. They suggested teachers choose the picture books together with students and the criteria for choosing them should be based on the "writing style, accuracy of content and interest level of the text" (p 473). Thirdly, instruction

could be aided with other multimodal materials such as video clips. Lv (2015) emphasized the importance of implementing multiple resources in using picture books in EFL classroom activities. Research also proved that picture books are appropriate materials for teaching Chinese children English. Hu and Commeyras (2008) explored a child's emergent biliteracy in English and Chinese through reading wordless picture books. Their findings revealed that applying wordless picture books in storytelling activities in English and Chinese can facilitate children's English alphabet recognition, Chinese character recognition, directionality in both languages, and English oral vocabulary size.

Although picture books are recommended in EFL classrooms by researchers worldwide, little is known about how teachers use them effectively in classrooms. Sheu (2008) interviewed ten EFL teachers from Taiwan elementary schools and private language schools to investigate their views of the instructional value of picture books. She summarized the findings of teachers' views of the value of picture books into three categories: "(1) linguistic value, (2) the value of the stories, and (3) the value of the pictures" (p. 48). The linguistic value of picture books is represented in the development of English linguistic knowledge for both students and teachers. By reading English picture books, elementary students reviewed what they have learnt in the textbooks and practiced the target language by telling the story in their own words. Teachers' linguistic knowledge was consolidated when they explained the images to children in the target language. The value of stories lies in motivating students' learning and sustaining students' reading process. The value of pictures means that they can facilitate students' comprehension of the texts and stimulate their imagination.

Sheu (2009) furthered her previous study by investigating children's views of using picture books as their EFL materials. The results of this research proved the existing three themes and revealed a problem that children regarded English vocabulary in the picture

books as the greatest challenge. Sheu's (2009) study fills the gap in terms of the lack of research on EFL teachers' views towards applying picture books into elementary students' curriculum and provides educators and researchers a basic concept of teachers' perspectives and children's perspectives on their use. However, the interview protocol for teachers isn't attached in the appendix of Sheu's article. What also remains unknown is whether the participants told the truth because this study collected data only through interviews. The use of interviews alone cannot assure the data collected reflect the truth because the interviewees may only give the information they want interviewers to hear.

Picture books are widely used in China's kindergarten EFL classrooms in order to stimulate children's interests in learning English and enhance their emergent literacy development (Xu, 2008). Teachers' attitudes towards picture books and their proficiency in using picture books significantly influence the teaching and learning activities and students' learning outcomes. Despite the phenomenon that picture books are widely regarded as effective instructional materials in preschool education, many teachers fail to give students explicit instruction in studying the picture books because there is almost no training or examples for teachers to know how to decode the meaning from color, line, and shape of the picture books to children (O'Neil, 2011). Limited research on using picture books in early childhood education in China failed to provide Chinese EFL teachers and educators with sufficient guidelines for selecting and using picture books effectively (Kang, 2007).

Although previous studies suggest picture books should be encouraged in young children's EFL classrooms, no research has focused on China's kindergarten EFL teachers' views and practices of using picture books by conducting both interviews and classroom observations.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed previous studies related to using picture books to teach children English in EFL classrooms. According to the Critical Period Hypothesis, children with early EFL education perform better in learning a second language than their peers, especially in phonology. Reading is one of the most important language skills. The Five Big Ideas revealed the most important domains in children's English reading development and pointed out effective ways to teach children reading.

According to Dual Coding Theory, children can better acquire a language when they are exposed to both visual images and words. Therefore, picture books are considered one of the most important instructional reading materials for fundamental education and are recommended for EFL classrooms by researchers from many countries.

The characteristics of picture books are in accordance with Krashen's five hypotheses, especially the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. The Acquisition -Learning Hypothesis is founded on the belief that second language acquisition and learning are two different concepts and an acquisition-rich environment can help children acquire the second language easily. When children read an English picture book together with an adult, they pay much more attention to its story than its linguistic forms, while at the same time, they are communicated with in the target language and acquiring the language automatically and subconsciously. The Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis point out that children's second language acquisition is facilitated when we expose them to comprehensible input in low anxiety situations, containing messages that children really want to hear. When EFL teachers choose picture books as their instructional materials, they can easily create a low anxiety learning situation for children, and with the help of pictures, the language points become the comprehensible input and children can better accept them.



However, little is known about kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward picture books, whether they create an active language acquisition environment for children, how they instruct children when using picture books, or the challenges they face in their EFL classrooms when using such books. To fill this gap in the research, this study explores teachers' attitudes toward and their application of using picture books in EFL classrooms.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In recent decades, learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China's kindergartens has gradually attracted researchers' attention (Hou, 2008; Xu, 2008; Zhu, 2011). Today, most private kindergartens in China set EFL courses in their curriculum in order to attract more students (Hou, 2008). Some public kindergartens also expose children to English through extracurricular activities for their students according to parents' wishes (Xu, 2008). However, the rapid expansion of English courses in kindergarten curricula brings a concern about whether the EFL courses provided by kindergartens can facilitate young children's second language learning, whether teachers are qualified to teach this special group and whether the textbooks they use are suitable for children's English development. To fill the gap in knowledge about such issues, this study was intended to gain an in-depth understanding of how kindergarten EFL teachers view the instructional value of picture books and how they use them in their classrooms.

This chapter provides a description of the research methodology for this project, including the qualitative methods design, site selection, respondent selection strategy, data collection, data analysis, ethical issues, research bias, trustworthiness, assumptions and limitations of the study.

### **Qualitative Methods Design**

To explore kindergarten teachers' views on using picture books in EFL classrooms, I conducted a qualitative study. Qualitative research methods are particularly suited to understand people's views, opinions, and knowledge in depth (Patton, 2002). In this research, I aimed to know in detail the common, and perhaps divergent, experiences shared by kindergarten EFL teachers in Shanghai who use picture books as their classroom

instructional materials. This study focuses on interviews with and observations of participants using picture books in Shanghai kindergartens.

In China, because of globalization, an increasing number of kindergartens in recent decades have established English courses in their curricula or as extracurricular activities. Establishing these English courses demands huge numbers of professional kindergarten EFL teachers who are experts in teaching children their second (or in some cases their third) language. Neither traditional kindergarten teachers nor general English teachers have the competence to fill this gap.

Kindergarten EFL teachers should have the qualification of teaching English as well as understanding the methods of instructing young children. As a result, it is important to understand what is happening in China's kindergarten EFL classrooms. Picture books are generally used as kindergarten EFL teaching materials, but no research has yet explored China's kindergarten EFL teachers' use of picture books in their classrooms. This study enrolled four of China's kindergarten EFL teachers who use picture books in their classrooms and explored their views on and practices in using picture books through interviews and classroom observations. In this study, I explored teachers' views and various practices in using picture books to instruct EFL students, such as improving students' linguistic cognition, facilitating students' English reading skills, and stimulating students' interests in learning English. This study lasted one month for the purpose of collecting data, but site selection came first.

### **Site Selection**

Kindergarten EFL is a newborn subject in China (Xu, 2008). Since educators and researchers have not reached a consensus whether children should learn a second language at an early age in China, kindergarten EFL courses are not yet generalized at a national level (Liao, 2002; Hou, 2008; Zhu, 2011). Most kindergartens of major cities set EFL courses into

their curriculum or extra-curricular activities to meet the needs of internationalization. But in small cities and rural areas, language training organizations rather than kindergartens take the responsibility for providing English courses for children whose parents want them to learn English at an early age (Liao, 2002). To better understand how kindergarten EFL teachers view and use picture books to instruct children, I chose to conduct this study in China's economic capital, Shanghai, because this city enjoys an advanced position in internationalization, and English has already become a necessary skill in the work and daily lives of many people there. As a result, kindergartens in Shanghai have comparatively mature curricula and experienced EFL teachers who I expected can provide rich information on my research questions (Xu, 2008).

The sites for one-on-one interviews were chosen by participants according to their convenience. Classroom observations took place in their classrooms with permission from gatekeepers, including the participants' school principals and the teachers themselves. I will give details in the next section on how I planned to get their permission.

### **Respondent Selection Strategies**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. As defined by Creswell (2012b), purposeful sampling "means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 156). The original survey population consisted of all EFL teachers from four kindergartens which have EFL classes in Shanghai. To ensure a diversity of participants' teaching contexts, I chose four kindergartens in Shanghai, including two private kindergartens, one public kindergarten and one language training institution. The common characteristic they share is that they have EFL classes and use picture books as instructional materials.

After obtaining IRB approval to conduct the research, I contacted the four kindergarten headmasters by sending an explanatory and invitational email in both English and Chinese to each of them respectively. In the emails, I also attached my consent forms in English and Chinese (see Appendix A) and informed them that if they were willing to participate, they needed to sign the consent form and send it back to me. I got the four headmasters' replies and gained their permissions to allow their EFL teachers to participate in this study. They all signed the informed consent forms and helped me to distribute another explanatory and invitational letter to their EFL teachers who could be my potential participants.

The explanatory and invitational letters to the EFL teachers were also written in both English and Chinese (see Appendix A). EFL teachers from the four kindergartens were invited to participate in an online survey and they were also asked to sign the informed consent forms (see Appendix A) before doing the survey. This survey (see Appendix B) aimed to identify and recruit a smaller group of experienced kindergarten EFL teachers who shared the experience of using picture books in EFL classrooms and were willing to discuss their experiences. The survey covers seven questions, including their teaching experience in full years, their frequency of using picture books in the class, and their job training experience. Thirty-six participants responded to this survey and 19 were completed.

By examining the 19 participants' responses to the survey, I used a criteria sampling method to identify four respondents who would complete open-ended interview protocols (see Appendix C) which were designed to follow-up on and probe more deeply into key issues and were willing to be observed in their EFL classrooms. I identified the potential participants according to their responses to the survey by considering the following criteria. In question 1, I recruited participants whose teaching experience was more than 6 years (see Appendix B) because these experienced teachers were likely to have more experience in

using picture books to instruct children. In question 2, I selected teachers from different types of kindergartens to ensure the diversity of participants' teaching contexts (see Appendix B). In question 3, I recruited teachers who were using picture books to teach children English (see Appendix B). In question 5, the teachers with high frequency of using picture books to instruct students were recruited because it was assumed they would be more likely to have more experience using picture books (see Appendix B). In question 7, the respondents had the right to choose if they were willing to participate in the follow-up interviews and classroom observations. (see Appendix B).

According to above criteria, I selected four participants who were willing to participate in the study. The details of selection will be presented in the next part "Data Collection Procedures". These four participants were from four different kindergartens. The participants' names and their kindergartens' names are all presented in pseudonyms in this dissertation. They were recruited by invitation through email (see Appendix A). They contacted me by replying to my email. All of them were volunteers. After selecting the participants and being assured of their commitment, I destroyed the other respondents' surveys immediately.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Survey**

I recruited participants by a survey and subsequently collected data by interviews, classroom observations, and documents. After getting permissions from kindergarten headmasters by email, I sent email messages to invite EFL teachers from two private kindergartens, one public kindergarten and one English training institution in Shanghai to complete a cross-sectional designed online survey with seven items focusing on their attitudes toward and application of picture books in their EFL classrooms (see Appendix B).

This recruiting survey was used to help identify participants for interviews and classroom observations who might be rich sources of information for exploring the research questions.

This survey aimed to identify experienced English teachers who shared the experience of using picture books in EFL classrooms and were willing to discuss their experiences. At the end of the online survey, I included this question: “Are you willing to participate in the follow-up interviews and classroom observations? If yes, please leave your contact information.” Thirty-six kindergarten EFL teachers participated in this survey and 19 of them completed all the questions. Among them, 16 left their contact information in question 7 and showed interest in participating in the interviews and classroom observations.

In question 3 “Are you using picture books to instruct children English?” , question 4 “Do you think picture books are effective teaching materials to instruct children English?”, and question 6 “Have you received job training about using picture books to teach children English?”, all of the 16 participants chose “A. Yes”.

There were differences, however, among the 16 participants’ answers to questions 1, 2 and 5. In question 1 “What is your teaching experience in full years?”, seven teachers chose “C. 6-10”. Since I wanted to recruit teachers with more experience teaching children English, I identified the seven teachers who chose “C. 6-10” as my potential final participants. Among those seven teachers, one chose “C. Seldom” in question 5 “How often do you use picture books to teach children English?”. The other six teachers who chose “A” or “B” in question 5 became my final target participants because I hoped to collect data from teachers who have more experience in using picture books to teach children.

Among these six participants, four of them were from private kindergartens, one was from a language training institution and one of them chose “D. Others” in question 2 “In which kind of institution are you teaching?”. To ensure the diversity of the participants’ teaching contexts, I firstly identified the respondent who chose “D. Others” and the

respondent who was from a language training institution as my potential participants. The other 4 respondents who chose “B. Private kindergartens” left their kindergartens’ names in question 7 and I found two of them were from Red Kindergarten and two were from Pink Kindergarten. To randomly choose the final two participants, I put their numbers respectively into two hats marked “Red” and “Pink” and then blindly picked one number from each hat.

Therefore, the final four participants were from four different schools. They were recruited by invitation through email. All participants were volunteers and they had the right to drop out of the study at any time. After getting their permissions and contacting them, I believed that they had substantial experience in using picture books to teach children English and that they were willing to share their experiences with me.

### **Interviews**

After getting the four participants’ permissions, I collected data by interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of documents. Creswell (2012a) suggests that in the interview researchers ask open-ended questions so that “the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p. 218).

I interviewed each participant once or twice with interview protocols (see Appendix C). The interviews aimed to understand their perspectives on using picture books. After the first interview and observation, I found additional data was needed based on questions raised by observing and interviewing two of the four participants, Mary and Cindy (their pseudonyms). Therefore, I requested a second interview after my classroom observations of them (see Appendix C). Concerning the possibility that participants’ English proficiency would prevent them from sharing their experience, I prepared the interview protocols in both English and Chinese so that they could choose which language they would like to use to



express themselves. Among the four participants, one of them chose to be interviewed in Chinese, and the other three chose English. For the participant who chose Chinese (Mary), I translated pertinent parts of her Chinese answers into English.

In the interview, the questions were designed to explore teachers' views on and practice of using picture books to teach children English and also the challenges they face in teaching activities related to the use of picture books (see Appendix C). The interview protocol included a number of open-ended questions or statements. The first interview protocol included ten questions aimed at understanding participants' perspectives on picture books and their understanding of their practice of using picture books. The second interview was given after the classroom observation, and it was an optional one depending on whether there was a new theme that emerged from the classroom observation. The second interview protocol had four questions or statements related to the class I observed, including "Please explain the teaching objectives of the class I observed", "Please explain more about your teaching activities and the role that picture books played in the class I observed", "What are the particular challenges for you in using picture books to instruct children in the class I observed", and "Is there anything else you want to tell me about the use of picture books in teaching children English by using picture books".

Mary and Cindy were invited to participate in the second interview. In Mary's classes, picture books seemed to play a much more complicated role. In Cindy's class, an unexpected situation took place when she was telling the story in a picture book to her students. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 4. I interviewed each of the four participants in the sites designated by them. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded by use of a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim.

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, I transferred the interview recording from the digital voice recorder to my personal computer immediately after each interview and

destroyed the original recording in the digital voice recorder. My personal computer is protected by an eight-digit code. Both the recordings and the transcripts were saved in password-protected files in my personal computer. Only I had access to the data, and the data was only used for the purpose of this study. During the reporting of the results, I used pseudonyms for the participant teachers and the research sites.

### **Classroom Observations**

Interviews can provide perceptive and reflexive focused data, but that is not enough. Although what the participants talked about may be the most important source of data, in order to get in-depth data and to verify their verbally shared information, I conducted a classroom observation for each participant. Patton (2002) points out that “to understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (p. 21).

I observed how the participants used picture books to instruct the young learners in their real classrooms. I firstly obtained the permission from the kindergarten principals and participants, and then after the first interview I made appointments with the participants to observe the teaching activities in their EFL classrooms. Before observing the class, I asked for permission from gatekeepers, such as kindergarten headmasters and the participating teachers via email, and on the consent form I emphasized that data on the children would not be collected. See Appendix A for copies of the consent form that was used.

After the first interview, I asked the participants about their syllabus and in which classes they would use picture books to instruct children. Then I asked each participant to schedule with me a date and time for the classroom observation to make sure that I could observe their use of picture books in class. The classroom observations lasted for approximately 30 minutes each time, depending on the specific curriculum in each

kindergarten and school. The time allocations for observing each participant's class are presented in detail in Chapter Four.

I took field notes during all of the four classroom observations according to the observation protocol, which was designed based on the research questions and theoretical framework (see Appendix D). During the classroom observations, I tried my best not to influence the class by being a non-participant observer and not interacting with students or the teacher. Nevertheless, my presence in some of the classrooms probably caused some inevitable differences from the norm, such as distracting children's attention and influencing a teacher's performance. In the classroom observations, I focused on the teachers' use of picture books and not on the students. By collecting data through classroom observations, I verified the information obtained from interviews as well as better understood the phenomenon being researched.

### **Documents**

Apart from interviews and classroom observations, I also collected data from documents, such as using my personal smart phone to take photos of the picture books, curricula, syllabi, teachers' written teaching plans, kindergarten introduction booklets, and classroom observation notes. I transferred the photos to password-protected files in my personal computer and destroyed the photos in my smart phone.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

After collecting data, I categorized them into files and read through the texts and images to code them. While I was coding, I found the data presented my participants' personal experiences regarding the use of picture books and helped me to find the essence of this phenomenon. Then I analyzed the coded data for significant statements and grouped them into meaningful units. During this process, several themes emerged, as will be

discussed in Chapter 4. The overview of my data analysis procedures is shown in Figure 1 below, according to Creswell's (2012b) suggestion.

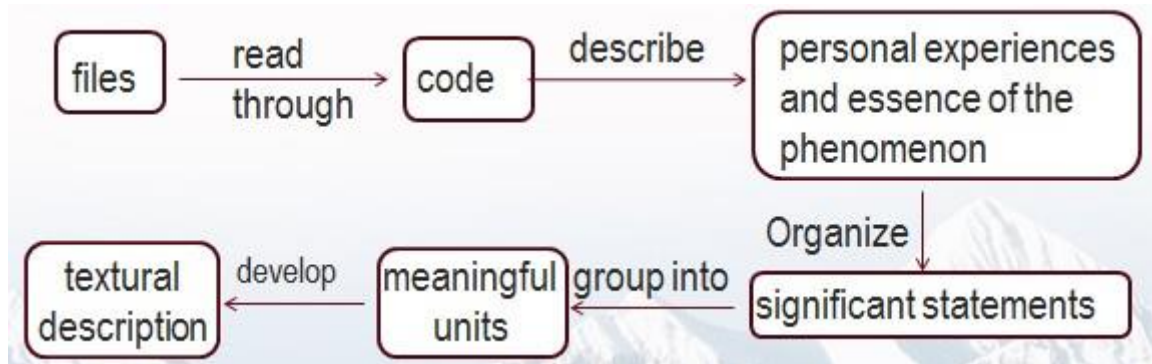


Figure 1. Data analysis procedures.

Creswell (2012 a) points out that “the object of the coding process is to make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes.” (p. 243). I firstly transferred the data collected from the interviews, observations, and documents into digital files in my personal computer. Then I read through the data and inserted and typed in the margins the ideas that came into my mind when I read them. During the reading process, participants’ personal experiences and the essence of the phenomenon of using picture books were discovered. When I coded the data, I divided the texts and document images into segments of information based on the sub-research questions, and used different colors to highlight the words, phrases, and sentences that accurately represented the participants’ perspectives about and their usage of picture books. In other words, I organized significant statements, grouped them into meaning units, and labeled the segments of information with codes. I checked through these codes and reduced the overlapping ones. The codes that remained were grouped into themes under my sub-research questions.

These steps were not always taken in sequence and certain steps were repeated several times. For example, when I coded the data, I went back to the files of the original data several times and read through them for better coding.

### **Ethical Issues**

I strictly followed the IRB guidelines in conducting this study. Before collecting data, I asked for permission from all gatekeepers, including the kindergarten headmasters and the participating teachers. In the online survey, I put the informed consent at the very beginning, in which I explained the purpose of my study, my procedures, the approximate time they would spend on it, their right to refuse answering questions and my promise that their information would be confidential.

Before the interviews and observations, I also gave the final participants informed consent forms. I protected participants by giving them pseudonyms. The kindergartens where they work were also mentioned in fictitious names of colors. The four kindergartens whose teachers participated in this study were from different districts in Shanghai, but their districts and specific locations are not referred to in this study. Also, any detailed information which could help to identify the kindergartens are not mentioned in this study, such as their ranks in Shanghai, total number of classes, total number of teachers, composition of teachers, their teaching plans, the exact amount of picture books they have, and the specifics of the curricula they used in their English classes. In addition, the use of demographic data to describe participants was limited so as not to inadvertently reveal their identity. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

### **Researcher Bias**

I have certain biases in this study. Firstly, what I knew about kindergarten English teachers' use of picture books comes from reviewing previous literature. My reading of the

literature on the use of picture books might have made me predisposed to seeing my participants' use as effective or not. What I thought should be taught to kindergarten students might not be applied practically in an authentic environment.

Secondly, since there are limited research articles related to China's context, so my study was designed based on previous studies conducted in the U.S. and other countries. Cultural differences exist between what I read and what I would study in Shanghai schools. For example, ESL classes in the U.S. are different from EFL classes in China. The most significant difference lies in the fact that English is the dominant language in the U.S. while it is a foreign language in China. Thus, ESL kindergarten students in the U.S are immersed in an English environment and they are exposed to English in a variety of contexts every day. However, for most of China's EFL learners, their only chance of being exposed to English is in the classroom. What I knew about ESL classes in the U.S. might not be suitably copied in Chinese contexts.

Thirdly, my education background and working experiences as well as the theories I have learnt could also lead to the biases I have in this study. Fourthly, I might also have a positive predisposition toward the use of picture books and this predisposition was likely to prevent me from seeing the disadvantages of applying picture books in Shanghai's kindergarten English classrooms. Although there is no policy in Shanghai about whether teachers should use picture books to instruct kindergarten students, an increasing number of educators are advocating the benefits of picture books. It is possible that in this context my participants would exaggerate the benefits of using picture books and I could be too positive while getting their information about the challenges they face in using picture books to teach children English.

### **Trustworthiness**

Since qualitative research is shaped by researchers' own interpretations of the data, the accuracy and credibility of the findings become one of the major concerns of this type of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2012a) suggests that to ensure the accuracy and credibility of qualitative data, researchers typically use three primary forms: "triangulation, member checking, and auditing" (p. 259). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that thick description is a way of achieving external validity. In this study, I used triangulation, member checking and thick description to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Triangulation is "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2012a, p. 259). I collected data from different methods, including interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. In the data analysis phase, I found evidence to support the themes by examining each information source. For example, when I coded the information I got from interviews, I checked it with my observation notes to see if they were corresponding to each other. Themes were summarized when evidence from each source was found.

When themes emerged, I asked participants to do member checking to ensure the accuracy and credibility of my findings. I emailed the themes to all of the four participants for member checking. I did member checking in written form and asked them about whether the description was complete and correct, if the findings were accurate and if the interpretations represented their views and the facts. The four participants all gave me positive confirmation about the themes.

Thick description refers to the sufficient detailed description of the phenomenon in which the researcher can summarize the patterns of cultural and social relationships and transfer them to other settings (Holloway, 1997). In this study, I focused on collecting in-

depth data through interviews, classroom observations, and documents about kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on using picture books to instruct children. The in-depth data collected through different methods provided evidence to understand kindergarten EFL teacher's perspectives on and usage of picture books with validity.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

My basic assumption regarding this study was that all of the participants told me the truth about their experiences of using picture books in their EFL classrooms. In the survey phase, I assumed that EFL teachers from the four kindergartens were willing to participate in this study and finish the questionnaire according to their true situation and thoughts. In the interviews, I assumed all participants would answer the interview questions honestly and were willing to share their experiences with me. When observing their classes as a non-participant observer, I expected teachers and students would not be influenced too much by my observations and perform as usual most of the time. I assumed that the data collected would correctly reflect kindergarten EFL teachers' thoughts about and practices in using picture books.

Certain limitations of this study are important to note. First, the sample size of this study is small, even though the four participants provided a rich amount of data connected to the research questions. Secondly, this study only involved EFL teachers from Shanghai's kindergartens. Shanghai is the economic capital of China, and its education level is generally above that of the national level. The results obtained from this study cannot be generalized to the national level, but they could be references for teachers, administrators and curriculum designers in other cities in China. Thirdly, in the interview phase, there was a possibility that the interviewees might only give the information they wanted me to hear. Even though I would observe their classes to better understand what was really happening in them, they could also only show me what they wanted me to see in their classes. Therefore, more



observations, if time permitted, may have yielded additional data that could have shed even more light on the research questions being explored.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As stated in Chapter 1, the study reported here examined in detail the kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books and the challenges they face when they use picture books to teach children English. This chapter is organized in terms of the three specific research questions posed in Chapter 1. Firstly, this chapter presents a brief introduction of the participants. Secondly, it explores the teachers' perspectives on the linguistic, cognitive development, and cultural awareness values of picture books in EFL classrooms. It then reports on the way teachers use picture books in their classrooms. And finally, this chapter examines teachers' views on the challenges of using picture books to teach kindergarten students English.

### **Participants and Their Teaching Contexts**

Participants in this study were recruited by a criteria survey. The common experience they shared was that they were all EFL teachers who had the experience of using picture books to teach kindergarten students English, and they all had more than six years of teaching experience. The four participants are given the pseudonyms Mary, Cindy, Emma and Elizabeth (see Table 1).

Mary is a very enthusiastic teacher with more than that of six years teaching experience, and she is teaching in Red Kindergarten, a Montessori-style private kindergarten in Shanghai. Cindy is also teaching in a private kindergarten, which is named Pink Kindergarten, and she also has been teaching children English for more than six years. Emma is at Green School, a language training institution for children, and she has eight years of experience in teaching children English.

Elizabeth's background is much more complicated than the other three teachers. In the survey, she selected "others" in question 2, that is "In which kind of institution are you teaching?" and noted that she taught children English for more than seven years.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics (In Pseudonyms).*

Name	Kindergarten Now Working at	Number of Years Teaching
Mary	Red Kindergarten (private kindergarten)	More than 6 years
Cindy	Pink Kindergarten (private kindergarten)	More than 6 years
Emma	Green School (Language Training Institution)	8 years
Elizabeth	White School (Language Training Institution) & Orange Kindergarten (Public Kindergarten)	More than 7 years (4 years teaching children in a language training school and 3 years in a public kindergarten.)

Elizabeth was employed by a language training institution after graduating from college. One year later, she joined White school, a famous English training school in China. Three years later, as White School established a cooperative relationship with Orange Kindergarten, a public kindergarten, Elizabeth was sent to Orange Kindergarten as an experienced teacher to teach children English. Therefore, now she is teaching public kindergarten English, but she still belongs to a language training school. Her special experience raised my interest and I wanted to know more about her understanding about and usage of picture books in teaching children English. Her experience might shed light on teachers who were trained in language training institutions but have teaching experience in both language training institutions and public kindergartens.

Mary, Cindy, Emma and Elizabeth also all have more than six years teaching experience, frequently use picture books to teach children English and were willing to participate in this study.

After getting their consent forms, I interviewed each participant at sites designated by them. During the classroom observation phase, something happened in Mary's and Cindy's classes that raised my interest, so I decided to give them a second interview to know more about their experience. In Mary's classes, picture books played a multi-functional role and she handled the class very well. I gave her a second interview to dig out more information about her design of the class and the way she used the picture books. In Cindy's class, she used a scientific picture book, *The Solar System*, to teach children both reading and scientific facts. To know more about her teaching objectives and skills, I invited her to participate in a second interview as well. As a result, I interviewed Mary and Cindy twice and Emma and Elizabeth once.

Different kindergartens and schools have different curricula and timetables for different grades. Emma's Green School, as a private language training institution, provides English classes for children at night on weekdays and a whole day on weekends. Children are assigned to different classes according to their English proficiency levels rather than their ages and they have to attend the class twice a week. One session of English class for beginners lasts for 15 minutes, and there is a 10-minute break between two sessions. I observed two sessions of Emma's class for beginners, and the total amount of time was 30 minutes. In those sessions, she used the picture book *Go Away, Mr. Wolf* as her textbook.

In Cindy's Pink Kindergarten and Elizabeth's Orange Kindergarten, each session of English class for senior grades lasts for 30 minutes. In the class I observed, Cindy used the picture book *The Solar System* to instruct students. Her teaching objectives included cultivating students' sense of science as well as improving their English reading ability. In Elizabeth's class for senior students in the public kindergarten Orange Kindergarten, she chose the beginning level picture book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* as her teaching material. English is not a compulsory course in public kindergartens, and most of

her students had no English education before five years of age. I observed one session for 30 minutes in both Cindy's Pink Kindergarten and Elizabeth's Orange Kindergarten.

Mary's Red Kindergarten has a completely different curriculum system (see Table 2). Red Kindergarten is a Montessori-style kindergarten. Table 2 is a copy of Red Kindergarten mixed grades' timetable of English classes. Since in Shanghai each private kindergarten has its unique timetable and daily activities, there is a possibility that readers may identify the kindergarten through the timetable. Therefore, to ensure the confidentiality of the participant, this timetable only presents Red Kindergarten's timetable of English classes, while other classes and activities are not presented.

Table 2.

*Timetable of Mixed Grades' English Classes in Red Kindergarten*

8:40-10:40	English Circle Time				
11:40-12:30	Lunch Time Outdoors/ Story Time				
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
14:30-15:00	English Lesson	English Lesson	English Lesson		English Lesson
15:00-15:30					Phonics
15:30-16:00		Phonics	English Lesson	English Lesson	English Lesson

In Red Kindergarten, there are three kinds of activities directly related to English learning: English circle time, English lesson, and Phonics. Apart from these three activities, Red Kindergarten also has Story time, which is partly related to English learning, for teachers share stories with children in English and in Chinese in turn. In the English circle time, 24 children of different ages were sitting in one big classroom. The teacher spent some time on reading an English picture book with all of the children for about 10 to 20 minutes and then encouraged children to play and read picture books they liked for the whole morning in an

English environment. During this time, the teacher identified the children who needed help and gave them one-to-one instruction. Each instance of one-to-one instruction lasts from 5 minutes to 30 minutes, depending on the child's English reading level and the specific problem he/she had. According to Mary's recommendation, I observed 30 minutes of her English circle time, from 8:50 to 9:20, in the observation room next to her classroom. This observation room is next to the classroom and observers could observe the class from a one-side-visible window which looks like a mirror from the classroom's side. I observed Mary's class from this observation room so my observation didn't cause any effect on her class.

During my observation time, Mary gathered children together and let them sit down in a big circle on the floor and read the English picture book *PaPa, Please Get the Moon for Me* for about 15 minutes, and later on she gave one-to-one instruction by using the picture book *Big Pig on a Dig* to a girl around three years old for about five minutes. Then she turned to an older child who was still reading *PaPa, Please Get the Moon for Me* and had a discussion with him for about five minutes.

After collecting data from the participants and analyzing the data, a number of themes emerged. These themes will be presented in the next part based on the three sub-research questions of this study: kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on picture books, their usage of picture books, and the challenges for them to use picture books to teach children English.

### **Kindergarten EFL Teacher's Perspectives on Picture Books**

To answer the first sub-research question "What do Shanghai kindergarten teachers think about the linguistic, cognitive development, and cultural awareness values of picture books in EFL classrooms?", one of the focus points of interviews and classroom observations was kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on picture books. All of the participants believed that picture books are effective teaching materials not only in their classrooms but also out of their classrooms. They also indicated that picture books play a multi-functional

role rather than being a simple language textbook. Three primary categories were identified as teachers' perspectives on picture books: (a) their linguistic values, (b) their cognitive values, and (c) and their cultural awareness values. Within each of these three primary categories, subcategories were developed that further described teacher's perspectives on picture books.

### **Linguistic Values of Picture Books**

Linguistic values can be viewed as the value of picture books on enlightening kindergarten children on learning English as a second language. Participants in this study indicated that the most important reason for using picture books to teach children English is that picture books have great linguistic values. In the interviews and classroom observations, six themes emerged as teachers' perspectives on the linguistic values of picture books: (a) picture books are children's best English primer, (b) linguistic value is crucial for choosing picture books, (c) picture books cultivate children's English thinking pattern, (d) picture books help develop children's phonics and phonemic awareness, and (e) picture books helps develop children's vocabulary and grammar.

**Picture books are children's best English primer.** All participants described picture books as kindergarten students' best English primer. As Mary said, "I can't find any other teaching material which is better than picture books to teach my children English...picture books are children's best English primer!".

The premier reason is that picture books can effectively raise children's interests of learning English. In China, English is not an official language and most parents cannot speak English themselves. As a result, children have limited chances to be immersed in an English environment and in their minds, English could be a difficult and unnecessary language to learn. Therefore, stimulating children's learning motivation is crucial in kindergarten EFL classes. Elizabeth described her experience of coping with this problem:

You know, I'm teaching the senior class in a public kindergarten (i.e., a class for senior grade students in kindergartens). It's so difficult, you know, to attract the students to learn English, because they have zero contact with English before coming to my class and they don't really want to learn English, maybe because they don't understand why they should learn a language which they don't need to use in their daily lives. But when I showed them the picture books, everything changed. They loved reading picture books and they loved attending my English class. It seems that reading picture books is a motivation for them to learn English.

Picture books build a bridge between Chinese children and English, and stimulate their interests of learning this completely new foreign language. The colorful picture elements and vivid stories attract children's attention and make it easier for them to read and learn English. At the same time, picture books help teachers create a safe and encouraging environment for children to begin their reading. Elizabeth said, "With picture books, they [the students] feel safe and comfortable. They forget the nervousness of learning a new language. They are immersed in the world picture books created." Even for children who have no experience of learning English, they can explore the story of a picture book by looking at and guessing the pictures in it. Picture books successfully help teachers open the door of learning English for kindergarten children, no matter what ages they are at. Mary stated,

Picture books have a magic to attract children at different ages. In my mixed-grades class, the youngest children are around three years old and the eldest children are around five or six years old. Before teaching them, I worried about if I could teach this special class. What about if the 3-year-old ones can't understand and disturb the elder ones? Or what about if the 6-year-old ones lose patience when I'm reading a picture book suitable for the younger children? But all my concerns are in vain. When the English circle time comes, I open a picture book, every child sits there quietly, staring at the pictures and waiting for me to begin the lesson. Yes, I just need to select a good picture book for them, and, this picture book helps me solve all the difficulties of attracting children's attention.

All of the participants expressed that picture books shortened the distance between their students and English class, and picture books are good fundamental English reading materials. Children love colorful pictures and they are capable of interpreting the pictures even though they can't read the letters. Cindy said, "Whenever I show them (her students) a



picture book, they are so excited. They are competing to shout out everything they find on the cover of the picture book and then ask me ‘Am I right? What does the title say? Please teach us the words in the title!’” Pictures raise children’s interests of exploring the new language. For children, reading a picture book is much like a game rather than a lesson. Emma shared her understanding of picture books,

I think picture book is the best reading material for young children. Children love story. Children also love colorful pictures. And children like playing games. Yes, this is what I mean, picture book has everything children like. You can’t force children reading and you can’t force children learning English, but you can give them a picture book and they will be happy to read and learn English.

Apart from stimulating children’s motivation of reading and learning English, picture books also facilitate children’s learning speed. All participants indicated that children can memorize new words and sentences at a quick speed when they are learning them from a picture book. Cindy stated, “When I use a picture book to teach my students some new words, their learning speed are out of my expectation, because they are eager to know what is happening in the book and the pictures help them to recall the words and the story”.

Participants also believe that picture books can cultivate children’s overall English ability, such as reading skills, listening skills, speaking skills and writing skills. By using picture books, teachers can design a variety of activities and create a safe environment to encourage their students to practice English. Emma stated,

It’s [picture book] not just a book, we can use picture book to do lots of activities, like role play, like singing and dancing. Children practice what they have learned in these activities, yes, they speak out the words and sentences they have learned, they carefully listen to each other, and, and wait for their turn to copy the characters in the picture book, yes, again and again and they love doing this. I think this is all because they love the picture book, and the story in the picture book, so they love to learn and use English.

All of the participants hold a positive attitude towards picture books and they believe that picture books are children’s best English primer, because with the colorful pictures and vivid stories, picture books can break the language barrier and attract young children to learn

a completely new foreign language. With the high motivation of reading the picture books, children are more likely to remember the language points the teacher taught them. Besides, picture books give room for teachers to design various teaching activities to help students achieve the teaching objectives.

**Linguistic value is crucial for choosing picture books.** When they talked about the criteria of choosing picture books for their students, all of the four participants mentioned that high linguistic values are their first consideration. According to their understanding, a picture book with high linguistic values should have accurate and up-to-date English language, good and catchy rhythm, vivid expressions and children-friendly writing style (which can attract children and make it easy for them to understand). Mary indicated,

Definitely, good picture books must have accurate language expressions, but also, these expressions must be suitable for children to understand; for example, if the sentence is too long or too complicated, then you should give this book to primary school students, not kindergarten children. And the rhythm is important, good rhythm catches children's ears and makes them willing to read aloud after the teacher.

Since English is not an official language in China, most kindergarten children do not have an environment to learn English in their daily lives. As a result, for most of them, the only input of English is from their English classes. In other words, the language printed in the picture books determines if they like learning English and to what standard they could achieve. Elizabeth explained the reason why she regarded linguistic value as the most important criterion in choosing a picture book,

In fact, for most children... the only way of learning English is from my English classes. You know...it is our responsibility... you should give them the right picture books... the language must be correct in the picture books. You can't imagine the outcomes of giving them a picture book with bad language.

Cindy emphasized the importance of giving children the picture books with up-to-date language,

I still remember... when I was a primary school student, I've learned lots of out-of-date words and sentences from the textbooks. I was laughed as 'old-fashioned'

when I talked with my foreign friends. I hope my students can learn English from the up-to-date picture books and never experience the embarrassments I suffered.

In the interviews, participants believe that kindergartens should provide their students with abundant picture books to read and these picture books should have high linguistic values. “Each year, tens of thousands of picture books are published. We have to decide which picture books should be purchased. Linguistic value is one of the most important criteria,” Mary said.

Red Kindergarten and Pink Kindergarten have their own libraries with collections of more than 4,000 picture books, and nearly half of them are English picture books, according to their kindergarten introduction booklets. Mary and Cindy told me the number of their kindergarten’s collection of picture books respectively, and these numbers were also mentioned in their kindergarten introduction booklets that I reviewed. Teachers have the right to borrow these picture books and put them into the reading corners of their own classrooms. Students can borrow the picture books from their reading corner and bring them home to read with their parents, as written in the class syllabus. Cindy said, “Though it’s impossible for us to read all of these picture books together with our students, we still need this large amount collection of high-quality picture books, because we want our students to keep on reading outside our classrooms.”

To guarantee the language quality of the selected picture books, private kindergartens invited both Chinese early childhood education experts and English native speakers in the field of early childhood education to choose the picture books together. Mary stated,

Each year, we spend lots of money and energy on purchasing picture books. Our experienced teachers and English native teachers together make the decision on selecting the right picture books for our children. We hope we can provide our children with the best reading materials. We hope they can learn authentic English from reading these picture books.

English training institutions such as Green School and White School also have their own collections of picture books. When they select picture books, they usually consult the

experts in this field or refer to the online comments on newly published picture books.

Elizabeth told me that as public kindergartens set English class as their extracurricular activities, they don't have their own English picture books. Elizabeth had to bring English picture books from White School, which has an abundance of such books. Emma explained the reason why language training institutions spend efforts on selecting picture books with high quality in language.

We need to compete with other English training schools... So we need to buy those well-known picture books to attract parents and students. Today, in Shanghai, many parents can speak English ...and some of them are very good at speaking English. If we don't have high quality picture books, high language quality, the parents will not trust us and go to find other training schools.

Once kindergartens purchased the picture books and put them into the school library, it is the teachers' responsibility to choose the right picture books for their classes.

Participants again emphasized that the linguistic values are their first consideration. "All in all, I'm teaching English class. Children's language development should be put on the top of priority list," Cindy remarked. Teachers would choose the picture books with the language suitable for their students to read and learn. Elizabeth stated, "My students are at beginner's level. So, I have to choose those picture books with simple words and short and repeated sentences." Mary has her own secret weapon of choosing the picture books for her mixed-group students,

My secret of attracting children at different ages is that you show them a picture book with beautiful pictures and beautiful language, language with rhythm. Even the little ones will be attracted by the colorful pictures and you have to believe that they can appreciate the beautiful rhythm and are willing to read after you. Some picture books even have songs with them. This makes me much easier to attract them, from age 3 to 6, they all like singing and dancing, and they can remember the words and sentences quicker than you think.

Participants also mentioned that they paid attention to the consistency and coherence of language in picture books. They prefer to deliver series of picture books to the reading corners in their classrooms. They think series of picture books have the same topic and the

same pattern of language. This enables children to review what they have learned when they are learning the new language points. Elizabeth mentioned, “Picture books of the same series have a careful design and they are likely to use the words and grammar in consistence. When I use picture books from the same series, children realize they are progressing.” Cindy stated, “I usually deliver the picture books of same series together into my classroom’s reading corner. After class, children like to go to the reading corner to find and read the next picture book of the same series. I think they are happy to see they can read more.”

To sum up, participants believe linguistic values are crucial for choosing English picture books. When purchasing new English picture books, kindergartens regard the linguistic values of picture books as the most important criterion. Linguistic values are also the first consideration for teachers to borrow picture books from kindergarten libraries and deliver them into the reading corners in their classrooms.

**Picture books cultivate children’s habits of thinking in English.** When talking about the benefits of using picture books to teach children English, one of the most frequently mentioned words by participants is “thinking in English”. In participants’ syllabi, “thinking in English” is also one of the most frequently mentioned teaching objectives of an English picture books reading class. “Thinking in English” was also written into the school admissions brochures of Red Kindergarten and Pink Kindergarten as one of their kindergartens’ features.

Decades ago, the prevailing teaching method of English classes in China was still translation-centered. As a result, in the input exercises such as listening and reading, students got used to translating every word into Chinese in their minds in order to understand the information. And in the output exercises such as writing and speaking, students automatically organized their thoughts in Chinese and then translated every sentence from

Chinese into English to express themselves. Emma recalled her experience of learning English,

The same as other people in my generation, the first time I had English class was in my primary school... not in kindergarten. I still remember, my teacher read every word in the textbook and translate the word one by one. We didn't have any colorful picture in the textbook. The only way to understand the text was listening to teacher's translation. Till now, I can hardly get rid of this bad habit. In most time, I think in Chinese and translate my idea into English and then speak out.

Emma also shared with me her understanding of the benefits picture books provided for her students,

I don't want my students to have this bad habit. And, they are lucky. They have picture books. They can observe the pictures and guess the meaning. They have the chance of getting rid of translation, and they can easily match the English words with the picture elements, and think in English.

The other three participants also indicated that picture books help their students form a habit of thinking in English and directly use English to express themselves. In their views, the pictures in picture books already convey the meaning of the stories. Children can guess the meaning from observing the pictures. When teachers read the picture books with body language or other assistant teaching materials, children can easily associate the target English word or sentence directly with the elements in picture books, without translating them into Chinese.

Taking Elizabeth's class I observed for example, the picture book she used was "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?". When she read the picture book, she didn't say any Chinese word. To help her students understand the sentence, she put a brown bear toy on a desk, and pointed at the toy and said "brown bear". She asked children to read after her and kept on pointing at the toy and repeated the word. Several times later, all the students understood the meaning of "brown bear". Then she used her hands to cover the eyes of the toy and suddenly released her hands while saying "What do you see?" The whole class was

so excited as if the teacher was playing hide-and-seek with them. Children began to imitate Elizabeth's movement to cover their own eyes and read after her "What do you see?"

This process enables children to skip the English-to-Chinese translation phase and directly connect English expressions with the objects the language described. Cindy told me a story,

Once I read a picture book about polar bear with my students. One month later, a parent came to me and told me that they went to an aquarium at the weekend, and in there they saw a polar bear. It was the first time they saw a real polar bear. When she was about to tell her son the name of the polar bear in Chinese, her son shouted out in English: "polar bear!" She was surprised because her son even didn't know the Chinese name for polar bear! It's amazing, isn't it? The little boy can associate what he learned in picture books with the real animal and he remembered the English word!

In this case, the little boy got rid of the phase of translating Chinese to English, and directly thought and spoke in English. This was not the only story I heard from my participants.

They have lots of stories about their students' excellent performance in directly using English to express themselves.

Picture books help teachers create a safe immersive environment for children to learn English. In this environment, children don't need to rely on Chinese instruction and translation is no longer a necessary process because the vivid pictures give students clues to understand the story and stimulate their imaginations.

### **Picture books helps develop children's phonics and phonemic awareness.**

Participants also highly praised the value of picture books in developing children's English phonics and phonemic awareness. According to the participants, in recent years the concepts of phonics and phonemic awareness have been very popular in Shanghai's kindergarten EFL classes, and phonics and phonemic awareness were given a new name, "Natural Spelling". When teachers mentioned phonics and phonemic awareness, they usually talked about them together by using the term "Natural Spelling". Almost every EFL class has phonics and phonemic awareness in their curriculum. All of the four kindergartens and schools set

“Natural Spelling” as one of their teaching objectives, according to their syllabi. In Green School’s advertisement and introduction booklets, “Natural Spelling” is highlighted to attract more students.

Teachers believed that phonics and phonemic awareness are essential for kindergarten students to learn English. The first reason is that learning phonemic awareness helps children build up correct English pronunciation. Mary stated,

Our kindergarten enjoys the fame of teaching students standard English pronunciation, American accent or British accent. Kindergarten period is the best time to correct children’s English pronunciation. Kindergarten children can easily pronounce every phoneme you teach them. As they grow older, they will be highly influenced by our own language. At that time, you can hardly correct their pronunciation because they can’t pronounce certain phonemes which they have never encountered before. That’s why we spend so much efforts on teaching children phonemic awareness.

Secondly, teachers believe that by learning phonics and phonemic awareness, children are able to match the sound with the spelling, and thus they can accumulate vocabulary quickly. As a teacher in a language training institution, Emma highly evaluated the value of learning phonics and phonemic awareness,

Parents spend money to send their children to our school. They want to see their children’s progress... Children’s vocabulary size is always parents’ first concern. Most parents evaluate their children’s learning outcomes by testing their vocabulary size... To gain parents’ trust and attract more students, our institution set Natural Spelling classes as our core course... This really accelerates children’s speed of learning new words... They know the rules and they can read out the new word, and they can spell a word according to its pronunciation.

English phonics and phonemic awareness systems are completely different from those of Chinese. “Without picture books, children easily lose patience of learning and practicing English sounds and spellings,” as Cindy stated. There are many elaborate picture books which concentrate on teaching children phonics and phonemic awareness. For example, alphabet picture books focus on teaching children phonics rather than telling a story, while those picture books concentrating on phonemic awareness provide children with practice on identifying phonemes, segmenting onsets and rhymes, and manipulating phonemes. With the



help of these picture books, teachers become more confident in having their students sitting on stools and focusing on their lessons. Cindy described her experience of using picture books to teach children phonics,

I think the most important thing of teaching Natural Spelling is to help children understand the relationship between sounds and letters. I use alphabet picture books to teach children the sound that is attached most frequently to each letter. The well-designed picture books have already prepared everything for me, the target letter, abundant examples, corresponding pictures, and even audio materials. It saves my time on preparing the lesson. Children love reading the alphabet picture books. With the picture books, the learning process becomes interesting, like playing games.

Picture books also play a very important role in teaching children phonemic awareness. There are picture books that are specially designed for children to learn phonemic awareness. These picture books use words beginning or ending with same phonemes to make up each sentence, in order to help children manipulate the target phonemes, including identifying phonemes, blending phonemes to form words, segmenting words into phonemes, and adding, deleting, and substituting phonemes to make new words.

In the teachers' views, picture books also tell them when a child is ready to learn phonics and phonemic awareness. My observation of Mary's class supported the participants' words on this point. In Mary's English Circle Time, she saw a 3-year-old girl reading a picture book named *Big Pig on a Dig*, which is an ideal picture book to teach children phonemic awareness. Mary felt it is the time to teach the girl phonemic awareness. She sat down and joined the girl and intentionally read aloud the title. The girl showed interest in listening to the rhythm. Later on, the girl imitated Mary by reading the title sentence aloud for fun. Mary asked if she liked this sentence. The girl laughed and said this sentence is funny because there are many "ig's in it. Mary took the chance and began to teach her the phonemes. By reading and playing games, the girl gradually realized that words are made up of sounds.

**Picture books helps develop children's vocabulary and grammar.** When asking about the focuses of linguistic domains by using picture books to teach kindergarten children English, a frequently mentioned phrase by the participants was “vocabulary and grammar”. “Vocabulary and grammar” or “Vocabulary and sentence patterns” was written in all of the participants' syllabi as one of their teaching objectives. In participants' syllabi, they clearly described their students' current English vocabulary and grammar level and designed their classes based on it.

Participants believe that picture books have three advantages in teaching children vocabulary and grammar. Firstly, high-quality picture books are designed and written by language experts in the field of early childhood education. Language in these picture books are concise, rhythmical, and easy for children to read and remember. Mary said,

A good picture book can easily attract children, not only the pictures, but also the language. Sometimes, when I read a picture book aloud, my children would sit there and listen to me, and imitated and read after me, even they didn't have the picture books in their hands. Children like the beautiful sounds and rhythms. If the language in a picture book is on rhythm and easy for children to remember, they will quickly learn the new words and remember the sentence patterns.

Secondly, participants believed that pictures facilitate students memorizing the new words and strengthens their memories. Learning a new language and remembering the new words and sentence patterns are never easy tasks, especially for little children who are easily distracted by other things. Children have little interest in memorizing words but they have strong interests in looking at colorful pictures. As experienced teachers, all of the four participants realized children's nature and found picture books as their best helpers to teach children words and sentence patterns. Elizabeth said,

You know, they don't like remembering new words or sentences. But they like playing games and reading pictures. When I required them to remember the new words, they were not happy and, in most cases, couldn't finish the task. But when I changed the task a little bit, like, told them we would read the picture books for ten times or twenty times... they were happy and eager to read the picture books. It's tricky, because, you know, after so many times' readings, they've already remembered the words and sentences. Picture books really helps.

Also, pictures stimulate students' schemata of learned words. In the class I observed, Emma helped children recall the vocabulary they had learned in the last class by showing them the corresponding pictures. In her teaching plan, she highlighted the importance of using picture books to reinforce children's vocabulary input. Emma talked about her experience, "When I asked my students a particular word, they always said they didn't know or they couldn't recall. But when I showed them the corresponding picture, they remembered everything."

Thirdly, as a reading material especially designed for children, picture books commonly use repeated words and sentence patterns to tell stories. Repetition is necessary for children to learn a new language. Through repeated reading, children automatically get familiar with the target new words and sentence patterns. Repetition reinforces children's memory of the language points they have learned. Mary indicated,

I think one of the most important features of picture books is that they use lots of repeated words and sentences...Adults don't like repetition but children like...Yes, I think this makes picture books great children reading materials...because when children continue reading the story, they meet the new words again and again. It strengthens children's memory of the new words and they can easily remember the new words without much effort.

In Elizabeth's class, she chose the picture book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See* to teach her students the sentence "What do you see?". In her syllabus, she set this sentence pattern and several new words as one of her teaching objectives. To achieve this aim, she designed various class activities to help children repeatedly read this sentence, such as reading aloud games and singing and dancing. As I observed, when Elizabeth led children to repeatedly read aloud the sentence with hand gestures, children were enthusiastic in the repeated exercises.

To sum up, based on participants' perspectives, picture books have great linguistic values. Picture books are regarded as children's best English primer because they successfully raise children's interest in reading and learning English. When teachers choose

picture books for their students, linguistic values play the most important role in their criteria. Teachers believe that a good picture book must have accurate and up-to-date English language, good and catchy rhythm, vivid expressions and children-friendly writing style. Talking about the linguistic values, all participants gave very high praise on picture books. They believe that picture books cultivate kindergarten children's habits of thinking in English, help students acquire phonics and phonemic awareness, and facilitate their acquisition of vocabulary and grammar.

### **Cognitive Values of Picture Books**

Using picture books to cultivate children's cognition was written in all of the four participants' syllabi. When I asked the participants the question "What else do you teach by using picture books in your EFL class?", all participants emphasized the cognitive values of picture books. Their responses can be categorized into five themes: (a) picture books open a window for children to know the world, (b) knowledge transfer occurs in reading picture books, (c) picture books cultivate children's reading, creativity and behavioral habits, (d) picture books develop children's cognition about science and the art, and (e) picture books facilitate children's cognition about interpersonal relationships.

**Picture books open a window for children to know the world.** "Every child is curious about this world. Picture books open a window for them to know the world." Mary's statement well represents all of the four participants' views on this point.

Today, tens of thousands of picture books can be found in the market and each kindergarten seriously selected high-quality picture books for their students. These picture books have a wide range of topics, from a simple story to complicated science issues. "Through reading different kinds of picture books, my students gradually understand this world and begin to form their own interpretations to everything," Cindy stated. Elizabeth gives a more specific explanation on this point,

Well, sometimes I envy my students. You know, when I was a child, I didn't have the chance to read so many kinds of picture books. Literature, health, biology, science, music, art, math... all kinds of picture books for children to read. By reading picture books, children can learn lots of things. Sometimes even I can learn something I didn't know from the picture books.

Elizabeth's opinion represents all of the four participants. One thing they emphasized about the cognitive value of picture books is that, as teachers, they also learn from the picture books. Mary said,

Many experts in different fields are involved in the writing of picture books. This makes picture books never a simple story book, but, I'd rather say, an encyclopedia. By reading picture books, children know why they should brush their teeth, why our world have four seasons, what a caterpillar will become, how to behave in public places, how to love people... When I read these picture books with them, I learn together with them.

Picture books turn the complicated world into thousands of interesting stories for children. When children are attracted by the beautiful pictures and catchy language, they automatically absorb the knowledge conveyed by each picture book. Due to experts' hard work, picture books open a window for children and enable them to safely explore this world. Picture books help teachers to pass on knowledge in an easy and attractive way to students.

**Knowledge transfer occurs in reading picture books.** Another interesting finding from interviewing the participants is that children spontaneously generalize information from the picture books to the real world. If children find something in real life that resembles what they have read in a picture book, they will be excited and naturally transfer the knowledge.

Mary shared a typical example,

One afternoon, we had to change our outdoor English time into indoor activities, because it was raining. Three-year-old little Tom came to me and asked if he could have a pair of "boots". He asked me in Chinese, but used the word "boots" in English. I was curious about his question and asked him what his "boots" means in Chinese. He said he didn't know Chinese word for "boots", and then seriously described in Chinese "yellow, on foot, stepping on water", and secretly told me that I could also find a pair of "boots" and then we could go outside to play with the "puddles" in the rain! I felt puzzled for a while. Then I suddenly realized... Last week I read with him the picture book *I Am Water*, and in that book, a picture showed a boy wearing yellow boots stepping on puddles, and the sentence on that page was "I am puddles for boots"! The "puddles" outside our classroom must

remind Tom that picture and the word “boots” and “puddles”, and he wanted to go outside to play in the rain!

Teachers notice this phenomenon and utilize it to teach children new things and shape their behaviors. With picture books, children are more likely to accept what teachers tell them, perhaps because children treat characters in picture books as real-life people and take them as models, or perhaps they find empathy in the characters. Cindy told me that one of her secrets to maintain the discipline of the class was to mention the relevant characters or stories in children’s favorite picture books. She said,

For example, if my students were too excited and shouted aloud, I would say, “If Peppa Pig (one of children’s favorite cartoon figures) sit in our classroom, she would sit there quietly and listen to teacher’s words.” In most cases, I would use the characters in our newly read picture books as their models, and it worked.

Children do not only transfer knowledge from picture books to the real world but also use their own knowledge to interpret what happened in the picture books. The most typical example is that children can easily recognize the items painted in pictures, even faster than teachers. Emma said,

As adults, we paid too much attention on the written words. Children are different. They read pictures first, and they read pictures very seriously. So I always gave them enough time to read the pictures, and always asked them to tell me what they could find in the pictures. To my surprise, every time, they found more things than me. Sometimes, they can even recognize those very abstract paintings.

According to participants’ findings, children can transfer the knowledge they’ve read in picture books into real life, and, in turn, they can also transfer the knowledge they’ve learned in real life into interpreting pictures. The experienced teachers in this study noticed this phenomenon and utilize it to teach children new knowledge and correct their behaviors.

**Picture books cultivate children’s habits.** Participants highly praised picture books for cultivating children’s habits. They mentioned three kinds of habits: reading habits, creativity habits, and habits of good behaviors.

According to participants' opinions regarding reading habits, picture books employ both written texts and pictures to present stories and knowledge. When children read picture books, they are in a process of decoding the pictures and texts. This process enables children to train their ability to absorb information from reading, and the successful decoding encourages children to explore more. Cindy stated,

I found a very interesting thing. At first, it is the colorful pictures and my story telling raised children's interests to read a picture book. Gradually, when they find they can tell the story by investigating the pictures, they are encouraged and they spontaneously pick up a picture book and are eager to tell me the story. Later on, as they can recognize some words in the texts, they become more enthusiastic in reading. They are tasting a feeling of success. I don't think I did anything in this process... It naturally happened... May be this is the charm of picture books... They can attract even the naughty children to read.

Apart from helping children form a habit of reading, picture books also encourage children to develop their creative ability. "Creativity is a habit. You need to encourage children's creativity when they are young. Otherwise, their creativity will fade," Emma stated. By reading picture books, children are not restricted by the written texts, instead, they read from the pictures. Decoding pictures is much more complicated than decoding written texts, according to Cindy, "because there is no fixed answer when children try to tell a story from investigating pictures." In the process of decoding pictures, children use their imagination and create their own stories. Mary said,

As the saying goes, "There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes." I would say, "There are a thousand stories in a thousand children's eyes" when they are reading the pictures in a picture book. When children observe the pictures, they use their own knowledge to interpret the content. Some children focus on the characters. Some children focus on the color of the page. Some children focus on the order of the pictures. Some children even focus on the tiny ornaments and always want to find something new. Finally, they get different stories from the same picture book.

All of the participants indicated that when their students want to tell a story about a picture book, they are often patient and encourage them to say more. They believe that

children are developing their creative ability in this process and their attempts need to be protected and encouraged.

In the participants' views, picture books also cultivate children's habits of good behaviors. Experienced teachers know the secret of successfully correcting children's misbehaviors. Mary's statements well represent this point:

Children like imitating the characters they like. And, believe or not, most children have a natural sense of self-examination. Every child wants to be a good child. Understanding children's nature, it is easy to use picture books to shape their behaviors. Yes, picture books cultivate their good habits.

Participants shared with me their experiences of using picture books to shape children's behaviors, including having good eating habits, paying attention to hygiene, being polite, having good habits in learning, being an upright person, and so on. Cindy emphasized,

Helping children forming good habits is one of the most important things we teachers must do. And we can teach them many things by reading picture books together with them. The characters and stories in picture books set good models for children. We just need to find out the right books for them to read.

Above all, according to the participants, picture books promote the cognitive values of cultivating children's reading habits, creativity, and habits of good behaviors.

**Picture books develop children's cognition on science and art.** All of the participants believe that learning English should not be the only aim of reading picture books. In their opinion, English is a tool which carries information, and children need to know how to use the language they have learned to get more information from the reading materials. As a result, kindergarten EFL classes have many different themes, such as EFL classes on mathematics, EFL classes on drama, etc. The most popular types of EFL classes are science and art, based on the four participants' statements. Mary introduced current English lessons in Shanghai kindergartens.

Most private kindergartens in Shanghai subdivide English classes into specific sessions with different themes; for example, in my kindergarten, we have English



Class for Science and English Class for Art every week. In these classes, we select picture books which introduce science or present art for children. We hope by reading these picture books, children can learn something more than English.

Elizabeth's statements coincided with Mary's words, "In White School, we have a series of Theme English classes, including Science Time and Art Time. And I bring this culture to [Orange Kindergarten]."

To better understand the cognitive value picture books can place on science, I observed Cindy's EFL Science Class. In her class, Cindy chose the picture book *The Solar System*. This picture book is from a series which also contains five other picture books, including *Earth*, *The Sun*, *The Moon*, *Comets*, and *Shooting Stars*. By reading this series of picture books, children can have a basic understanding of the solar system and outer space. The painting style of this series of picture books is different from that of common picture books. These picture books employ colorful realistic pictures which look very similar to the real planets. Under each page, a simple sentence is printed to introduce the scientific facts. There are audio materials of songs and playing cards attached to the picture books, which help attract children's attention. After reading *The Solar System* under the direction of Cindy, children began to have interest in understanding Earth and other planets in the solar system, and some of them automatically went to the reading corner to continue their reading of the other picture books in this series.

Participants also highly praised the value of picture books in facilitating children's art appreciation development. Mary said, "Every child is a genius in appreciating art. The pictures in picture books are wonderful enlightening materials. Different picture books have different painting styles so that children can 'taste different flavors' in art." In EFL art classes, teachers can provide children with a variety of activities that originate from reading the picture books. Emma explained her EFL art class activities,

It depends on the teaching objectives. Sometimes, I simply let children pick out their favorite pictures in a picture book, and ask them to tell me the reasons.

Sometimes, I prepared colorful pens and papers for them, and they could draw anything they wanted to. Sometimes, I taught them to observe an item in the picture book and draw on the paper. You see, with picture books, we can have many art activities.

According to all of the four participants' descriptions, children love colorful pictures, and as they observe the pictures, spontaneous drawing behaviors often occur. To encourage their imagination and creativity, teachers seldom interfere with their drawing behaviors. "At this time, picture books are the teachers," as Mary stated, "Our roles are facilitators when children have problems in appreciation or drawing, and, when they show us their masterpieces, we just need to be their loyal audiences."

### **Picture books facilitate children's cognition about interpersonal relationships.**

Participants also mentioned that picture books help children build up good relationships with others. According to their description, due to the one-child policy in the past decades, most families in Shanghai are composed of one or two children, two parents, and four grandparents. As a result, children enjoy the attention and love of all the six adults in their families. They are used to being taken care of by others and barely know the relationship between taking and giving. Under this circumstance, most children in Shanghai do not know how to maintain good relationships with others, such as their classmates, their teachers, and even their dearest family members. Therefore, how to help children understanding gratitude, sympathy, and love, and eventually build up good interpersonal relationships with others should be taken into consideration.

On this point, participants shared their experience of successfully using picture books to teach children gratitude, sympathy, and love. They believed that the stories in picture books are good materials to set examples for children to imitate. Mary said, "Every child is an angel. They just need you to show them the right direction."

When I observed Mary's class, she was reading the picture book *PaPa, Please Get the Moon for Me* together with the whole class. After the circle time, children were dismissed

and a boy went to the reading corner and continued reading this picture book. As Mary passed by, the boy said, “My papa is like Monica’s papa. My papa also brings the moon to me!”. Mary pretended to be surprised, “Really?! Tell me more about your papa! He must be almighty and he loves you very much!” The boy agreed, “Yes, he loves me very much.” Mary encouraged the boy to talk more about his father’s love. The boy tried his best to use English to have the conversation with Mary. After the short conversation about his father’s love, Mary asked the boy, “You have a great papa! Do you love him?” The boy said “Yes! Of course!” Mary said, “You see, Monica’s papa loves Monica. He did something for Monica and let Monica feel his love.” The boy said, “I want my papa feel my love.” Mary encouraged him, “Yes, you can say ‘I love you’ to your papa. And you can do something for your papa.” Then, they had a discussion on how to let his father feel his son’s love.

When I gave Mary the second interview, Mary told me that her teaching objectives are very inclusive,

You can’t expect children’s reaction to a picture book. Every child is different. So, you need to prepare as much as you can, and, when it is the time, seek the chance to tell them what they should or should not do... I always believe that interpersonal relationship is very important for children to learn. I mean, children need to know how to love the others and express their love. Today, I found a good chance. It was not on my today’s teaching plan, but it is always on my teaching plan.

To sum up, all the participants agreed that picture books have cognitive values. First, they believe that picture books open a window for children to know the world. By reading picture books, children begin to understand this world. Second, children are able to transfer the knowledge in picture books to that in the real world, and they are also capable of using their learned knowledge to interpret the concepts in picture books. Third, picture books cultivate children’s habits, such as reading habits, creativity, and good behavior. Fourth, picture books develop children’s cognition about science and art. And last, picture books facilitate children’s cognition about interpersonal relationships.

## Picture Books and Cultural Awareness

Besides mentioning linguistic and cognitive values, participants also shared their understanding of the value of picture books in promoting cultural awareness. On this point, two themes emerged from the data collected through interviews. First, participants praised the value of picture books on helping children understand cultural diversity. Second, participants recognized the value of picture books on helping children respect cultural diversity.

**Picture books help children understand cultural diversity.** One of the most frequently mentioned words in participants' responses is "being aware of cultural diversity". All participants emphasized the importance of letting children understand cultural diversity. As Mary stated,

I've been frequently asked a question by parents, or, I'd rather say, the complaints from the parents. They asked me why little children should learn English when they can't even speak their mother tongue well. Every time, I gave them the same answer. Globalization makes the world a united village. Chinese people believe people should live in harmony and we have to pass this virtue to our next generation. The peace of the world is based on understanding each other. How can you let children understand others' cultures without showing them? By learning foreign language, they are offered a chance to be aware of the diversity of this world. And, kindergarten children are at an age of no bias, no stereotypes. We have to teach them to understand and respect culture diversity at this age, like planting a seed of peace and love in their hearts, and wait for them to grow up and change this world a better place.

Mary's opinion well represents those of the other participants. They all emphasized that learning language is only a part of their teaching objectives and that kindergarten EFL classes should focus on cultivating children to be better global citizens. When they talked about using picture books to help children be aware of cultural diversity, they shared their experiences in detail, such as letting children know there are different races and ethnicities in this world, showing them the differences between Chinese culture and other cultures, discussing with them the different etiquettes in different cultures, and celebrating different

festivals in different cultures. Elizabeth showed her experience of using picture books to teach children to be aware of cultural difference.

...for example, once I read the picture book *If You Take a Mouse to School* with my children, at first, they were attracted by the story. You know, children are always eager to know what happened next. After telling the story, I gave them free reading time. As they were looking at the pictures and digging more of the little mouse's story, I asked them to find out something similar to their real lives and something different from their real lives. In this activity, they had a brief idea about the similarities and differences between Chinese school life and American school life. We always paid attention not to let children compare which culture is good or better. Instead, we lead them to explore the differences and understand, and accept the differences.

All participants emphasized the importance of giving children right instruction. They all mentioned that picture books present children with a colorful world, but how to interpret the information conveyed in the picture books depends on teachers' instruction. They believe that teachers have the responsibility to let children understand there is no better or worse culture; they are just different. Cindy said,

I can't find any teaching materials better than picture books to let children be aware of the cultural diversity. Picture books use simple language and direct visual presentation to show children different cultures. Children love reading picture books, and kindergarten children are at the period of absorbing everything you give to them. They can easily understand there are different cultures in the world. I think this makes sense, because when they grow up, they will not have bias towards other people who are different from themselves. They will feel no people, no culture is superior or inferior than the others. They are just different.

**Picture books help children respect cultural diversity.** Participants mentioned that picture books are also good teaching materials to let children appreciate the other cultures and respect cultural diversity. They believed that the stories in picture books have great value in teaching children the way to love others and to respect others' cultures. Participants mentioned that understanding cultural diversity is the first step of letting children become global citizen. The second step is to teach them to respect the other cultures and love this world. Cindy stated,

Picture books create a beautiful world for children. In this world, people of different backgrounds live in harmony and love each other. Children like reading these

stories. At the same time, they are learning to respect the others and the way to love and to get along with different people.

In EFL classes, teachers use English picture books written by writers from different countries. These books convey the messages sent by writers and represent different cultures. Kindergarten educators carefully select picture books which deliver positive messages about cultural diversity and hope children can learn from these stories and become people full of love. Emma's words well represent the other participants' views on this point.

In our institution, every picture book is carefully selected. The stories in picture books directly influence children's values. So, it is our responsibility to be good gatekeepers, to make sure the picture books give children positive influence on viewing the world and different cultures. We want our children to be able to respect the other's culture... to have a warm heart.

Good picture books help children build up positive cultural awareness. There is a great number of picture books focusing on delivering a message of respecting different cultures. Elizabeth said, "Some authors intentionally involve the topic of respecting other cultures in their stories. Some authors simply tell stories about their own cultures and this also give children a chance to understand and respect other cultures." By reading these picture books with children, teachers deliberately lead children to understand and respect different cultures.

In conclusion, to answer the first sub-research question "What do Shanghai kindergarten teachers think about the linguistic, cognitive development, and cultural awareness values of picture books in EFL classrooms?", this study analyzed data collected through interviews and classroom observations, and categorized the data into three categories: linguistic values, cognitive values, and cultural awareness. On participants' perspectives on linguistic values of picture books, five themes emerged, (a) picture books are children's best English primer, (b) linguistic value is crucial for choosing picture books, (c) picture books cultivate children's English thinking pattern, (d) picture books helps develop children's phonics and phonemic awareness, and (e) picture books helps develop children's

vocabulary and grammar. On picture books' cognitive values, there are also five themes that emerged, including (a) picture books open a window for children to know the world, (b) knowledge transfer occurs in reading picture books, (c) picture books cultivate children's reading, creativity, and behavioral habits, (d) picture books develop children's cognition on science and art, and (e) Picture books facilitate children's cognition on interpersonal relationships. And two themes emerged under the cultural awareness value of picture books, including (a) picture books help children understand cultural diversity, and (b) picture books help children respect cultural diversity.

### **Kindergarten EFL Teacher's Usage of Picture Books**

The second sub-research question of this study is "How do the teachers use picture books in their classrooms?". To answer this question, data collected from interviews and classroom observations was analyzed and five themes emerged. They are (a) utilizing picture books to create a positive learning environment, (b) accomplishing teaching objectives and dealing with unexpected events during the reading of picture books, (c) designing various activities to facilitate reading picture books, (d) laying emphasis on repetition, (e) respecting children and encouraging children to explore more about picture books.

#### **Utilizing Picture Books to Create a Positive Learning Environment**

In the interviews, participants all emphasized the importance of creating a good learning environment for children, and they indicated that this is a part of the trainings they had been given by their kindergartens or institutions. In their views, creating a good environment means giving children a safe and comfortable environment in which to learn, and in this environment, children have high learning motivation, high confidence and low anxiety. As Elizabeth stated,

Creating a good environment is more important than anything else... You can't expect children to learn anything if they have no interest in it... And, we have to encourage them to learn, to convince them that they can learn very well... Don't push

them, don't make them feel nervous. Giving them a comfortable learning environment.

Experienced teachers are experts in using picture books to create a good learning environment for children. They know how to use picture books to raise children's learning interests, build up their learning confidence, and prevent them from being anxious. Knowing that children love listening to stories and love looking at colorful pictures, teachers commonly use sentences such as "Let's listen to a story" and "Look at this picture" instead of "Let's begin our class" to attract children's attention.

According to participants, picture books are good materials to create a good learning environment because they have colorful pictures and attractive stories. One of the most widely used ways to use the pictures to create a positive learning environment is to show children the cover of the picture book. Instead of directly reading a picture book, teachers spend time on asking children to explore the cover picture of the book. Mary explained, "Leading children to investigate the cover of the picture book works well to stimulating their learning motivation." Teachers designed various lead-in activities for children to investigate the covers. Elizabeth shared her experience of utilizing the cover of picture books.

It depends on my teaching objectives and...the characteristics of the cover. If my aim is to teach children new words, I ask children to look at the cover picture and find and tell me everything they know in the picture. In this way, they can review the words they've already learned and are prepared to learn new words. I encourage them to speak in English, but also allow them to speak Chinese. In this way, children feel like they are playing games and they feel relaxed. If my aim is to develop their reading ability, I ask them to guess the content of the picture book by looking at the cover picture. You know, no matter what task I give to them, I need to let them feel like playing a game.

The picture on the cover usually contains key elements of the picture book. When children investigate the cover, they are in fact predicting the content of this picture book. This process stimulates children's motivation of reading the picture book and as they have already explored the cover, they are well prepared and have confidence for the coming reading exercise.



Exploring the picture on the cover has an obvious advantage in creating a good environment for children to read scientific picture books. Cindy's EFL science class for senior students provided a good example on this point. In the class, Cindy firstly showed children the cover page of the picture book *The Solar System* and told them this picture book would lead them to explore outer space. In the cover picture, outer space and the planets in the solar system are painted in a realistic style, looking like a real picture taken by a camera. This was the first time these children read a picture book painted in this style. Some of the students were excited. But other students seemed not interested in this picture. Cindy noticed children's reactions and asked the most excited student to share with the class why he liked this picture. The boy said, "Because it is real! I'm a big child. This book is for big child to read!". His pride was contagious. Some children followed him and shouted they were also big children and they wanted to read the picture book. Cindy took the chance and encouraged children to talk about what they found in this picture, "Yes, you are big kids now. I believe that all of you will find this picture book is interesting and easy to read! Now, anyone can tell me what you can see in this picture?" The children's confidence grew and they were eager to share their findings.

In this process, Cindy used English to communicate with the children and most of the time, the children used English to express their ideas. When they couldn't find the words and spoke Chinese to express their ideas, Cindy confirmed their findings first and then told them the English expressions. For example, a girl said she saw "clouds" in the picture. Then a boy joined the discussion and said "No, it's not clouds, it's xingyun (nebula in Chinese)." Cindy gave high-fives to both of the children and encouraged the girl by praising her observation and then turned to the boy and confirmed his comments. Cindy said, "Yes, it's xingyun in Chinese. In English, we call it nebula. Everybody, read with me! Nebula! Nebula!..."

In this way, children had a basic idea about the names of the planets and objects in the solar system. Influenced by the positive atmosphere, even the quietest child participated in the discussion. When Cindy noticed that every child was involved in the discussion and eager to know more about the next page, she thought it was time to teach children the content of this picture book.

In the second interview, Cindy explained her use of the cover to create a positive learning environment for the children in her class.

Not every child has interest in learning science. When I showed them the cover page, in fact, I was observing their reactions. If they all had high motivation in reading it, I would tell them that I trust them and encourage them to explore the pictures in the next pages. They are senior students and they had certain vocabulary size. They understand most words in this picture book. Yes, this is the reason why I chose this book for them. If I gave them a picture book with too many new words, to teach science, they would definitely lose interests and confidence in learning... Today, some children showed no interest when I showed them the cover page. Then I knew I need to spend some time on raising their interests... It's important to give them some time to warm up. Otherwise, without good learning atmosphere, children can hardly learn.

Apart from showing children the cover page of a picture book, teachers have many other ways to use picture books to create a good learning environment. Another commonly adopted way is to tell the beginning of the story in a picture book and leave the rest for children to explore. This method uses children's curiosity and stimulates their motivation to learn. Some teachers use a special way to create the learning environment. They ask children to pass the picture book around the class and let every child touch it as if they are making friends with this picture book. Mary used this activity in the class I observed. This activity makes children relaxed and at the same time gives them some time to calm down and be prepared for the next reading. Sometimes, teachers sing the song of a picture book or read the sentences in the picture book with an attractive rhythm. In Elizabeth's class, she firstly sang the song to get her students' attention and then began her class. All of these activities attract children and create a good environment for them to read.

## **Accomplishing Teaching Objectives and Dealing with Unexpected Events**

When kindergarten EFL teachers design an English class, they firstly set clear but flexible teaching objectives. In general, these teaching objectives include English learning, emergent literacy, habits cultivation, emotion education, and development in specific subjects, such as science, art, mathematics, etc. Before each class, teachers set up their specific teaching objectives based on the curricular and children's recent performance. Then they select the picture books which can help them accomplish their specific teaching objectives. However, their teaching objectives are flexible. As Mary said,

We have clear teaching objectives, but not that strictly fixed, because the most important thing is to encourage children to learn. Children have natural curiosity. If they show interests in learning something else in the class, which is also included in our curricular, we usually follow their interest and change the teaching objectives a little bit. For example, if in this class I plan to teach children ten words in a picture book, but may be when we read the picture book, children show great interests in reading the pictures and telling their own invented stories, I would encourage them to go on, and change the teaching objectives from teaching words to develop their emergent literacy. Because reading is also part of our teaching objectives for the entire semester. It's fine to change the teaching objectives within this range. We have to observe our children and provide with them what they really need, and this facilitate their learning.

The other three participants also mentioned their understanding about setting and accomplishing teaching objectives. They all believe that clear teaching objectives are necessary but that teachers should always pay attention to children's responses and adjust their teaching objectives during the class. Emma said,

Our school encourages us to set teaching objectives based on children's real situation. Sometimes I adjust the pace of teaching, sometimes I change the teaching objectives a little bit. I have the right to change teaching objectives based on my children's progress. But in the long run, I should accomplish the teaching objectives for the whole term.

According to the participants, although they are experienced teachers, it still difficult for them to precisely predict their students' responses in reading the selected picture books. "Because every grade is different, every child is different. You can't rely too much on your experience. You need to be adaptable and have quick response. You should not ignore

children's desire in learning, just for accomplishing your teaching objectives," Elizabeth commented.

Participants also emphasized that having flexible teaching objectives doesn't mean giving up teaching children what they need to learn. They believe having and following term-long teaching objectives is necessary. Emma stated, "We are just making the adjustment within a range. We have to guarantee the learning outcomes of children. Otherwise, we will lose customers."

Teachers carefully choose the picture books to teach children what they want children to learn in a class. However, there are always unexpected events happening in class. Besides adjusting the teaching objectives, teachers also need to know how to deal with these unexpected events and help children get back on the track of learning. The most frequently mentioned unexpected events include children's misbehaviors, discipline problems, children losing patience in reading picture books, children's unexpected reactions to the picture books, etc. Experienced teachers have their secrets in dealing with these problems. They know how to cope with children's misbehavior and how to maintain class discipline simply by using the stories and the characters in the picture books as examples to attract children back on track. When children lose patience in reading picture books, their teachers use pre-designed games to motivate them to learn. When children show unexpected reactions to the picture books, for example, some children may show fear when they see certain items in a picture, so experienced teachers make a quick judgement based on their experience to understand children's problems and then spend some time on helping children get rid of the problems.

Taking Cindy's EFL science class as an example, something unexpected happened when she read *The Solar System* with her students. In her teaching objectives, she wanted children to learn the new words and understand scientific facts related to the solar system. To accomplish her teaching objectives, she prepared some activities, including singing,

dancing, and role play for children. This was not the first time she used this picture book to teach children science. But in this class, her teaching plan was interrupted by a curious boy.

On the first page, when Cindy read “Eight planets go around the sun,” the boy asked in English, “Why eight?” Cindy noticed him. But as other students listened carefully to her, Cindy intentionally ignored the boy and led students to review the names of the eight planets they had just learned. But the boy continued, “Why eight? Not seven or nine?” This time, his voice was loud and attracted the whole class’ attention. Cindy answered him,

You asked a great question! In the past, we believed that there are nine planets in the solar system. But now scientists find the ninth planet doesn’t belong to our solar system. Do you want to know the ninth planet’s name? If you can tell me the eight planets’ name, I will tell you the ninth’ name.

The whole class was interested in this ninth planet and they together called out the names of the eight planets one by one loudly. Then Cindy told them the ninth planet’s name was Pluto and continued to explain the characteristics of the eight planets according to her plan.

As she read the rest of the picture book, the curious boy kept on asking questions, including “Why Earth is blue?”, “Why Jupiter is so big?”, “Why moon is not a planet?”, “Why I can’t see asteroids at night?”, “Why comets don’t melt when go around the sun?” Inspired by this boy, the whole class became active and children began to ask their own questions about the pictures and contents in the picture book. Cindy patiently answered their questions with a smile on her face. For the questions whose answers she was not sure of, she answered honestly that she didn’t know and encouraged children to find out more in other picture books and promised them she would search for the answers in relevant books and online after class and tell them the next time. This encouraged the children, and they seemed to be getting more interested in reading the picture book. At last, she didn’t finish reading the picture book, nor did she finish her previous teaching objectives. In the second interview, she laughed, “You see, being a kindergarten teacher, you need to be an encyclopedia!” She continued,

You can never prepare too much for a kindergarten class. You can never predict what questions will come up from children's little brains. In my plan, I prepared to finish reading this picture book in this class and I prepared lots of activities for them. I didn't finish that...and I didn't expect they had so many questions. But I was happy, because they had curiosity in learning the scientific facts and they really learned something from this class.

According to participants' views and practices, they have clear teaching objectives for the entire semester and they select the picture books to help them finish these objectives. But in each specific class, the teaching objectives are flexible and adaptable based on children's performance. Experienced teachers know how to adjust teaching objectives to encourage children to learn and at the same time ensure the learning outcomes of the semester. It is inevitable that unexpected events will happen in kindergarten EFL classes when teachers use picture books. Teachers' quick responses, experience, and love for their students help them successfully deal with these problems.

### **Designing Various Activities to Facilitate Reading Picture Books**

According to the participants, teachers design various activities to facilitate reading picture books. "You can't expect kindergarten children sit there all the time listening to you read a picture book," as Mary stated. Participants believe that activities, such as games, singing and dancing, and role play are necessary to be applied in EFL classes to help children read a picture book.

From the limited observations of these four teachers, it seems that games are the most frequently adopted teaching activities in kindergarten EFL classrooms. Kindergarten EFL teachers understand that children learn from playing games. Therefore, instead of asking children to sit down for the whole class, they prefer to change their class so that children learn through playing. Experienced kindergarten EFL teachers can embed games into different phases of their teaching to facilitate children's learning. As Mary said, "Game is a magic word. Children get excited even when they just hear the word 'game'. So, I always use the sentence 'Let's play a game' in my class." In the pre-reading phase, teachers give

children games to raise their motivation of reading picture books, to stimulate their schemata on background knowledge, and to help them relax and focus on the coming learning. In the while-reading phase, teachers use games to help children understand difficult concepts and to regain children's attention if they feel tired or bored. Games are most-widely used in the after-reading phase as an effective way to reinforce children's learning outcomes related to the picture book. For example, in Emma's second class on reading the picture book *Go Away, Mr. Wolf*, she used a series of games to help children recall what they had learned in the picture book, including game on reviewing vocabulary, games on reviewing sentence patterns, and games on reviewing the story.

Singing and dancing is another frequently used activity in kindergarten EFL classes. Many picture books are attached with songs for children to better remember the story. Teachers well utilize these resources and organize children to sing and dance during or after reading the picture books. In the classes I observed, all of the participants organized children to sing song accompanying the picture books in their classes. In their views, singing and dancing are good facilitators in helping children read a picture book. Elizabeth stated, "Though it spends some time on teaching children sing and dance, singing and dancing are necessary in learning English." Participants indicated three reasons for adopting singing and dancing in their classes. Firstly, singing and dancing raise children's motivation to have the class. Cindy stated, "Some children don't like sitting down to have the class. Some children don't like listening to stories. But almost every child love singing and dancing." Secondly, teachers believe that children can learn a song more quickly than English sentences. Through singing and dancing, the tune and movements help children better remember the vocabulary and sentence patterns in the picture books. Every time they sing and dance, they are reviewing what they have learned in the picture book. The third reason is that children need physical exercise. In an EFL class, children have to sit there for 15 to 30 minutes. This is

quite a long period for children to sit down all the time. Singing and dancing give them a chance to have some physical exercises, and this enables them to keep their attention on the class.

Role play, or drama, is another widely-used teaching activity in kindergarten EFL classes. Children naturally love role play. Picture books provide teachers and children a very good chance to have a role play. Emma commented,

Role play is my favorite teaching activity, and also my students' favorite. To be frank, for me, I don't need to spend much time on designing the activity because I can simply follow the story line of the picture books. For my students, they are practicing what they learned and may have a sense of achievement.

According to all of the participants, in role play, children are not restricted to sitting on their stools. They have a chance to move around and to practice the words and sentence patterns in the picture books. They are also fascinated with imitating the characters in picture books. If children know they will have a role play after reading the picture book, they are very likely to try harder to remember every word and sentence in the picture book.

### **Laying Emphasis on Repetition**

In interviews, repetition is one of the most frequently mentioned words when participants were asked about their practice of using picture books to teach children English. Data collected from classroom observations also showed the significance of repetition in teachers' usage of picture books. Repetition is emphasized in three aspects: teachers' delivering of picture books, reading process, and designing of teaching activities.

Teachers pay attention to repetition when they select and deliver picture books into the reading corners of their classrooms. Participants indicated that the time they spent on each picture book depends on children's needs for repeated reading. They generally finish teaching a picture book within one or two classes. But to reinforce children's learning outcomes and give children enough time to explore the picture books, teachers encourage children to re-read the taught picture book in the reading corner. Therefore, teachers usually



leave the already-read picture books in their reading corners for the whole semester, and they will not replace these picture books until children seldom read them anymore. Cindy shared her finding:

Unlike adults, children are interested in repetition. When I was a new teacher, I didn't notice that. I worried that my students might feel bored if I read the same picture book to them for several times, so I always chose new picture books for my students. But, when I observed them at the reading corner, I found children always picked up the same picture book to read. They can even read a picture book for several months with great interest! From then on, I understood, children love repetition, and they learn through repetition.

Understanding children's learning process, teachers intentionally controlled the time of delivering new picture books to the reading corner. Mary said, "I would leave the most popular picture books in my classroom's reading corner even for the whole year. Children need time to explore in a deeper sense."

In reading a picture book with children, teachers put great emphasis on repetition. One of teachers' typical practices is to ask children to repeatedly read after them the words and sentences in picture books. Teachers believe that by repeated reading, they can set an example for children to pronounce the words, and at the same time, reinforce children's memory of the target words and sentence patterns. All of the participants stated that repeated reading is necessary for children to learn English, and teachers should make sure their students are ready for repeated reading.

In Elizabeth's class, she always noticed her students' responses on repeated reading. When she found her students were attracted by the colorful pictures in the picture book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See*, she felt it was the right time to lead children to read this book. Elizabeth then slowly read the sentence on first page with cadence "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a red bird looking at me." The cadence of her voice raised children's interest and they spontaneously read after her. She intentionally slowed down her reading and broke the sentence into several fragments to enable children to

follow her. Children intently imitated Elizabeth's pronunciation and tune. They repeated the first sentence ten times, but some children already remembered the sentence and began to lose interest. Elizabeth noticed children's reactions and asked them to stand up and added body language into the reading. Children were excited again. They kept on reading the first sentence until Elizabeth was sure that every child was able to remember this sentence pattern. In this process, Elizabeth always kept an eye on every child's performance. She walked around to let every child see her mouth and movements and at the same time observed if children were learning. Sometimes she stopped in front of a child to encourage him/her to read more loudly. Sometimes she stopped to make exaggerated expressions and movements to raise children's interest.

In all of the participants' classes, they spend time on leading children to do the repeated reading activities. Mary explained, "This is the most direct and effective way to teach children a foreign language. Anyway, practice makes perfect."

Apart from repeated reading, the teachers also provide children with more colorful activities focusing on repetition to reinforce their learning. According to participants, when they use picture books to teach children English, they adopt various activities to help children repeatedly practice what they have learned. In Mary's class, when she was teaching children the sentence pattern "I wish I could do something" in the picture book *Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me*, she firstly asked children to read the sentence after her several times. And then she had children sing a song with "I wish I could..." in it. After singing, she distributed to the children a stack of cards with different activities on it and encouraged them to use "I wish I could..." to describe the activities on the cards. In the second interview, Mary explained that every activity was designed to give children repeated exercises on the target sentence pattern. She stated, "Repetition is the key to help children acquire a language. But asking

children simply read after me may cause them feel tired and bored. So, I have to design different teaching activities to achieve the aim of repetition.”

### **Respecting Children and Encouraging Them to Explore More about Picture Books**

In both interviews and classroom observations, participants emphasized the importance of respecting children and addressed the necessity of encouraging children to explore the picture books in and out of class.

Respecting children and respecting their ways of learning seemed from my observations and discussions with the teachers to be the golden rule in every participant’s mind. When they used picture books to teach children English, they encourage children to learn but tried their best not to force them. Emma explained, “We have to give them some time. Don’t push them too hard, otherwise they will lose interests in learning English. That’s the worst thing we want to see.” Mary’s words explained her understanding from another perspective.

I respect my students. Every one of them is a genius in learning. But they learn in different ways... Never force them to learn in your way. You have to observe and understand them and find their pace and respect them. If you respect them and their learning way, they will show you how fast they can absorb the knowledge you want them to learn.

In Mary’s class, when she showed her mixed-grade class the picture book *Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me*, every child was attracted by the beautiful cover picture. But later on, as she led children to read the content of the picture book, some younger children lost interest and sat there quietly playing with the toys in their hands. Mary didn’t require all the children to join the teaching and learning activities; instead, she attempted to use games and singing and dancing to raise children’s attention. These activities successfully attracted children’s attention and finally they all joined in the class again.

After observing her class, I interviewed Mary. She explained her methods of dealing with the children who were not interested in reading the picture book,

When I was a new teacher, I handled this situation in a different way. If today's situation happened five years ago, I would be very angry and stopped and required every child to read after me. But, as I grew up together with children, I gradually realized, I became angry not because they were wrong, but because my authority was challenged. As a new teacher, I had less confidence and less experience in teaching them, so I paid too much attention to my own feeling but ignored my children's needs. You see, in today's class, they behaved very well, aren't they? They all had interests in reading picture books. You can know that from their eyes. At first some children didn't want to read together with me because they had their own concerns. Some of them were shy, some of them were preparing, and some of them were attracted by other things. What I should do was not scolding at them, but try to make my class more attractive.

Every participant had their own stories in respecting children and harvesting children's progress. In their stories, they all mentioned the silent period issue in children's language development. Emma shared that she was once blamed by a parent because the mother found her son could not speak even one word in English after attending Emma's class for one week. In the following week, Emma paid special attention to this boy and found he listened to the class carefully but never opened his mouth to read. Emma tried many ways to try to get the boy to speak English. The boy seemed interested in every activity Emma prepared for him but still spoke only in Chinese. One month later, when Emma was about to give up, the mother came again and told Emma excitedly that her boy suddenly read a whole picture book at home loudly in English. The other three participants also had similar stories. Elizabeth shared a similar story about a five-year-old girl who refused to speak in English in her class. In Elizabeth's story, the girl experienced a short silent period about three weeks, and one day she suddenly automatically read aloud a long sentence from a picture book. Cindy reported that she noticed the silent period of some children. She didn't push them to speak out but patiently waited, because she believed that children need time to absorb what they have learned. Mary said, "Children are genius in learning language. I always met children who refuse to speak in English. This is because they need to listen and digest first. When they are ready, they will give you a big surprise!". They believe that some children

need time to digest what they have learned in English. After digesting, children will transfer the input into output naturally.

Participants also indicated the importance of encouraging children to explore the picture books on their own or together with their parents. They believe that children need time to explore the content of picture books. When reading together with teachers, children are learning what teachers give them. But in their independent readings, children have the chance to appreciate the pictures, use their imaginations to make up their own stories, as well as digest what their teacher taught them during class time. In their views, teachers can only accompany children in their class time. But class time is far from enough for children to read picture books and learn English. Cindy stated,

Reading picture books in class is far from enough. It's like the top of the iceberg. Children need to spend more time on reading picture books. We encourage children read picture books on their own or in groups in their free-reading time in kindergarten, and read picture books with their parents outside kindergarten.

Red Kindergarten and Pink Kindergarten set free-reading time into their curriculum. Every week day, children have scattered one to two hours of free-reading time. In these periods, children are encouraged to find their favorite picture books in the reading corner and read the books on their own or in groups. Teachers keep an eye on children without disturbing them, unless they need help. Teachers also encourage children to bring picture books back home and read them together with their parents. Mary stated, "Parental accompany is necessary. When children read picture books with their parents, they are learning in an intimate atmosphere. This provide children a good environment to learn and enhance the parenthood."

As an extracurricular course, the English class in Orange Kindergarten doesn't have particular free-reading times. But Elizabeth indicated that she encouraged children to bring picture books home to read on their own or together with parents. In Green School, children are encouraged to read picture books if they arrive early or leave late. Green School also has

a library for children to read picture books during their spare time, and they can bring these picture books home to read together with their parents.

All of the participants believe sufficient reading time is critical in children's English learning and reading of picture books. They all encourage children to read picture books as much as possible.

To sum up, in using picture books to teach children English, kindergarten EFL teachers share some common understandings and practices. First, they are good at using picture books to create a high-motivation, high-confidence, and low-anxiety learning environment for children. Second, teachers set clear and flexible teaching objectives for reading picture books, and experienced teachers know how to deal with unexpected events during the reading of picture books. Third, teachers adopt various teaching activities to facilitate children reading picture books, including games, singing and dancing, and role play. Fourth, teachers lay emphasis on repetition when they teach children to read picture books. Finally, in reading picture books with children, teachers respect children and their ways of learning. Also, teachers encourage children to explore more about the picture books by reading on their own and with their parents.

### **Challenges for Teachers Using Picture Books to Teach Children English**

The third sub-research question of this study is "What challenges, if any, do the teachers have when using picture books to teach kindergarten students English?". To answer this question, data collected from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed, and three themes emerged. First, participants felt challenges on developing EFL classes. Second, participants felt challenges considering their self-development. Third, participants felt challenges on building up relationships with parents.

## **Class Development Challenges**

All of the participants in this study were experienced teachers in kindergarten EFL classes. They were not only responsible for teaching their own classes but also took the responsibility of developing EFL classes for their kindergartens. In the interviews, participants indicated that they face great challenges in developing classes for their kindergartens. Developing EFL classes is a time-consuming task and due to lack of references, this task becomes more challenging for teachers.

Participants all expressed that designing a class of using picture books to teach children English is not an easy task, and they had to spend lots of time on it. Unlike other textbooks, picture books are not especially designed for classrooms. Teachers cannot find any one series of picture books which can meet the demands of their whole semester's teaching objectives. As a result, for each class, teachers need to spend time on selecting one particular picture book from hundreds or even thousands of picture books which can best help them to fulfil their teaching objectives. Besides, unlike other textbooks, most picture books do not have exercises attached to reinforce children's learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers have to spend time on designing a number of teaching and learning activities to facilitate children learning from the picture books and consolidating the knowledge they have learned. Mary stated,

I love spending time with children. But the time I spent on designing the class was much more than I spent with children. As a leader of our teaching group, I have to lead teachers in my group to develop EFL courses. It's very time-consuming. Selecting picture books, designing games, learning to sing and dancing, making teaching materials, preparing all kinds of activities... It seems that we have 8 hours' working every week day and have 2 days weekends. But actually, except the time I spent on eating and sleeping, I devote all my outside-class time into developing EFL classes. I don't even have time to accompany my families. I doubt if I could still insist once I have my own child.

Participants also indicated another factor which makes developing an EFL class a time-consuming activity. According to participants, in China, an EFL class is not a

compulsory course in kindergarten. In fact, having a kindergarten EFL class is not a decision by the government but a product of market choice. As Elizabeth stated,

EFL classes are not included into Shanghai's public kindergarten's curriculum. But to attract more students, many public kindergartens set EFL classes as an extracurricular course. They invited teachers like me from English training institution, and parents have to pay extra tuition for EFL class.

Without education departments' support, there are no national standards for kindergarten EFL classes and no demonstration class for kindergartens to copy. As a result, each kindergarten and English training school must invest lots of energy, time and human resources into developing their own EFL classes if they want to attract students and parents. The problem is that kindergartens are not willing to share their achievements in EFL class development with other kindergartens. Cindy shared her understanding,

There is no national standard for kindergartens to take reference... Every private kindergarten and training school has their own deliberately designed EFL courses. They don't want to share with others their findings and results. I can understand that... If you spent lots of energy, money and time on it, you definitely want to gain more profits. After all, it's like a competition. Every kindergarten wants to attract the most talent children into their kindergartens and good EFL class is definitely a very important advantage.

Without nation-wide transparent curriculums or demo classes for kindergarten EFL classes, such classes have become a battleground for commercial war. The administrators of every private kindergarten and English training school wants to know more about their competitors' EFL class development and are eager to learn from each other. At the same time, they are afraid their research results would be "stolen" by others. To attract more students and parents, some kindergartens and training schools post parts of their teaching plan and demo classes online. And these limited resources have become the most important way for kindergartens and training schools to learn from each other. Emma stated,

Sometimes I feel I'm not only a teacher, but a spy. My institution gives us the task to polish our classes. But I can find limited resources to improve my teaching. Kindergartens and English training institutions don't welcome peers to observe their EFL classes. I can only find some fragments of other school's classes online. That's far from enough. Sometimes I took my own child to other institution's free



audition class... Do you know free audition class? The kind of class... training institutions open one demonstration class for the public to attract more students, and you have to take a child as your entering ticket. So, I pretended to be a parent interested in their institution's class. But actually, I was learning from their methods of teaching children to read picture books, and I had to report my findings to my institution and develop our own EFL class. It's so awkward.

Lacking cooperation and sharing, each kindergarten has to devote more time, energy, money, and human resources in developing EFL classes. This causes lots of unnecessary repeated work and gets in the way of the development of EFL classes.

### **Self-Development Challenges**

In my interviews, all of the participants expressed their concerns about self-development from two aspects: training and conducting research. They expressed that although they all received training from their kindergartens or institutions, they still found challenges when they were new teachers. And as they gradually become experienced teachers, they seldom have the chance to get further training opportunities. As experienced teachers, they also bear the research task on their shoulders. However, due to lack of training and resources, they regarded conducting research as a great challenge for them.

According to participants, when they were new teachers, they all received job training before teaching children. These trainings included getting teachers' licenses in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), understanding the culture of kindergartens or training schools, and auditing experienced teachers' classes. The training period depends on each kindergarten's or training institution's own schedule, lasting from one week to six months. However, when participants talked about their experiences of being a new teacher, they all expressed that these trainings were helpful but not adequate. They still faced great challenges in the first year they used picture books to teach children English. For example, they didn't know how to keep children's attention during the whole class, how to maintain class discipline, how to deal with unexpected events, how to take care of children's learning interests and at the same time finish their teaching objectives, etc.

Now, even as experienced teachers, participants still feel that they need further training opportunities regarding the use of picture books. Cindy said,

I have more than six years' experience of using picture books to teach children English. In these six years, I have witnessed the development of kindergarten EFL classes. Six years ago, we simply read picture books together with children and paid much attention to their oral English development. Now, you see, we have science class, art class, drama class, many different classes originated from reading English picture books. Keeping pace with the times is a great challenge for me. I hope I could have chances to communicate with teachers and educators from other kindergartens, and have chances to listen to experts' suggests in this field.

According to participants, they seldom have chances to get further training on using picture books to teach children English, and this is because kindergarten EFL classes are still not regarded as compulsory courses in China, and official activities in this field are hard to find.

Mary stated,

In Red Kindergarten, we have many training opportunities, including national and international conferences, seminars, and workshops. But none of them concentrated on using picture books to teach children English. Kindergarten EFL class is not recognized as a necessary course in authorities' minds. Perhaps in the future, we will have more opportunities to have advanced trainings.

According to participants, another challenge of self-development is conducting research. In both kindergartens and training institutions, conducting research and publishing teaching-related papers bring advantages for a teacher's promotion. Experienced teachers also want to share their experience and findings by publishing articles. However, participants found it difficult to conduct research and write papers to publish. The first reason is that they were too busy to fulfil their jobs. As Elizabeth stated, "I seldom have my own spare time. Outside classroom, I have to prepare for the class, select picture books, and communicate with parents. I seldom have time to write down my own experience." The second reason is that even if they have time, they can hardly find high-quality research papers online as references. Mary stated,

I also want to learn the latest theories and findings of children's EFL class in China. But I can't find many resources online or in periodicals. Perhaps because this field is not recognized by China's researchers yet. Most of the research papers online

were the articles written by kindergarten EFL teachers. In these papers, they were sharing their understandings but without the support of relevant theories. I hope more researchers can notice the desire of kindergarten EFL teachers for high-quality research papers.

### **Challenges of Building Relationships with Parents**

Participants felt building good relationships with parents was a great challenge for them. Elizabeth stated, “Teaching children to read English picture books requires parents’ support. It’s very important for us to get parents’ support. But it’s hard to build good relationship with them.” Talking about the challenges of building good relationships with parents, participants shared their problems from three aspects: parents’ doubts about their children’s EFL classes, difficulties in persuading parents to spend time on reading picture books with children, insufficient communication between teachers and parents.

Since kindergarten EFL classes in China are not compulsory and there is no national curriculum as a reference, parents often have doubts about a kindergarten’s EFL classes. Participants from different teaching contexts shared their challenges from different aspects. In public kindergartens, parents’ doubts exist on the necessity of setting EFL classes as a kindergarten’s extracurricular course. In Elizabeth’s view, she faces a great challenge of self-dignity, because some parents treat her as a fraud. Orange Kindergarten is a public kindergarten and the tuition is less than 400 RMB per month (approximately 57 U.S. dollars), which is a very low price. But as an extracurricular course, an EFL class needs to charge each student extra tuition, which is more than 400 RMB per semester. Some parents doubt the necessity of paying for children to have an EFL class. Elizabeth explained,

You know, most public kindergarten children’s parents are not high-income population. They don’t want to pay for or they can’t afford this extra fee. And they don’t think it’s necessary to let children learn English at an early age. After all, EFL class is not compulsory in kindergarten. In their eyes, I’m a cheater who just want to steal money from their pockets. You know the sight they put on me.

Other public kindergarten parents have doubts about the necessity of using picture books to teach children English. Elizabeth explained,

It's a big challenge for me to convince parents that reading picture books is an effective way to teach children English. Some parents complained to me. They asked me why just read picture books in class. They want their children to learn from "real textbooks". I understand their feeling. You know, they think they have paid a lot to EFL class, and they want to see their children are learning. But they don't have much knowledge about early childhood education, and, you know...there is no national curriculum or national level test to test children's English level for them to evaluate. So, parents have their concerns. And it's my challenge to convince every parent that learning from picture books is very important.

In English training institutions, parents' doubts lie in the achievements of the EFL classes. In Shanghai, English training institutions charge very expensive fees to children. Each institution has their own fee scale, ranging from less than 1,000 RMB to more than 10,000 RMB per person per month. As a result, parents spend this great sum of money in the hope of letting their children be early birds in English learning. However, without a national level test or curriculum to consult, parents can hardly find any reference to evaluate their children's performance, and they are very likely to use the standard of primary or even middle school EFL classes to evaluate their children's performance. Emma talked about the challenges she faced.

I felt great challenge in showing parents my students' progress. Every parent is eager to see their children's progress. Some parents have patience and they understand the importance of waiting for their children to grow up. But some parents have doubts in the achievements of their children. They think reading picture books is a waste of time. They want their children to learn more words, have solid grammar, and can understand and speak fluent English. I know it's my job to explain to them the importance of reading picture books, and the nature of kindergarten children's characteristics of learning. But it's a challenge for me to keep in good temper when I answered some of their rude questions... Once a parent asked me "Are you using picture books to teach children because you are not qualified to use other higher-ranking teaching materials?" ... Every time they asked me about their children's progress, I would show them the records of their children's achievement. My students are excellent enough. But parents still want them to achieve more.

In private kindergartens, parents' doubts mainly focus on the quality of the teachers. According to the participants, most private kindergartens enjoy a good reputation for high-quality education, but at the same time, they charge very expensive fees, which are ten times or even hundreds of times more than those of public kindergartens. Unlike public

kindergartens, private kindergartens have the right to select their students, and children must pass certain tests to enter good private kindergartens. As a result, parents have a much higher expectation for their children and higher demands on teachers. Mary and Cindy both expressed the pressure and challenge they faced concerning this issue. Mary stated,

It's not easy to gain parents' trust. Some parents are experts in this field. They know what their children need to learn, and they know if you are a good teacher. I like these parents, and I like to talk with them, and learn from them, and, I can have a better understanding of their children in the talking, and improve my teaching skills by learning from them. But some parents are very difficult to deal with. For example, some parents don't understand EFL class in kindergarten. They have lots of their own beliefs, such as foreign teachers are better than Chinese teachers, vocabulary size is more important than interests, teachers should spend time on teaching children not playing with children, teachers should speak very standard BBC or VOA accent, etc. They always have doubts on teachers and never really think what is good for children's further development.

Besides parents' doubts, participants also found challenges in persuading parents to spend time on reading picture books with their children. According to all the participants, reading picture books with parents could facilitate children's learning, and all the kindergartens and institutions encourage children to bring picture books back home to read with their parents. However, some parents failed to find time to read with their children, and some parents treated such a reading task as a burden for themselves. Cindy stated,

Today, most parents in Shanghai are quite busy. They don't have much time to spend on playing or reading with their children. Even if they have time, they would spend it on something they think is more important. But, do you really think there is anything more important than accompanying their children? Fortunately, parents in Shanghai still cares about their children's performance in kindergartens. So, we assign reading picture books together with parents as homework for children. And many parents told us, or complain to us, that reading picture books with children become the most time-consuming activity in their families. I'd rather say, it's the biggest challenge for me to persuade parents to spend some time on reading with their children.

Last but not least, participants reported that they face challenges of insufficient communication with parents. Participants believed that sufficient communication with parents is essential in building good kindergarten-parent relationships, and insufficient communication often causes problems. Cindy said, "Without sufficient communication,

misunderstandings will take place. We have to work together to create a good learning environment for children.” However, due to the fast pace of modern society, parents and teachers in Shanghai can hardly find time to have a face-to-face communication. Elizabeth stated, “I use online communication devices such as WeChat and QQ to keep in touch with parents. I can hardly see my students’ parents in the whole year. But online communication is not enough and always lead to misunderstanding”.

Participants also shared their own stories about the misunderstanding caused by insufficient communication with parents. Elizabeth shared a typical and touching story which well represents the importance of sufficient communication between teachers and parents.

The first year I came to Orange Kindergarten, I had a student, a very cute boy, in my class. He was very active and cooperative in class, but I thought he’s not hardworking. Because he could follow me and pronounce all the words correctly in class, but the second day, he forgot the right pronunciations and mispronounced every word. You know, I assigned them the homework of repeated reading with parents. I expected he should remember what he had learned in my class. This circle had taken place for one month, and I thought I should have a talk with his parents to mention them to spend some time on reading together with their son. To my surprise, his parents was very sad and they told me they accompanied their son to read assigned English picture books every night. And as they could not speak English, they spent much time on looking up dictionaries to learn the pronunciations themselves. At that time, I understood the reason why the boy mispronounced the words every second day. I felt guilty to blame them. They’ve already tried their best. It’s my fault. I should communicate with my students’ parents earlier and understand their problems. The next day, I did two things. One was to share an audio copy of my reading of the picture book online for parents and children to listen and imitate. The second thing was to summon a parent meeting and listen to their problems.

Insufficient communication is very likely to cause problems between teachers and parents and brings more challenges for teachers to use picture books to teach children English. But on the other hand, maintaining sufficient communication is another challenge for teachers. Participants all expressed that they have to spend lots of time keeping in touch with parents. In this cyber society, parents can easily find and send message to teachers 24 hours online. Mary stated,

I got more than 30 messages every day sending from parents. Yes, every day. Some of them ask about their child's performance. Some of them ask about the homework which I've already sent to them. Some of them send invitation to me about some events. Some simply want to have a chat with me. It's kindergarten EFL teachers' dilemma. I can't ignore the messages parents sent me online because I need to better understand my students and keep the good relationship with parents. But I really want to tell them that I'm busy. I have lots of works to do. I really want to shut off all my electrical devices to have an hour without disturbance.

Though they are facing so many challenges, at the end of the interviews, all of the participants expressed that they love their jobs, and they love reading picture books together with children to teach them English. As Mary stated,

When I open a picture book and read together with my students, I forget all the terrible things, as if I'm in a purest world with little angels around me. I'm moved when I see their wistful eyes, and I'm happy to see every achievement they've made.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the findings of this study to answer the overarching research question by responding to the three sub-research questions, including,

1. What do Shanghai kindergarten teachers think about the linguistic, cognitive development, and cultural awareness values of picture books in EFL classrooms?
2. How do the teachers use picture books in their classrooms?
3. What challenges, if any, do the teachers have when using picture books to teach kindergarten students English?

Data collected from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed and themes emerged under each sub-research question. To answer the first sub-research question, teachers' perspectives on picture books were summarized into three categories: linguistic values of picture books, cognitive values of picture books, and cultural awareness values of picture books. On teachers' perspectives on linguistic values of picture books, five themes emerged. First, teachers believe that picture books are children's best English primer. Second, linguistic value is crucial for choosing picture books. Third, picture books cultivate children's English thinking patterns. Fourth, picture books help develop children's phonic

and phonemic awareness. Fifth, picture books help develop children's vocabulary and grammar.

On teachers' perspectives on cognitive values of picture books, five other themes emerged. First, teachers believe that picture books open a window for children to know the world. Second, teachers find knowledge transfer occurring in reading picture books. Third, picture books cultivate children's reading and behavioral habits. Fourth, picture books develop children's cognition on science and art. Fifth, picture books facilitate children's cognition on interpersonal relationships.

On teachers' perspectives on cultural awareness values of picture books, two themes emerged from the data. First, participants praised the value of picture books in helping children understand cultural diversity. Second, participants recognized the value of picture books in helping children respect cultural diversity.

To answer the second sub-research question, data collected from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed and five themes emerged. They are (a) utilizing picture books to create a positive learning environment, (b) accomplishing teaching objectives and dealing with unexpected events while reading picture books, (c) designing various activities to facilitate reading picture books, (d) laying emphasis on repetition, (e) respecting children and encouraging them to explore more about picture books.

The third sub-research question focuses on the challenges teachers face when they use picture books to teach children English. On this point, three themes emerged. First, participants felt challenges on developing EFL classes. Second, participants felt challenges considering their self-development. Third, participants felt challenges on building relationships with parents.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The significant development of globalization has led to an increasing number of kindergarten children learning English as their second language in Shanghai. In Shanghai's kindergarten EFL classes, picture books are generally regarded as the most important teaching materials. The findings of this study revealed kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books in their classrooms, as well as the challenges they faced. In this chapter, these findings will be discussed from two aspects: relationship between findings of this study and previous literature and further implications for practice. Findings regarding the three sub-research questions will be discussed separately. The first two sub-research questions will be discussed together with previous literature. The third sub-research question will be discussed as further implications for practice.

### **Relationship between Findings of This Study and Previous Literature**

Results of the first two sub-research questions revealed teachers' perspectives on the role of picture books in kindergarten EFL classes and on their practices of using picture books to teach children. These findings will be discussed together with previous literature on the benefits of picture books and also the two theories presented in Chapter 2, Krashen's Hypotheses and Five Big Ideas.

### **Findings of This Study Related to the Functions of Picture Books**

Findings of this study suggested that teachers generally believe picture books are effective teaching materials in kindergarten EFL classrooms. This is in accordance with previous studies on the benefits of picture books (Althouse, Johnson, & Michell, 2003; Bullen & Nichols, 2011; Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2007; Güneş & Güneş, 2011, Xu, 2008).

Participants emphasized the importance of giving children free-reading time to let them explore picture books on their own. They expressed that even without teachers'

instruction, children can read picture books based on their own decoding of the pictures and words presented in picture books. They believed that with pictures and words printed on the picture books, children are able to use their learned knowledge and imagination to interpret the information, and this process accelerates children's learning. This finding is in accordance with previous studies on the application of dual coding theory in children's reading of picture books. Dual coding theory states that learners can process both visual and verbal information at the same time so providing learners with both pictures and words can facilitate their acquiring of new information (Paivio, 1971). Findings of this study proved the effectiveness of dual coding theory on the application of picture books in kindergarten EFL classes.

Regarding the first sub-research question, findings revealed that teachers chose picture books as their teaching materials because they believed picture books have linguistic, cognitive and cultural awareness value. On linguistic values of picture books', five themes emerged in the findings. First, teachers believed that picture books are children's best English primer. Second, linguistic value is crucial for choosing picture books. Third, picture books cultivate children's English thinking patterns. Fourth, picture books help develop children's phonic and phonemic awareness. Fifth, picture books help develop children's vocabulary and grammar. The first theme and second themes are in accordance with previous studies on using picture books as EFL teaching materials (Hadaway & Mundy, 1999, Sheu, 2008, Xu, 2008). The fourth and fifth themes are in accordance with previous studies on the role of picture books in language development (Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2005; Dias, 2010; Flynn, 2011; Hu & Commeyras, 2008; Williams, 2012). The third theme furthers the understanding of teachers' perspectives on linguistic values of picture books. Previous studies paid much attention to the language, but seldom discussed the notion of thinking in the target language. Based on the data collected through interviews, this is

perhaps because this study focused on Chinese kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives, and Chinese is a different language system than that of English. Decades ago, the prevalent teaching method in China was the direct-translation method. For most Shanghai kindergarten EFL teachers, when they were learning English, they didn't get the training of thinking in English. Instead, they were used to thinking in Chinese and then translating Chinese into English as an output in writing and speaking. As a result, today, when they teach their students, they realize the importance of thinking in English and finding picture books as useful teaching materials to cultivate children's English thinking patterns.

On the cognitive value of picture books, most findings of this study are in accordance with previous studies that picture books help children understand the world, cultivate children's learning habits, develop children's cognition on science and art, and facilitate their cognition on interpersonal relationships (Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2005; Hansen and Zambo, 2005; Hsiao, 2010).

One of the themes under this category furthers current understanding of picture books' cognition value, which is theme two mentioned above, that is "knowledge transfer occurs in reading picture books". Participants reported their perspectives on children's spontaneous knowledge transfer from picture books to real-life objects and events. This finding is partly in accordance with previous studies which suggested that children are able to acquire knowledge automatically and spontaneously from reading picture books and they can transfer knowledge under adults' instruction (Althouse, Johnson, & Michell, 2003; Bullen & Nichols, 2011; Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2007; Ganea, Pickard, & DeLoache, 2008; Ganea, Ma, & DeLoache, 2011; Güneş & Güneş, 2011). But in this study, findings indicated that even without teachers' instruction, children are capable of transferring knowledge from picture books to real life by applying the knowledge they have learned and their imagination. Also, teachers reported that knowledge transfer did not only happen from picture books to

real life, but also from real life to picture books, because they found children can associate items and stories in picture books with their real-life experiences and use this association to better understand the content of picture books.

Apart from linguistic values of picture books and cognition values, findings of this study furthered the understanding of the benefits of picture books in that teachers also believed picture books have value in promoting cultural awareness. On this point, Shanghai kindergarten EFL teachers reported that they found picture books carried valuable information on cultural awareness, and they emphasized the importance of using picture books to teach children the concept of understanding and respecting other cultures.

Findings of this study also revealed the characteristics of Shanghai kindergarten EFL teachers' usage of picture books in their classrooms. Themes under this category include (a) utilizing picture books to create a positive learning environment, (b) accomplishing teaching objectives and dealing with unexpected events while reading picture books, (c) designing various activities to facilitate the reading of picture books, (d) laying emphasis on repetition, (e) respecting children and encouraging them to explore more about picture books. These themes are in accordance with previous studies on the usage of picture books in classrooms, but at the same time provided a more detailed further understanding of Shanghai kindergarten EFL teachers' usage of picture books (Ganea, Pickard, and DeLoache 2008; Hadaway and Mundy, 1999; Hu and Commeyras, 2008; Lv, 2015; Sheu, 2008).

### **Findings of This Study and Krashen's Hypotheses**

Findings of this study seemed to lend support for some of Krashen's hypotheses, including the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Some of Krashen's hypotheses are not embedded in this study, such as the Monitor Hypothesis and the Natural Order Hypothesis.

In the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, Krashen proposed that acquisition and learning are two different independent concepts in that learning focuses on linguistic forms while acquisition emphasizes the understanding of the meaning conveyed by the target language, and teachers should create an acquisition rich environment for students (Krashen, 1981). Findings of this study supported Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis. Participants reported that when they were students, they were "learning" English via memorization and direct translation. Based on their own experience and the trainings they received, they realized the importance of "acquisition" for children, that is picking up the language in a more natural way through meaningful activities. In their class activities, they are using picture books to create an environment for children to "acquire" and also designed various activities to help children to "learn" the language forms. Their usage of picture books also indicated that "acquiring" and "learning" can be well integrated in kindergarten EFL classes by using picture books as teaching materials. For example, when teachers taught a new word in a picture book, children simultaneously looked at a picture or pictures that represent that word and inferred from the picture(s) its meaning. They skipped the process of "translation" from a Chinese word to an English word, but directly associated the item in the picture with the word which the teacher taught them and to which the picture book exposed them. This enabled the children to learn while acquiring.

Findings of this study also were congruent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Krashen proposed that acquisition happens when learners receive sufficient comprehensible input. If the learner is at "level  $i$ ", i.e. input that they already comprehend, and the target is "level  $1$ ", i.e. input that is just beyond what they comprehend, the learner should receive the input of "level  $i+1$ " to acquire the knowledge (Krashen, 1999). Findings of this study revealed that when teachers designed the class and set their teaching objectives, they paid attention to " $i+1$ ". For example, in their syllabi of teaching vocabulary and grammar, teachers clearly

addressed children's current level and decided the target input based on children's current development. Before teaching the new knowledge, teachers gave children various activities to stimulate their schemata in order to prepare them for the new input.

Krashen also proposed in his Input Hypothesis that there is a silent period between input and output. In this silent period, learners need sufficient input but will not produce any output until they are ready. Learners need this silent period to internalize the newly acquired competence (Krashen, 1985). The findings of this study also proved the existence of this silent period (for at least one student whose story was reported in Ch. 4). In interviews, participants reported their noticing of this silent period, not only in second language acquisition, but also in emergent literacy. They reported cases of children who might refuse to speak in English or retell the story in a picture book immediately after learning, but after a period, children would spontaneously speak in English or retell the target story without any requirement. For students in this silent period, teachers kept on giving them various repeated exercises to reinforce their learning outcomes. This is in accordance with the Input Hypothesis in that learners need sufficient input during this silent period; otherwise they may not produce their own output.

Findings of this study are also in accordance with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen proposed that a series of affective factors can facilitate EFL acquisition, including motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety (Krashen, 1981). In this study, participants all recognized these factors as essential for children acquiring knowledge. Before delivering the classes, teachers used picture books to create an environment in which children could learn with high motivation, high self-confidence and low anxiety. They believed that children could better acquire the target knowledge in this kind of environment. In their statements, picture books were considered the best textbooks to raise children's interest in learning, and with the combination of pictures and words, picture books provided

their children with a safe environment to explore the stories and build up their confidence in early childhood reading. When children read picture books with teachers, they were observed to like exploring a new story rather than being forced to learn it, and this enabled them to acquire the knowledge in low anxiety (or what Krashen referred to as “low affective filter”) situations, including reading stories not only in teacher-directed activities but also on their own and/or with their parents.

### **Findings of This Study and Five Big Ideas**

Five Big Ideas are recognized as the most effective evidence-based methods for teaching children to read in the United States, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Findings of this study suggested that the focuses of Shanghai kindergarten EFL classes were slightly different from those of the English reading teaching in the United States. First, phonemic awareness and phonics were recognized as one concept in Shanghai kindergarten EFL classes, which was given a new name, “Natural Spelling”. Second, fluency and comprehension were seldom mentioned when teachers talked about their teaching. Third, these Shanghai teachers put emphasis on vocabulary and grammar.

The major reason for these differences is perhaps because in the United States, English is most children’s first language, but in China, children learn English as their second language and they have few, if any, opportunities to learn English out of their classrooms. In Shanghai kindergarten EFL classes, teachers give importance to learning phonemic awareness and phonics because they believe in the Critical Period Theory that children need to get sufficient pronunciation training when they are young, and this enables children to have a correct accent in speaking English. In participants’ statements when they referred to phonemic awareness and phonics, they did not speak of them separately; instead, they used a commonly-adopted term in China, “Natural Spelling,” to mention the combination of

phonemic awareness and phonics. The reason why they did not teach phonemic awareness and phonics separately remains unknown.

Fluency and comprehension were seldom mentioned in participants' statements. This is perhaps because kindergartens also provide Chinese early childhood literacy classes, and fluency and comprehension are emphasized in those classes instead of in EFL classes. Teachers also reported that most parents regard accent, vocabulary, and grammar as the most important criteria to evaluate their children's English development. As the product of a market economy rather than a government decision, Shanghai kindergarten EFL classes lack the guidance from the authority department, and to some extent, parents' views decide the focuses and the development of kindergarten EFL classes.

### **Implications of This Study**

The third sub-research question focused on the challenges kindergarten EFL teachers face when they use picture books to teach children English. Findings revealed that challenges existed in three major areas. First, participants felt challenges in developing EFL classes. Second, participants felt challenges considering their self-development. Third, participants felt challenges on building relationships with parents. Implications of these findings revolve around two aspects: the Chinese government's support and kindergartens' or English training institutions' support.

#### **The Government's Support**

Results of this study indicated that one major challenge for the four teachers is that kindergarten EFL classes are not yet compulsory in China. Since there is still a controversial debate in China on whether kindergarten EFL classes should be included in the curriculum, the government has not made a decision yet. However, the fast pace of globalization has already turned Shanghai into an international metropolis. In Shanghai, a great number of parents who have received college education realize the importance of providing their



children with an early chance to learn English. As a result, most private kindergartens set kindergarten EFL classes into their curricula to attract more talented and wealthy students. Many public kindergarten students' parents send their children to English training schools to learn English because they worry that their children may fall behind as public kindergartens do not have EFL classes. Being afraid of losing talented students, even public kindergartens set EFL classes as their extracurricular course, and parents need to pay an extra fee for that. Therefore, even without the government's support, kindergarten EFL classes have already become prevalent in Shanghai. Kindergarten EFL classes are the product of market choice rather than of a governmental decision.

However, due to lack of the government's support, many problems exist in kindergarten EFL classes, and these problems cause great challenges for kindergarten EFL teachers. The first problem is the unfairness of availability of educational resources. Findings of this study revealed that in Shanghai, the fee charged in private kindergartens and public kindergartens are tens of times different. Wealthy parents send their children to private kindergartens to have an early start in learning English, but ordinary families cannot afford the high tuition in private kindergartens. So, instead, they choose to send their children to public kindergartens and pay the fee for extracurricular EFL classes or send their children to English training institutions to learn English. But low-income families have no choice; they cannot even pay for the extracurricular EFL classes in public kindergartens, and due to a lack of education, they do not even understand the reasons why they should let their children learn English. According to the responses of participants, children attending private kindergartens generally have a much higher English proficiency level than children in public kindergartens, and this difference will be heightened when they enter primary and middle schools. Finally, this will put children attending public kindergartens into a disadvantaged

position when competing in national college examinations, the scoring of which place a high demand on students' English proficiency level.

The second problem is that due to the lack of government support, limited resources are distributed to kindergarten EFL classes. Absence of a national-level curriculum, lack of relevant research, and insufficient communication and cooperation among kindergartens prevent kindergarten EFL classes from developing. Results of this study indicated that teachers felt developing their EFL classes and self-development were great challenges for them because they can hardly find any seminar, workshops or training programs on using picture books to teach children. Without the government's support, there is almost no official promotion of activities for kindergarten EFL teachers. Besides, teachers can hardly find high-quality research papers to learn relevant theories on using picture books to teach children English because the field of teaching preschool-age children English is still in dispute in China. Also, most researchers and educators are focused on publishing articles on debating whether EFL classes should be set into kindergarten curricula but ignore the next step, which is how to develop kindergarten EFL classes.

The third problem is that without governmental supervision, the quality of kindergarten EFL classes cannot be guaranteed. According to participants' reports, different kindergartens and institutions have different teaching plans. Many kindergartens and institutions provide children with high-quality EFL classes. But there are still some kindergartens and institutions that pay much more attention on attracting students to gain money instead of spending time on developing the quality of their classes. These irresponsible kindergartens and institutions usually employ foreign teachers as an advertisement to attract parents who do not understand English. But, in fact, to save on costs, they hire foreign teachers who do not have any qualifications to teach children English, and they will not tell parents the truth.

Above all, although the debate on whether kindergarten EFL classes should be set into curricula still continues, the government should not ignore the prevalence of kindergarten EFL classes and the demand for equal educational resources and high-quality kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai. Relevant regulations and support issued by the government would likely alleviate burdens on kindergarten EFL teachers and provide them with a better environment to develop their classes and improve their own teaching skills in using picture books to teach children English.

### **Kindergartens' or English Training Institutions' Support**

Kindergartens' or English Training Institutions' support is also essential for helping teachers develop EFL classes and improve their teaching skills in using picture books to teach children English. Results of this study showed that at present, due to the lack of a national-level curriculum, each kindergarten or English training institution has to develop their own EFL classes, and the competition for attracting students makes their EFL classes to some extent a trade secret. Kindergartens and English training institutions are not willing to share their findings and their success with others. Even when they open demonstration classes to attract students and parents, they would set very strict auditing rules, such as parents much take children with them when auditing such classes, and no photos or videos should be taken during those classes, etc.

Without communication and cooperation, kindergartens and institutions are in fact doing unnecessarily repeated work. As participants reported, they spend much time on developing their EFL classes because there is no national-level curriculum for them to refer to or no demonstration classes from other kindergartens for them to learn from. If kindergartens and English training institutions can cooperate and communicate with each other and share their findings and failures together, kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai will be significantly improved.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books in their classrooms, as well as the challenges they face. The participants in this study offered many statements concerning the value of pictures books and the challenges they face. Classroom observations revealed the ways teachers used picture books in their classrooms. A number of themes emerged under each sub-research questions, and results of this study are generally in accordance with previous studies in this field, except for several issues which need a deeper examination.

Based on this present study, further research could employ prolonged observation and recruit a bigger sample size to better understand teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books. In this study, there was a possibility that participants tended to share with me what they wanted me to know. A prolonged observation could better reveal what really happens from day to day and week to week in their classrooms.

One of the most significant findings of this study which is different from previous research is that, in Shanghai, kindergarten EFL teachers regarded phonics and phonemic awareness as an integrated concept. Further research could examine teachers' perspectives on phonemic awareness and phonics and could focus on their usage of picture books to teach such awareness. Such research could yield a better understanding of the reasons why phonics and phonemic awareness are treated as an integrated concept in kindergarten EFL classes.

The participants also offered many statements about the challenges they face when developing their classes and considering how to use picture books to teach children English. Since picture books are not textbooks in a common sense, and there is no single series of picture books which could satisfy the needs for a whole semester's teaching and learning, teachers need to set clear teaching objectives and teaching plans for the whole semester or entire school years and choose the corresponding picture books to meet their demands.

Further research could focus on kindergartens' designing of their EFL classes, including their criteria for setting teaching objectives and teaching plans, their choice of picture books, and the way they guarantee the consistence and coherence of their EFL classes by using picture books as teaching materials.

Thirdly, results of this study revealed teachers' perspectives and usage of picture books, but children's development does not only rely on teachers. In participants' statements, they emphasized the importance of parents' participation in children's reading of picture books. Further research could also investigate parents' views on and use of picture books with their children.

Findings of this study showed that kindergarten EFL teachers in Shanghai were reflective and were willing to share their experience with researchers. Therefore, more research could be focused on this and other groups of teachers who may be similarly reflective. A replication of this study could be done with a bigger sample size and in other cities and towns in China to see if similar and/or different perspectives on the research questions emerge. Since Shanghai is the economic capital of China, what happens in Shanghai's kindergarten EFL classrooms may not be the same as what happens in other cities of China.

In this study, all of the four participants believed that picture books are effective teaching materials in kindergarten EFL classrooms. On the other hand, according to the findings of this study, lack of a national curriculum has already been mentioned as a crucial problem in developing kindergarten EFL classes. Therefore, further study could also focus on the possibility of developing a national curriculum for kindergarten EFL classes and including picture books as an important part of such a curriculum. Besides, further study could also explore teachers' perspectives on and usage of wordless picture books to examine if wordless picture books should also be included in the national curriculum.

Findings of this study also indicated a phenomenon that kindergartens and language training institutions are less likely to share their EFL curriculum with others. Further study may also focus on this phenomenon and explore if it is possible to encourage kindergartens and language training institutions to share their experiences in developing EFL classes. Sharing and having more open resources may benefit themselves as well as the teachers in other cities and in rural areas.

Last but not least, further study may also focus on kindergarten EFL teacher preparation programs. Based on the findings of this study, teacher preparation program could be more successful if they include the use of picture books, second language acquisition theories, and the Five Big Ideas into their schedules.

### **Conclusion**

Today, more and more parents in Shanghai believe that learning English at an early age will bring their children an advantage in future competition. As a result, private kindergartens and language training institutions set kindergarten EFL classes into their curricula in order to attract more talented and wealthy students. Even some public kindergartens set EFL classes as their extracurricular courses to join into this competition for students. However, since kindergarten EFL classes have not yet been recognized as compulsory courses by the government, there are no national standards or regulations for kindergarten EFL classes. Also, what is happening in Shanghai's increasing number of kindergarten EFL classes still remains largely unknown. To have a better understanding of the kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai, this study aimed to explore kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books in their classes, as well as the challenges they face.

The overarching research question of this study is this: What do kindergarten teachers in Shanghai think about the instructional value of picture books and how do they use them to instruct their students in EFL classrooms?

To answer these questions, this study used a survey questionnaire as a tool for recruiting participants. EFL teachers from four kindergartens were invited to answer this questionnaire. Based on a number of criteria, four EFL teachers were finally identified as the final participants in this study. Each of them was interviewed once or twice, based on the data provided by them, and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. After the first interview, I observed each participant's class 20-30 minutes, depending on the specific curriculum in each kindergarten. Also, documents, such as photocopies of the picture books, curricula, syllabi, and the teachers' written teaching plans were collected as supporting data.

After analyzing the data, findings revealed that teachers highly praised the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural awareness values of picture books. In regards to their linguistic value, teachers believed that (a) picture books are children's best English primer, (b) linguistic value is crucial for choosing picture books, (c) picture books cultivate children's English thinking patterns, (d) picture books help develop children's phonic and phonemic awareness, and (e) picture books help develop children's vocabulary and grammar.

Concerning their cognitive values, teachers believed that (a) picture books open a window for children to know the world, (b) knowledge transfer occurs from reading picture books, (c) picture books cultivate children's reading and behavioral habits, (d) picture books develop children's cognition on science and art, and (e) picture books facilitate children's cognition on interpersonal relationships.

For cultural awareness values of picture books, teachers praised the value of picture books in helping children understand cultural diversity and they recognized the value of picture books in helping children respect cultural diversity.

Teachers' usage of picture books in their EFL classrooms have the following features. They are (a) utilizing picture books to create a positive learning environment, (b) accomplishing teaching objectives and dealing with unexpected events while reading picture books, (c) designing various activities to facilitate reading picture books, (d) laying emphasis on repetition, and (e) respecting children and encouraging them to explore more about picture books.

Results showed that the challenges teachers faced can be categorized into three aspects. First, participants felt challenges on developing EFL classes. Second, participants felt challenges considering their self-development. Third, participants felt challenges on building relationships with parents.

The findings of the first and second sub-research questions are generally in accordance with previous studies. Some findings furthered the understanding of some of that literature. On the linguistic value of picture books, for example, this study added new findings to previous studies in that teachers found picture books are effective in cultivating children's English thinking patterns. This study also revealed that children's knowledge transfer does not only happen from picture books to real life, but also from real life to picture books. In addition, most previous studies focused on the linguistic and cognitive values of picture books, but this study found teachers also highly praised the value of picture books in raising students' cultural awareness and that teachers believed cultural awareness is very important for children to become global citizens.

The findings of this study also proved to be congruent with three of Krashen's five hypotheses, including the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. However, when comparing the results of this study with the Five Big Ideas, I found that this study proposed several different points regarding the teachers' beliefs of what linguistic domains should be the most important when teaching



kindergarten children. First, phonemic awareness and phonics were recognized as one concept in Shanghai kindergarten EFL classes, and that concept was called “Natural Spelling”. Second, fluency and comprehension were seldom mentioned when the teachers talked about their teaching. Third, teachers put emphasis on vocabulary and grammar. These differences from the Five Big Ideas could be caused by the different contexts of kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai and kindergarten English reading classes in the United States. In Shanghai’s kindergartens, English is a foreign language for children. Since English and Chinese belong to different language systems, teachers in Shanghai paid much attention to children’s pronunciation and vocabulary learning and acquisition. They trusted in the Critical Period Hypothesis and believed that kindergarten is a critical period for children to learn English phonics and phonemic awareness.

This study also led to suggestions for further implications based on the findings of the third sub-research question on teachers’ reported challenges. Teachers faced great challenges in developing EFL classes, on self-development, and on building relationships with parents. To work on solutions to these problems and improve the quality of kindergarten EFL classes in Shanghai, both government and kindergartens or language training institutions should make efforts to support teachers. Shanghai’s kindergarten EFL classes are the product of market choices and are still in their beginning phase of development. As such, they need the support from all walks of life to have a better development in the future.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS (ENGLISH AND MANDARIN)

**Informed Consent Form (English Version)****INFORMED CONSENT***Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives on and Usage of Picture Books in EFL Classrooms in Shanghai*

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve gathering information regarding your perceptions of using picture books in EFL classrooms.

My name is Yuan Shi, and I am a student from China and Ed.D. candidate at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a kindergarten EFL teacher in Shanghai and have experience of teaching children English.

The purpose of this research is to explore the use of picture books from the perspectives of kindergarten EFL teachers in Shanghai, i.e. to understand how they perceive the instructional values of picture books, and the way they use picture books as kindergarten children's EFL materials, as well as the challenges they may face in their practices. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to e-sign this form, email it back to me, and schedule a date and time with me for one or two 30-minute interviews, and one or two 20-30-minute classroom observations. The interview(s) will be audio-recorded. Your participation in this study will last 1.5 months.

There are some possible risks involved for participants. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality of your identity, and the associated sociological risk may occur if others become aware of your association with the study. In addition, there is a psychological risk if the discussion of the topic and classroom observation creates emotional discomfort for you, such as anxiety and nervousness. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that your participation will advance the understanding of kindergarten EFL teachers' perspectives on and usage of picture books, and there is a chance that the findings of this study will help you improve your teaching skills.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at 13816991424. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (001) 209-946-7716. In the event of a research-related injury, please contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier, then contact the Office of Research & Graduate Studies.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your confidentiality are creating a pseudonym for you in my dissertation and not mentioning any names in the audio-recorded interview. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of five years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

Signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Informed Consent Form (Mandarin Version)****《知情同意书》**

**研究课题：**《上海幼儿园英语教师对于英语绘本教学的观点及其课堂应用》

您受邀参与一项研究课题，此课题需要您对于使用英语绘本进行课堂教学发表见解，我会对此信息进行收集。

我的名字是史媛，是一名中国学生，教育学博士候选人，就读于美国太平洋大学伯纳德教育学院。您之所以被选为此课题的受试者，是由于您是一名幼儿园英语教师，且具有幼儿英语教学的经验。

此项研究目的在于探究上海的幼儿英语教师对于英语绘本的看法及应用，即如何看待英语绘本的教学价值、如何将其应用于英语课堂，以及使用英语绘本进行教学时所遇到的挑战。若您决定参与，请签署这份《知情同意书》，并以电子邮件的方式发回给我，并同我确定可供访谈和课堂观察的时间。我将会对您进行一至两次 30 分钟的访谈并录音，以及一至两次 20-30 分钟的课堂观察。您参与此项课题时长为一个半月。

此项研究可能会给受试者带来一定的风险。潜在风险包括个人信息泄露，若他人获悉您参与此项研究，可能会给您带来相关的社会风险。此外，访谈的话题和课堂观察也有可能给您带来一定的心理问题风险，例如焦虑、紧张等。此项研究可能会为您带来的潜在利益包括：您的参与将会帮助社会更加了解幼儿英语教师使用英语绘本教学的情况，同时本项研究的结果可能会为您今后的教学提供一些思路。

一旦您对本项研究有任何问题，请随时与我联系（手机号 13816991424）。若您对作为研究项目受试者的权利方面有任何疑问，请致电美国太平洋大学研究与研究生院办：(001) 209-946-7716。万一因参与研究而负伤，请与您的医疗服务提供方取得联系，经由您正规的医保机构进行补偿，之后联系太平洋大学研究与研究生院办。

通过此项课题而获取的信息以及可识别您身份的任何信息均属保密，只在获得您允许的情况下才会披露。为确保您的隐私，现采取以下措施：您的名字会以匿名形式出现在本人论文中，录音的采访中不会提及任何名字。获得的数据将存放在安全、上锁的地方，并且在此课题完成五年后销毁。

您可自愿参与此项研究，且不会因此涉及任何处罚，您在其他方面有权主张的利益也不会受到任何损失。即使您已经决定成为受试者，您也有权随时终止参与此项研究，且不会受到任何处罚，也不会因此受到其他方面的损失。

如果您已经阅读并理解上述信息，且愿意参与此项课题研究，请在下方署名。您可随时撤回同意、随时终止参与，且不会受到任何处罚，也不会受到其他方面的利益损失。您将受到一份此《知情同意书》副本。您保有法定求偿权以及其他法定权利。

您将保留一份署名后的《知情同意书》副本。

签名\_\_\_\_\_ 日期\_\_\_\_\_

### Gatekeepers Consent Form (English Version)

Title of study: Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives on and Usage of Picture Books in EFL Classrooms in Shanghai.

Name of Researcher: Yuan Shi.

Please tick to confirm your understanding of the study and that you are happy for your organization to take part and your facilities to be used to host parts of the project.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided about the above-mentioned study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
  
2. I understand that participation of our organization and members in the research is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect legal rights. ☐
  
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymized and remain confidential. ☐
  
4. I agree for our organization and students/members to take part in the above study, and I agree for classroom observations in our organization. ☐

Name of Gatekeeper:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Researcher:

Date:

Signature:



**Gatekeepers Consent Form (Mandarin Version)**

## 园长知情同意书

研究课题： 上海幼儿园英语教师对于使用英语绘本教学的观点及其课堂应用

研究者： 史媛

如果您已经了解了本项研究且乐于让您的幼儿园教师参与其中，并愿意为本研究提供一些场地或设施，请在下列表述后画√。

1.我确认已经阅读并了解该项研究的相关信息，且我有机会对于该研究的信息进行思考和提问，并且得到了相关的满意回答。

☐

2. 我了解我园教师可以自愿参加该项研究，他们有权随时无理由退出该研究且不会受到任何影响。

☐

3. 我了解该项研究所收集到的所有个人信息都将会作匿名处理并且保密。

☐

4. 我同意我园的学生/教师参与上述研究， 并同意为该研究员开放课堂观察。

☐

园长姓名：

日期：

签名：

研究者姓名：

日期：

签名：

**Emails to Kindergarten Headmasters (English Version)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Yuan Shi. I am an Ed.D. (Doctor of Education) candidate of University of the Pacific and I am doing my doctoral dissertation right now. My dissertation aims to examine kindergarten teacher's perspectives towards and usage of picture books in EFL classrooms in Shanghai. In this study, I need to interview kindergarten EFL teachers about their views and practice of using picture books to teach children English and observe their class activities. The information I get from the study will help to increase the understanding of the views and kindergarten EFL teachers toward using picture books to instruct children.

Your kindergarten is well-recognized as a pioneer in the field of using picture books to instruct children English. I wonder if you are happy for your kindergarten to take part and your facilities to be used to host parts of this study. And I also need to ask for your permission to observe classrooms. The detail information of my study is presented in the Informed Consent Form attached to this letter.

If you are willing to participate, please check and sign the Gatekeepers Consent Form in the attachment and scan/send it back to me, or I can also bring its paper version to your kindergarten for you to sign it if it is more convenient for you. After that, I will send you the survey for kindergarten EFL teachers together with the Informed Consent Form for them.

If you have any question, please contact me. My Email is 1363683853@qq.com and my mobile phone is 13816991424.

Thank you for spending time on reading this letter.

Best Regards,

Yuan Shi

**Emails to Kindergarten Headmasters (Mandarin Version)**

尊敬的先生\女士，

我是史媛，一名美国太平洋大学教育学博士在读学生。目前我正在做博士毕业论文，我的论文旨在探究上海的幼儿英语教师对于英语绘本的看法及应用。在这项研究中，我需要邀请几位幼儿英语教师进行访谈并观察他们的课堂活动，因此需要征得您对于观察贵园课堂的同意。研究中所收集到的信息将会帮助社会更好地了解幼儿英语教师是如何使用英文绘本教授幼儿英语的。

您所任职的幼儿园在使用英文绘本教学领域取得了很好的成绩，因此我诚邀您的幼儿园参与此项研究。此项研究的具体情况请详见附件里的《知情同意书》。

如果您愿意参加此项研究，请填写附件里的《园长知情同意书》，并将扫描件通过电子邮件发送给我，如果不方便的话，我可以将纸质版带到您的幼儿园供您当面阅读后签署。之后，我会将调查问卷和需要教师填写的《知情同意书》发给您的幼儿园的英语教师。

如果您有任何疑问，请直接与我联系，我的电子邮件是 1363683853@qq.com，我的手机号是 13816991424。

感谢您阅读这封邮件。

此致

敬礼

史媛

**Emails to Kindergarten EFL Teachers (English Version)**

My name is Yuan Shi. I am an Ed.D. (Doctor of Education) student of University of the Pacific and I am doing my doctoral dissertation right now. My dissertation aims to examine kindergarten teacher's perspectives towards and usage of picture books in EFL classrooms in Shanghai. In this study, I need to interview kindergarten EFL teachers about their views and practice of using picture books to teach children English and observe their class activities. The information I get from the study will help to increase the understanding of the views and kindergarten EFL teachers toward using picture books to instruct children.

You are invited to consider participating in this research study. Please check the attachment and carefully read the Informed Consent Form to know more about this study before you make the decision. If you are happy to participate, please read and sign the Informed Consent Form and send it back to me, or I can also bring its paper version to your kindergarten for you to sign it if it is more convenient for you.

If you have any question, please contact me. My Email is 1363683853@qq.com and my mobile phone is 13816991424.

Thank you for spending time on reading this letter.

Best Regards,

Yuan Shi

**Emails to Kindergarten EFL Teachers (Mandarin Version)**

您好，

我是史媛，一名美国太平洋大学教育学博士在读学生。目前我正在做博士毕业论文，我的论文旨在探究上海的幼儿英语教师对于英语绘本的看法及应用。在这项研究中，我需要邀请几位幼儿英语教师进行访谈并观察他们的课堂活动。研究中所收集到的信息将会帮助社会更好地了解幼儿英语教师是如何使用英文绘本教授幼儿英语的。

我诚邀您参与此项研究，请您仔细阅读附件里的《知情同意书》之后再决定是否参与。如果您愿意参加此项研究，请在《知情同意书》上签名，并将扫描件通过电子邮件发送给我，如果不方便的话，我可以将纸质版带到您的幼儿园供您当面阅读后签署。

如果您有任何疑问，请直接与我联系，我的电子邮件是 1363683853@qq.com, 我的手机号是 13816991424。

感谢您阅读这封邮件。

此致

敬礼

史媛

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (ENGLISH AND MANDARIN)

**Questionnaire (English Version)**

1. What is your teaching experience in full years?  
A. 0-1      B. 2-5      C. 6-10      D. 11 or more
2. In which kind of institution are you teaching?  
A. Public kindergarten  
B. Private kindergarten  
C. Language training institution  
D. Others \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you using picture books to instruct children English?  
A. Yes      B. No  
(If yes, please answer the questions 5-8. If no, this is the end of survey)
4. Do you think picture books are effective teaching materials to instruct children English?  
A. Yes      B. No
5. How often do you use picture books to teach children English?  
A. In every class  
B. Not in every class but more than once per week  
C. Seldom
6. Have you received job training about using picture books to teach children English?  
A. Yes      B. No
7. Are you willing to participate in the follow-up interviews and classroom observations? If yes, please leave your contact information.  
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_  
Kindergarten \_\_\_\_\_

**Questionnaire (Mandarin Version)**

1. 您的从教年限是?  
A. 0-1 年      B. 2-5 年      C. 6-10 年      D. 11 年及以上
2. 您所从教的学校属于以下哪类?  
A. 公办幼儿园  
B. 私立幼儿园  
C. 英语教育机构  
D. 其他\_\_\_\_\_
3. 您是否使用英语绘本进行教学?  
A. 是      B. 否  
(如果选择“是”, 请继续回答第 5-8 题; 如果选择“否”, 不必回答后续问题)
4. 您是否认为英语绘本是有效的教学材料?  
A. 是      B. 否
5. 您使用英语绘本教学频率是?  
A. 每节课都用  
B. 并不是每节课都用, 但是每周使用次数在两次及以上  
C. 很少用
6. 您是否接受过使用英文绘本教学的相关培训?  
A. 是      B. 否
7. 您是否愿意参加后续的访谈和课堂观察? 如果愿意, 请留下您的联系方式。  
称呼\_\_\_\_\_ 电话号码\_\_\_\_\_  
幼儿园名\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (ENGLISH AND MANDARIN)

**Interview Protocols (English Version)**

## Interview Protocol 1

1. How do you choose picture books?
2. How much time do you tend to spend on the use of picture books within your overall English instruction?
3. How much time do you tend to spend in class on each picture book?
4. In what way (or ways) have you been trained to use picture books to teach children English?
5. What are the focuses of linguistic domains when you use picture books to teach children English (e.g. phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, etc.)?
6. What else do you teach by using picture books in your EFL class?
7. What are your teaching objectives? How do you use picture books to achieve your teaching objectives?
8. How much do you think children can learn from a class with picture books?
9. What are the benefits of using picture books to teach children?
10. What are the challenges of using picture books to teach children?

## Interview Protocol 2

(Protocol 2 is for the second interview. The questions are designed to address the research questions as they relate to what I observe in the teachers' classes and to clarify for me the teachers' perspectives on their use of picture books.)

1. Please explain the teaching objectives of the classes I observed.
2. Please explain more about your teaching activities and the role that picture books played in the classes I observed.
3. What are the particular challenges for you in using picture books to instruct children in the classes I observed?
4. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the use of picture books in teaching children English by using picture books?



**Interview Protocols (Mandarin Version)**

## 第一次访谈提纲:

1. 您是如何选择英文绘本的?
2. 在您的整体教学时间中, 使用英文绘本教学占据多少时间?
3. 您完成教授一本英文绘本需要多少课堂时间?
4. 您接受过哪些使用英文绘本教授幼儿英语的培训?
5. 您在语言教学过程中比较侧重什么方面? (例如音素意识、自然拼读法、单词等)
6. 除了上述内容外, 您还使用英语绘本教授孩子哪些知识?
7. 您的教学目标有哪些? 您是如何通过使用英文绘本达到教学目标的?
8. 您认为孩子在英文绘本课堂中可以学到什么?
9. 您认为使用英文绘本教学的好处是什么?
10. 您认为使用英文绘本教学的挑战有哪些?

## 第二次访谈提纲:

1. 请您解说一下我所观察的那节课的教学目标。
2. 请您详细解说一下那节课上您所组织的课堂活动以及英文绘本在其中发挥的作用。
3. 那节课上您觉得有哪些方面对于您而言有一定难度?
4. 您还有哪些关于使用绘本教授幼儿英语方面的信息想告诉我?

## APPENDIX D: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

1. How does the teacher begin the lesson and introduce a picture book?
2. What characterizes the learning environment when the teacher uses the picture book?
3. Does the teacher use English or both English and Chinese to instruct children when they use the picture book?
4. What teaching approach does the teacher use to instruct children by using the picture book? What specific activities does the teacher involve students in when using the picture book? What are the functions of the picture book in these activities? How does the teacher encourage students to interact with the text and each other, if she or he does so?
5. How does the teacher encourage children to use the target language by using the picture book? How does the teacher correct children's language mistakes, if any?
6. What elements of the Five Big Ideas (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) appear in this class? How does the teacher instruct students in any of these elements by using the picture book?
7. Does the teacher stimulate students' motivation? If yes, how?
8. How does the teacher use the picture book to develop children's cognition development, if at all?
9. How does the teacher use the picture book to develop children's cultural awareness, if at all?
10. Is there anything I observed in this class that is different from what the teacher told me in the interview? If so, what is different?