

The Dis/Continuity of the Implementation of Play-Based Learning From Kindergarten 2 to Year 1 in a Maltese School

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of play-based learning as a pedagogical tool within Early Childhood Education in one school in Malta, focusing on the continuation of play-based learning from Kindergarten 2 to Year 1. It explores its implementation and identifies possible challenges encountered during its execution. This qualitative research methodology involved interviews with an Early Years Educational Officer, as well as two Kindergarten 2 educators, and two Year 1 teachers from one state school. Two main themes emerged, namely the implementation of play-based learning and the challenges within the context of a Maltese school. The findings indicated that educators valued the importance of play in education, but identified challenges such as lack of resources, time constraints, and pupils' behaviour. The study provides suggestions for the School Leadership Team, Early Years Education Officers, and educators to address these challenges and enhance the implementation of play-based learning in Early Childhood Education.

Keywords

Benefits of Play, Challenges of Play-Based Learning, Early Childhood Education, Play-Based Learning

Introduction

What is Play?

The definition of play is very broad, covering a wide spectrum of activities (Wood & Attfield, 2013) and is considered very significant in children's development (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Play can be described as participating in freely chosen

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creative and joyful activities that focus mainly on means rather than objectives (Ashiabi, 2007). It is regarded as the driving force for children's learning because it allows them to become active explorers of the world around them whilst constructing new knowledge (Stevens et al., 2014).

Although play-based learning (PBL) is considered important for learning, there seems to be a lack of implementation and appreciation within the local scenario. Sollars's (2006) study suggests that Maltese children are not provided with enough opportunities to engage in high-quality creative and leisure activities. Within the school context, Year 1 (Y1) educators who are aware of the value of kindergarten practices that focus on PBL are better equipped to provide holistic education that includes PBL, offering a seamless continuity in the pupils' learning experiences (Sollars & Mifsud, 2016).

What is PBL?

PBL combines play with educational pedagogy. Its main purpose is to allow children to acquire knowledge whilst playing (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). It also consolidates various aspects related to skill acquisition, namely cognitive, social, creative, emotional, and physical skills (Zosh et al., 2017). This type of learning allows pupils to investigate through trial and error (Pyle & Danniels, 2016), helping them enrich their learning experience (Taylor & Boyer, 2019).

Adopting a PBL approach requires a shift in how educators operate in the classroom (Nolan & Paatsch, 2017). Nolan and Paatsch (2017) identify five main areas in the learning environment that can undergo modifications to facilitate PBL, namely the resources provided, classroom layout, the learning experiences offered, the educators' interactions, and the expected behaviour of the pupils. The concept of quality in PBL encourages educators to merge conventional notions linked to play with fresh ideas about the significance of social interaction, communication, modelling, and personal relations in children's education (Edwards, 2017).

Theoretical Influences on PBL

Throughout the unfolding history of human life, play has been a significant aspect for all ages and cultures. According to Wood (2010), PBL was already being used in the 1700s. However, it gained considerable momentum in the 20th century, especially with the contributions of Montessori and Dewey (Platz & Arellano, 2011). Montessori and Dewey argue that Early Childhood Education (ECE) should shift to a child-centred approach, promoting active learning. Montessori (1912) emphasises the importance of addressing the pupils' uniqueness, nurturing their potential through holistic learning experiences,

giving children a choice, and allowing them to work at their own pace. Meanwhile, Dewey (1938) recommends that schools offer learning activities that represent real-life scenarios, allowing pupils to experience a range of social contexts, as opposed to abstract, traditional learning processes. This creates a community atmosphere where pupils learn and solve problems together (Williams, 2017).

During the second half of the 20th century, PBL was heavily compromised by the political, economic, and social pressures that prioritised product-driven results to produce a future workforce (Dahlberg et al., 1999). The concept of using PBL in the primary sector saw a major shift during the early 2000s, especially since various countries like Canada, Sweden, China, the United Arab Emirates, and New Zealand recognised the benefits of implementing such practices (Danniels & Pyle, 2018).

Another significant theorist in modern education is Froebel. Froebel's theory states that play is children's main source of learning (Bruce, 2012). This theory emphasises the importance of real-life, hands-on, multisensory and kinaesthetic experiences, which form the foundation of children's development (Bruce, 2012), allowing them to progress at their own pace (Tovey, 2020). According to Bruce (2012), play is a resource that remains deeply rooted in children as they grow older because it fosters attitudes that support future learning, ensuring that knowledge is integrated rather than disjointed and compartmentalised.

PBL Within the Local Context

The National Curriculum Framework and the Learning Outcomes Framework

In the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE, 2012) emphasises the importance of fostering learning through play by deploying cross-curricular themes that instil active involvement and holistic development. This approach helps pupils contextualise knowledge in a practical manner. In addition, it establishes the competencies, knowledge, values, and attitudes that pupils are expected to develop, including a strong sense of identity, positive self-image, social skills, effective communication skills, and a positive attitude towards learning (MEDE, 2012). Therefore, the NCF provides the foundation for a flexible learning environment, encouraging learning experiences that promote lifelong learning (MEDE, 2012).

The NCF also encourages schools to adopt a child-centred approach that inspires active participation (MEDE, 2012) and a smooth transition between the different stages of education, namely early childhood, primary, and secondary

education, by presenting a seamless curriculum (Attard Tonna & Bugeja, 2016). With the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF), educators were given the possibility to utilise their professional expertise to interpret the broad learning outcomes and implement the required practices (Attard Tonna & Bugeja, 2016). Moreover, the LOF provides schools with the flexibility of designing custom-made learning programmes that cater for the specific needs of the pupils (Schembri, 2020). These versatile learning outcomes allow educators in the early years sector to focus on the general competencies that establish the foundations for lifelong learning (Eurydice, 2021).

The Emergent Curriculum

MEDE (2012) encourages early childhood educators to foster pupils' interests by creating a stimulating environment in which they can observe the latter's development and devise methods to scaffold learning through an emergent curriculum approach. The precursors of the emergent curriculum emphasised various salient factors that could create a context where pupils are given the right stimuli and environment to develop holistically. Researchers like Piaget (1965), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1996), and Malaguzzi (1993) established the foundations for such emphasis. For instance, Bruner (1996) sheds light on the importance of rooted experience and self-discovery to facilitate the learning process. Malaguzzi's (1993) theories complement these approaches by emphasising the importance of the context and the educator's assistance throughout the educational process, especially when helping pupils explore their personal growth.

The emergent curriculum approach is based on play and child-initiated learning (Jones, 2012; Stacey, 2009). It strongly relies on educators' initiative to notice their pupils' queries and devise creative ways to develop their interests by building on their diverse strengths (Jones, 2012; Malaguzzi, 1993). Early childhood educators should document this learning process to understand the pupils' learning curves and address particular areas that require improvement (Jones, 2012). This helps educators instil further curiosity and a yearning for knowledge in their pupils (Jones, 2012). As a result, planning should be flexible and in constant development (Stacey, 2009).

The flexibility of the emergent curriculum is reflected in the LOF, which allows educators to develop tailor-made programmes to suit their pupils' needs whilst addressing the learning outcomes, thus giving them curricular autonomy (MEDE, 2015). Educators must also seize any opportunity of spontaneous learning and invaluable teachable moments arising from play activities (MEDE, 2015). Within

the local context, the emergent curriculum started being implemented during the scholastic year 2018–2019 in Kindergarten 1, 2019–2020 in Kindergarten 2 (KG2) (Eurydice, 2020) and 2022–2023 in Y1.

Significance of the Study

Play is widely acknowledged to have a favourable influence on children's overall development (Aras, 2015). Thus, this research study aims to elucidate the extent of the implementation of PBL across KG2 and Y1 classes in one particular school, and the challenges that educators encounter during this process. Moreover, the data acquired from this study will provide suggestions on how PBL can be improved within the school.

Aims

The central aim of this study is to shed light on the challenges of PBL in two KG2 classes and two Y1 classes in one specific school within a college network in Malta. The objectives connected to this aim should reveal instrumental information about how the arising challenges can be addressed to make PBL more effective, based on how PBL is being implemented.

Methodology

Research Rationale and Purpose

According to Singh (2019), research studies have three core purposes: to provide knowledge to the researcher as a professional in the field of study, to describe events and situations, and to explain the reason why some things might occur. The researcher's personal interest in PBL stems from the researcher's 14 years of teaching experience in the Early Years. Throughout the years, the researcher has observed pupils flourish whilst immersed in playful, hands-on experiences. Hence, the researcher is interested in analysing the continuity of this good practice from KG2 to Y1.

According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2013), the most common way of formulating research questions is by spotting gaps in existing literature. After reviewing local and foreign literature, the researcher located an overlooked area and decided to investigate the dis/continuation of PBL across KG2 and Y1 classes. This type of gap-spotting is referred to as neglect spotting (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013).

The process of analysing this dis/continuation involved obtaining information about how PBL is being implemented and its barriers. The information acquired from the Early Years Education Officer (EO) helped the researcher understand what is expected of early childhood educators, the support provided by EOs, and PBL's implementation within this transitional period.

Research Questions

For this study, two research questions were formulated, namely:

1. In what ways, if any, is PBL being implemented in KG2 and Y1 classes?
2. What challenges do educators encounter when implementing PBL, if any?

Research Context and Participants

For this study, two KG2 and two Y1 educators from a total of nine and five educators in each year group, respectively, were chosen to compare their implementation of PBL in their respective year groups. Additionally, an EO was also selected to substantiate the knowledge about the subject and analyse what is expected of educators. An EO is a designated official focusing on the educational process of pupils within an assigned area of education.

After ethical approval was obtained from the Institute for Education and the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability, the selection process was initiated. A local Maltese state school was randomly chosen using the simple random sampling technique. Following this, an email was sent to the Head of School (HOS), outlining the study's aims and process, and requesting permission to conduct the study with the educators. Following the HOS's approval, the Assistant HOS approached two KG2 and two Y1 educators interested in participating in this research. Subsequently, an information letter and consent form were sent to the participants.

Similarly, an EO was selected for this study through the same random number generator. The selected EO was contacted via email, and an information letter and consent form were sent.

Once the consent forms were signed, the interviews were scheduled to be held online via Zoom according to the participants' availability. Each educator was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Table 1 summarises the demographics of the study.

Table 1
Demographics of the Study

Pseudonym	Position	Years of Teaching Experience	Qualifications
Emily	KG2 Educator	10	Diploma in ECE
Anne	KG2 Educator	10	Diploma in ECE
Charlotte	Y1 Teacher	9	B.A. in History M.A. in History PGCE in Primary Education
Jane	Y1 Teacher	4	B.Ed. in ECE

The use of semi-structured interviews offered invaluable data collected from educators and the EO, enabling an analysis of the methods used to implement PBL. The interviews substantiated information about the barriers educators might encounter and identified possible areas of improvement for this learning strategy. Moreover, the interview with the EO shed light on the approaches and strategies expected of educators.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the research is ethically sound, the researcher made sure to safeguard the participants' wellbeing, keep data and personal information safe, and represent the participants honestly (Mortensen, 2021). Hence, all necessary ethical considerations and procedures were adopted to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity throughout this study. In addition, the data was stored in a password-protected hard disk exclusively accessed by the researcher to ensure data protection.

Information letters were sent to the director of the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) and the HOS. Once approval was obtained from the director of DLAP and the HOS, the participants were given an information letter and a consent form outlining the study's aims and purposes. The participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and were informed of their rights, including the right to opt out of the study at any point during the research.

The semi-structured interviews were recorded, and the data collected was transcribed for analysis. The information gathered from the participants was solely used for this research. The participants were advised not to include any private or personal details during the interviews, and pseudonyms were assigned to preserve their anonymity (see Table 1). To conceal the identity of the EO, the school's identity was omitted throughout the research (Schembri & Sciberras, 2020). In addition, the researcher avoided giving any personal opinions throughout the interviews to

ensure that the participants were providing feedback based on their opinions and experiences rather than what they thought was expected of them (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Selection of Interview Questions

For the interviews, the researcher designed a set of predetermined open-ended questions to support emergent dialogue during interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and to obtain relevant data from KG2 and Y1 educators, and the EO. The questions used during these interviews were aligned by addressing the same areas. However, each question was oriented towards the participants' specific role to obtain relevant data of their own points of view. After the interviews, the researcher noted themes and patterns that stemmed from the responses, and clustered the items into relevant categories (Cohen et al., 2018).

The interview questions were split into four main areas, namely:

1. PBL and its Benefits
2. PBL within the Local Context
3. Role of Educators in PBL
4. Educators' Perspectives on PBL

Data Collection

This research utilises both primary and secondary sources. Semi-structured interviews were used as primary sources, while different studies were used as secondary sources. The primary sources provided first-hand authentic and contextual data about the educators' ideas and experiences within the field of study. Secondary sources played a crucial role in identifying the main area of interest, formulating the research questions, adopting the ideal research methods, and designing the field questions for the interviews.

According to Creswell (2014), the researcher needs to establish the importance given to the qualitative or quantitative aspect of the research. For this study, the qualitative aspect was central in acquiring factual information from professionals working in the field. The research focused on collecting data about the methods educators adopt to implement PBL and examples of challenges encountered by educators during its execution.

To limit bias during the interviews, the researcher responded with prompts by using the exact words uttered by the interviewees, especially when asking for

further clarification (DiCicco–Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This method proved helpful to avoid partiality.

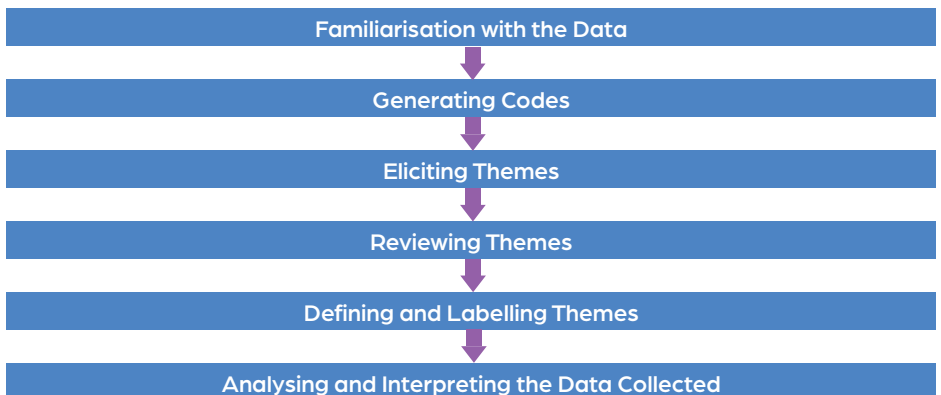
Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data gathered through the online semi-structured interviews was analysed using a reflexive thematic approach. Hawkins (2017) outlines that adopting a thematic analysis allows researchers to identify “recognisable recurring topics, ideas, or patterns (themes) within the data” (p. 1757). This was done by generating codes that identify specific insights that arise from the data obtained through the interviews (Delve & Limpaecher, 2024). This process requires numerous readings of the data to facilitate the identification of recurrent patterns. The themes were identified from one interview transcript, similar themes were identified by reviewing the other interview transcripts (Hawkins, 2017), ensuring that the themes matched the research objectives and questions.

The data collected during the interviews was transcribed, interpreted, and analysed through an inductive process (Cohen et al., 2018). The researcher elicited specific patterns and themes through this process, explaining the data objectively and effectively (Cohen et al., 2018), without overlooking the context and possible biases entailed through the process of analysis (Delve & Limpaecher, 2024). This provided sufficient information to corroborate occurrences, leading to broader generalisations and concepts (Thomas, 2010). The steps taken throughout the reflexive thematic analysis are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Reflexive Thematic Analysis Method



Note. The figure identifies the steps taken throughout the Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

The interviews with KG2 and Y1 educators, and the EO were examined by adopting an interpretative approach. Interpretative researchers maintain that reality is constructed through people's experiences of the world around them (Thomas, 2010). This approach allows researchers to understand their subjects' actions in context (Cohen et al., 2018), thus enabling in-depth analysis and examination of the data according to its relevance to this study's research questions.

Limitations of the Chosen Data Collection Method

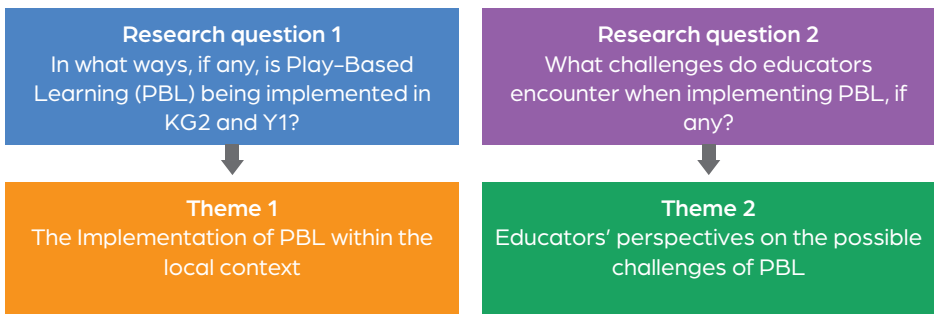
One main limitation of the selected data collection methodology is that the interviews were conducted online. According to Howlett (2021), online interviews hinder the interviewer from deriving valuable information from the interviewee's body language. Moreover, online interviews limit the interviewer's ability to build a rapport with the interviewee (Van Zeeland et al., 2021). This was especially felt during the interview with the EO, whose camera was not functioning, thus rendering the interview very impersonal. In addition, there were some audio issues during certain instances, making some words or phrases hard to decipher.

Research Findings

The main scope of the interviews was to shed light on the practices adopted by KG2 and Y1 educators whilst implementing a PBL approach. The interviews also revealed the challenges educators encounter when utilising this practice. A reflexive thematic approach was adopted to analyse the data, from which two main themes emerged, and are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Research Questions in Relation to the Themes



Note. The figure displays the two themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

Theme 1: PBL Within the Local Context

Through the interviews, it emerged that there is a significant difference in the implementation of PBL between KG2 and Y1. This is because, in kindergarten, pupils are given much more freedom to engage in play activities, whereas in Y1, play is restricted due to the content workload.

Both KG2 educators try to balance the school day between free play, during which they provide pupils with different resources, and semi-structured play, where they select the focus of the activity, such as using blocks for counting or playdough for letter and number formation. Nevertheless, when discussing the applicability of PBL, Emily admitted that the approach is affected by teacher-led activities that the school imposes.

When the implementation of PBL with the Y1 teachers was discussed, Charlotte said that, when planning the classroom layout, a “space in the classroom [is] dedicated solely for PBL”, where the pupils can engage in play during their free time through the provision of different manipulatives. Charlotte tries to integrate PBL in almost every subject by dedicating the first 15 minutes of each lesson to PBL. Charlotte also believes that certain topics, such as mathematics, languages, and science, are taught better when involving PBL.

Likewise, Jane firmly believes that PBL is “an enriching experience” and “a holistic way of teaching”. One can argue that such strategies allow educators to create engaging activities that are more relevant to the pupils, thus making the learning process more productive. Although the implementation of PBL enriches the process of education, it also involves intensive preparation. In fact, Jane argued that, at times, PBL is more challenging to adopt for subjects that are more discussion-oriented, such as religion. In the interviews, it was revealed that both Y1 teachers assign PBL homework, including online games and the use of manipulatives, such as creating different shapes using lollipop sticks.

According to the EO, in Malta, a blend of play-based approaches is implemented, including the Montessori approach. During the interview, the EO revealed that currently, EOs are putting more emphasis on training educators to be more responsive to children's interests and needs. Thus, it is fundamental for educators to observe the children's curiosities to stimulate their learning process through activities that stem from their personal backgrounds or likings. Educators may maximise these interests by “turn[ing] [them] into a project, where the children can continue to explore further”, thus encouraging cross-curricular learning.

Table 2
Challenges of Implementing Play-Based Learning

	Lack of resources	Pupils' behaviour	Lack of classroom space	Time limitations	Number of pupils
Jane	x			x	x
Charlotte	x	x		x	
Anne	x	x	x		
Emily	x	x	x		

On the other hand, the EO described the transition to Y1 as “dramatic”. This is caused by the “one size fits all copybook or handout” approach. However, educators are trying to move away from this approach. This is supported by Sollars and Mifsud’s (2016) local study, which found that in Y1 academic performance is more valued than PBL. Hence, according to the EO, adopting a “much more playful” approach that is “similar to kindergarten” is being promoted. Despite this, EOs still face resistance from educators who do not yet understand the significance of play. Indeed, educators’ backgrounds might affect the perception and implementation of PBL. The resistance to PBL could also be caused by the influence of School Leadership Teams (SLTs) and parents’ negative perceptions or lack of understanding of PBL.

Theme 2: Educators’ Perspectives on the Possible Challenges of PBL

Table 2 outlines the challenges encountered by educators when implementing PBL.

The greatest challenge experienced by all four educators in their school was the lack of resources available. In Anne’s opinion, it is the major inhibiting factor that keeps educators from implementing PBL. Jane also added that, given that educators need to plan for pupils’ diverse needs, they incur great expenses when buying particular games that address their pupils’ requirements.

Behavioural challenges posed by the pupils were another contributing factor that was deemed a barrier to the implementation of PBL by KG2 and Y1 educators. Jane added that the large number of pupils in the classroom makes it very difficult to give one-to-one attention. Unfortunately, given the established ratios of pupils per educator, implementing PBL strategies might lead to an increase in educators’ workload. In addition, both KG2 educators agreed that the lack of classroom

space does not allow educators to set up stimulating areas where pupils can engage in play. Structural challenges, the children's behaviour (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019), and the lack of resources (Hunter, 2019) were also common challenges that emerged in studies conducted with primary school teachers overseas.

Time limits were highlighted by both Y1 teachers as another challenge deemed to affect the applicability of PBL. They associated this challenge with the vast learning outcomes that need to be covered. This issue was also reflected in Hunter's (2019) study with primary school teachers in New Zealand, who argued that their workload restricts them from engaging in PBL.

Interestingly, these challenges were not reflected in the EO's interview. The EO's interpretation of the challenges faced by educators vis-à-vis the implementation of PBL was mainly due to the postponement of the implementation of the emergent curriculum in Y1 classrooms, given that training was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have affected the transition from KG2 to Y1, given that during KG2 these pupils were being immersed in PBL approaches, whereas in Y1, they faced a more rigid, traditional learning context. The EO specified that the aim is to have a cross-curricular education "that is more playful, play-based, and that is in tune with the children's interests, abilities, skills and needs".

The EO also remarked that KG2 educators had to shift their outlook of the children, viewing them as competent and independent pupils, as opposed to previous teaching styles that made educators perceive them as thoroughly dependent pupils. As Malaguzzi (1993) advocates, children are very ambitious and have the right to take risks and to be active and imaginative. By recognising their strengths, educators would be giving them the freedom to flourish by making them feel valued.

Discussion

One of the major recommendations arising from all educators was to have more support from the EOs, SLTs, and parents. Charlotte believes that a more conscious effort from all the stakeholders would help with the implementation of PBL, especially since the latter requires a major "shift in the mentality". In addition, Charlotte believes that professional development sessions would be beneficial. Moreover, although Charlotte feels supported by the SLT, EOs, and pupils' parents, assistance is only provided when requested. Likewise, Jane recommended more support from EOs, as well as meetings with field experts to discuss their current

practices. Emily also stated that obtaining more information about dealing with challenging behaviour, as well as more ideas about relevant activities, would be of great support. Moreover, Jane also remarked that SLTs could also support educators by compiling and providing a list of online resources that can be used as part of PBL.

Meanwhile, Anne believes that there should be more parental awareness of the importance of PBL in kindergarten. Furthermore, both KG2 educators argued that the Education Department should provide more resources for educators. Emily added that an increase in awareness of PBL classroom practices would result in schools providing more appropriate resources. Meanwhile, Jane suggested that more Learning Support Educators and classroom assistants should be employed to support different groups of children.

On the other hand, the EOs are already giving small group or individual support within schools; however, this support is limited, because there are only two EOs, and they support all the schools in Malta and Gozo. There have also been some issues with organising support sessions in some schools due to logistical reasons that include lack of classroom replacements.

The EOs have been involving SLTs and parents to help them understand the early years pedagogies. They have also been communicating with other EOs of different subjects to “promote continuous assessment in forms that are authentic through play” across all the subjects.

Summary of the Findings

The data gathered was analysed through two main themes, namely the implementation of PBL across KG2 and Y1 classes, and the challenges experienced by educators during its implementation. The execution of PBL was examined through the first theme. PBL practices seemed to feature mostly in KG2 classes. Indeed, the KG2 educators seemed confident in implementing this practice with their pupils and had a clear vision of how to include it in their teaching strategies. It was shown that even Y1 teachers make efforts to incorporate PBL in their practices; however, they encounter considerable limitations. The limitations pronounced by the Y1 teachers included pressure from the current syllabus and a lack of training about the emergent curriculum.

In the second theme, the educators voiced their concerns about the daily

challenges they experience when implementing PBL. The two main challenges were the lack of resources available and the pupils' challenging behaviour. Other barriers included the lack of classroom space, time constraints, and the large number of pupils in class. The maximum number of pupils in KG2 classes is 19, and in Y1 is 28; however, when there is a child with special educational needs, the number of pupils is reduced to 16 and 24 respectively (Eurydice, 2022). It was interesting to note that the EO did not mention these challenges. The EO's main concerns included the lack of proper use of outdoor spaces, both within and outside the school premises.

Meanwhile, the educators argued that parents, SLTs, and EOs should be more aware of the educators' concerns and suggested an increase in their one-to-one support. Some educators also showed an interest in participating in Professional Development sessions to increase their knowledge about the implementation of PBL.

Conclusion

This study aimed to obtain a clear picture of two KG2 educators and two Y1 teachers' perceptions of PBL within one particular school in Malta. It revealed the extent to which PBL is being implemented across the respective year groups and investigated the challenges encountered by educators during their practice, allowing them to voice their suggestions to improve PBL's vital role in education. This study also sheds light on how the implementation of PBL can be made more efficient within one specific school in Malta.

Implications for Practice

All stakeholders involved in the pupils' educational journey should strive to provide the best possible learning experiences to their pupils. SLTs and EOs should communicate with the educators to discuss any suggestions that the latter might have, provide support, and discuss the acquisition of meaningful, high-quality resources to maximise the pupils' educational experience. It is recommended that SLTs and EOs schedule recurrent meetings and in-class visits to evaluate each class's individual needs and obtain feedback from educators. A recommendation for early childhood educators is to observe their pupils while they are engaged in play. Through careful observation, educators are better informed about the pupils' individual educational needs so that they can implement additional activities as needed. Observing pupils whilst playing would also place educators in a better position to discuss their pedagogical approaches and specific requirements with SLTs and EOs to enhance their pupils' educational experience.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study pertains to the fact that it is based on the practices and perspectives of educators from only one school. The small sample size of two KG2 educators and two Y1 educators from a total of nine and five educators in each year group, respectively, does not allow sufficient information to be generalised about the school. Having participants from different schools would have brought additional perspectives of educators from different environments. Another limitation is that no in-class observations were conducted due to the limited time allocated for this study. For this reason, the data collection process relied entirely on interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that future researchers investigate the implementation of PBL as a continued practice from KG2 to Y1 classrooms on a national scale across all Maltese schools to analyse the extent of the implementation of PBL and the challenges encountered by educators. This would be beneficial for all stakeholders, allowing them to establish a general overview of the local scenario, identify any areas of weakness, and address them accordingly for the benefit of pupils and educators alike.

Notes on Contributor

Tiziana Camilleri holds a B.Ed (Hons) First Class in Primary Education, and a BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development with distinction. Camilleri has been working as an educator for the past 14 years, with a special interest in early childhood education. She is also a qualified dance teacher, holding an Associate in both Ballet and Freestyle with distinction, through the National Association of Teachers of Dancing, UK.

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