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THE CURRENT STATUS OF ORGANIZING ART CREATION ACTIVITIES FOR FIVE- TO SIX-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN USING NATURAL MATERIALS IN PRESCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Organizing art creation activities for five- to six-year-old children using natural materials in preschools contributes to the development of creative thinking, competencies, and aesthetic emotions, while also fostering motor skills and essential life skills. The implementation of these activities needs to follow a structured process with clearly defined content, accompanied by appropriate teaching methods, pedagogical measures, and specific supporting conditions. A case study conducted in preschools in Xuan Truong commune shows that these activities have achieved notable results; however, there remain certain limitations related to teachers' competencies, instructional methods, and implementation conditions. Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of organizing art creation activities using natural materials, it is necessary for teachers and school administrators to address these shortcomings and improve the overall quality of educational practices.

KEYWORDS: Organization; Art Creation Activities; Natural Materials

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials (such as fresh leaves, dried leaves, pebbles, seeds, twigs, seashells, and clam shells) plays a particularly important role in promoting the holistic development of children in preschools, including physical, cognitive, intellectual, imaginative, and socio-emotional domains. Through these Art Creation Activities, children are provided with opportunities to explore, experience, and interact directly with the natural environment, thereby stimulating creative thinking, enriching imagination, and enhancing aesthetic perception. In addition, such activities contribute to the development of fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and practical manipulation abilities. More importantly, the use of Natural Materials helps foster children's love for nature, raise awareness of environmental protection, and create positive emotional experiences in the learning process [1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8].

From an educational perspective, organizing Art Creation Activities using Natural Materials requires a systematic approach, including clearly defined objectives, appropriate content selection, and the application of suitable teaching methods and pedagogical measures. Teachers play a crucial role in designing, guiding, and facilitating these activities to ensure that children actively engage and achieve the expected learning outcomes. However, in current practice, many preschool teachers still face difficulties and challenges in organizing these activities due to limitations in professional competency, teaching methods, and available conditions for implementation. Therefore, this article aims to examine the current status of organizing Art Creation Activities using Natural Materials in preschools, thereby providing a basis for proposing solutions to improve the effectiveness of this educational approach in practice.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Methodological Framework

The study employed theoretical research methods to examine relevant theories on organizing Art Creation Activities and organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials, including implementation processes, content, and pedagogical approaches applied by teachers to enhance the effectiveness of these activities. These theoretical foundations served as the basis for investigating and evaluating the current status of organizing Art Creation Activities using Natural Materials in preschools in Xuan Truong commune, Ninh Binh province [1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8]. In addition, the study applied a case study approach and survey methods using questionnaires administered to school administrators and preschool teachers to collect data on the current situation.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews and analysis of activity products were conducted to clarify the research findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. Quantitative data were processed using a five-point Likert scale to evaluate the results of the survey on the current status of organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials in preschools in Xuan Truong commune, Ninh Binh province.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of Competency in Concept Formation of Sets, Quantity, and Counting among Early Childhood Education Students

According to Nguyen Thi My Hanh (2022), Natural Materials are defined as familiar and vivid artistic materials readily available in nature, possessing diverse aesthetic characteristics and unique artistic properties that are suitable for children to explore and use in creating models and assembled products, thereby expressing their emotions, thoughts, and artistic abilities [2]. Natural Materials originate from various sources, including plants, animals, minerals, and geological components, such as leaves, flowers, fruits, stones, wood, metals, natural rubber, clay, petroleum, and natural gas.

Organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials is an educational approach in which teachers utilize these natural resources (e.g., leaves, branches, flowers,

seeds, pebbles, and stones) to guide children in creating artistic products. Through these Art Creation Activities, children are encouraged to develop creativity, foster interest in the natural environment, and enhance their cognitive abilities, skills, and socio-emotional development [5][6][7][8]. Therefore, Natural Materials serve as essential pedagogical means that enable teachers to effectively organize Art Creation Activities, contributing to the holistic development of children's personality in accordance with educational objectives.

To effectively organize Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials, teachers need to follow a systematic process.

Step 1: Planning content, forms of organization, and preparing materials [5][6][7][8]. At this stage, teachers determine the content of the Art Creation Activities, such as drawing, modeling, cutting, or tearing, thereby identifying the type, theme, and form of the activities and selecting appropriate Natural Materials. Teachers collect materials such as wood pieces, leaves, dried flowers, seeds, shells, sand, pebbles, straw, and vegetables (e.g., carrots, potatoes, radishes), either by preparing them directly or encouraging parental support. Some materials need to be processed to ensure safety and hygiene, and all materials should be classified systematically to match the activity content.

Step 2: Organizing activities for children to explore and become familiar with Natural Materials [5][6][7][8]. Teachers create opportunities for children to interact directly with Natural Materials through touching, holding, and observing, using guiding questions to help them recognize names, shapes, colors, and characteristics. Games can be organized for children to classify materials based on features such as color, shape, and size. Through guided inquiry, children are encouraged to explore the characteristics and uses of materials with questions such as "What is this?", "What are its characteristics?", and "How can it be used in Art Creation Activities?".

Step 3: Organizing Art Creation Activities for children [5][6][7][8]. Teachers introduce specific themes and assign tasks, guiding children to apply appropriate techniques to create artistic products, such as making animals from shells and seeds or designing outfits from leaves. Teachers provide suggestions on how to use materials effectively while encouraging children to express their own ideas freely. In this process, teachers act as facilitators, observing and supporting children through guiding questions to help them develop creative ideas.

Step 4: Displaying and evaluating products [5][6][7][8]. Teachers organize the display of children's products in an art corner, allowing children to observe their own and their peers' work, thereby fostering confidence. Evaluation should focus on positive feedback and encouragement to stimulate creativity and interest in Art Creation Activities, while also encouraging children to share their ideas and learn from one another.

The effectiveness of organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials depends on several essential conditions [5][6][7][8].

(1) Conditions related to Natural Materials: Natural Materials must be carefully selected in terms of type and origin to ensure their suitability with the content and forms of the Art Creation Activities. These materials should possess aesthetic value and contribute to representing the characteristics of objects and phenomena. In addition, they must ensure safety for children during use, be easy to handle, and be stored and displayed in a scientific manner that meets classroom hygiene requirements while maintaining aesthetic quality.

(2) Conditions related to teachers: Teachers need to have a thorough understanding of Natural Materials, including their properties and educational value for children. They must be capable of designing plans for using Natural Materials in Art Creation Activities, classifying and preparing materials systematically to facilitate children's participation. Teachers should also possess strong competencies in organizing Art Creation Activities and applying appropriate pedagogical methods to guide and support children in using materials effectively. Moreover, teachers need artistic skills and instructional techniques that ensure scientific, educational, and aesthetic values, thereby contributing to children's holistic development. Creating a supportive learning environment that fosters creativity, emotional expression, and artistic competence is also essential. In addition, teachers must be able to provide constructive evaluation and feedback to motivate children's engagement and enhance their creativity.

(3) Conditions related to children: Children need to demonstrate interest and active participation in Art Creation Activities, cooperate with teachers, and effectively manipulate Natural Materials to create artistic products.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A survey was conducted with 98 administrators and teachers from four preschools in Xuan Truong commune to assess the implementation of the content and process of organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials in preschools. The results are presented as follows:

Table 3.1 Current Status of the Implementation of the Process and Content of Organizing Art Creation Activities for Five- to Six-Year-Old Children Using Natural Materials in Preschools in Xuan Truong Commune

Competency in concept formation of sets, quantity, and counting for children among students	Performance Results					Mean	Rank
	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent		
1. Planning content, forms, and preparing materials for Art Creation Activities							

1.1. Identifying the content of Art Creation Activities	0	0	33	33	32	3.99	1
1.2. Identifying forms and activity themes	0	0	40	34	24	3.84	2
1.3. Preparing appropriate Natural Materials	0	13	36	32	17	3.54	3
1.4. Cleaning, classifying, and storing Natural Materials	0	12	38	33	15	3.52	4
Overall Mean						3.72	
2. Organizing activities for children to explore Natural Materials							
2.1. Familiarizing children with Natural Materials	0	0	34	35	29	3.94	1
2.2. Organizing games for classifying Natural Materials to be used	0	0	39	34	25	3.85	2
2.3. Helping children recognize the characteristics and roles of Natural Materials used in Art Creation Activities	0	10	38	33	17	3.58	3
						3.79	
3. Organizing Art Creation Activities for children							
3.1. Teachers introduce the content and activity themes	0	0	24	35	39	4.15	1
3.2. Assigning Art Creation tasks to children	0	0	23	38	37	4.14	2

3.3. Providing guidance and support for children in using Natural Materials	0	0	30	35	33	4.03	3
3.4. Encouraging children's creativity to complete their products	0	8	36	35	19	3.66	4
						3.99	
4. Displaying and evaluating products							
4.1. Organizing the display of products in the art corner	0	0	35	33	30	3.95	2
4.2. Guiding children in self-assessment	0	14	42	42	11	3.39	3
4.3. Using peer assessment for children's products	0	15	43	43	10	3.36	4
4.4. Teachers' feedback and evaluation of children's products	0	0	20	20	39	4.19	1
Overall average score						3.72	

Regarding the preparation stage:

The survey results indicate that the preparation for organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children in preschools in Xuan Truong commune has been implemented; however, the effectiveness remains at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 3.72. The findings also reveal a lack of consistency among the components of the preparation stage. Specifically, two aspects achieved the highest evaluation results: identifying the content of Art Creation Activities ($M = 3.99$) and identifying forms and activity themes ($M = 3.84$). Notably, no respondents rated these aspects as weak; however, a considerable number of responses (33/98 and 40/98, respectively) were at the average level, suggesting that teachers should pay further attention to improving these areas. An analysis of teachers' educational documents shows that lesson plans clearly and specifically identify themes, content, and the use of Natural Materials in organizing Art Creation Activities.

In contrast, two aspects received lower evaluation results, although still at a fair level: preparing appropriate Natural Materials ($M = 3.54$) and cleaning, classifying, and storing Natural Materials ($M = 3.52$). Notably, these aspects also received “weak” ratings from 13/98 (13.26%) and 12/98 (12.24%) respondents, respectively. Interviews with teachers from several preschools, including Xuan Ninh, Xuan Truong, and Xuan Ngoc, revealed that while teachers are able to identify activity themes and content, they encounter the greatest difficulties in preparing Natural Materials, particularly due to limited time for collection and challenges in preserving materials. These constraints negatively affect the effectiveness of organizing Art Creation Activities for children.

Organization of children’s exploration of Natural Materials:

The survey results show that the stage of organizing children to become familiar with and explore Natural Materials was evaluated more positively than the preparation stage, with an overall mean score of 3.79, indicating a fairly good level of implementation. However, the results among specific contents are not uniform. The two highest-rated aspects were introducing children to Natural Materials ($M = 3.94$) and organizing games that enable children to classify the materials to be used ($M = 3.85$), both at a fairly good level with no “weak” ratings reported. In contrast, the lowest-rated aspect in this stage was organizing activities for children to recognize the characteristics and roles of Natural Materials used in Art Creation Activities, with a mean score of 3.58. Although still rated as fairly good, this result is close to the average level, and notably, 10 out of 98 respondents (10.20%) rated this aspect as weak.

Organization of Art Creation Activities for children and product display and evaluation:

At the stage of organizing Art Creation Activities, teachers and administrators reported higher implementation results compared to the previous stages, with a mean score of 3.99, indicating a relatively high level of effectiveness. Nevertheless, differences still exist among specific aspects. The highest-rated activity was teachers presenting the content and themes ($M = 4.15$), followed closely by assigning tasks to children ($M = 4.14$), both with no weak ratings. The lowest-rated aspect was encouraging children’s creativity in completing products ($M = 3.66$), which, although fairly good, still had 8 out of 98 responses (8.16%) at the weak level.

Regarding the stage of product display and evaluation, the overall mean score was 3.72, indicating a fairly good level; however, inconsistencies remain, particularly in evaluation-related activities. Displaying children’s products in the art corner was rated fairly good ($M = 3.95$) with no weak ratings. Teacher evaluation of children’s products received the highest score in this stage ($M = 4.19$). However, two aspects were only rated at an average level: guiding children in self-assessment ($M = 3.39$) and using peer assessment for children’s products ($M = 3.36$). These aspects also had relatively high proportions of weak ratings, with 14/98 (10.42%) and 15/98 (10.53%) respectively, indicating notable limitations that need improvement.

Interviews with teachers from the surveyed preschools, specifically Teacher 2, Teacher 3, and Teacher 4 from Xuan Ninh Preschool; Teacher 6 and Teacher 7 from Xuan Truong Preschool; and Teacher 12 and Teacher 13 from Xuan Ngoc Preschool, regarding the stages of product display and evaluation in organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children, revealed the following insights: “In addition to the preparation stage, we also need to organize activities for children to become familiar with and explore Natural Materials before conducting the Art Creation Activities, followed by product display and evaluation. During the implementation process, we have applied various strategies to encourage children’s active participation in creative activities. However, we still encounter difficulties in fostering children’s creativity and in engaging them in self-assessment as well as peer evaluation of their products.”

3.2. Current Status of Conditions for Organizing Art Creation Activities for Five- to Six-Year-Old Children Using Natural Materials Effectively

A survey of 98 administrators and teachers from four preschools in Xuan Truong commune on the conditions for organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials yielded the following results:

Table 3.2: Evaluation of administrators and teachers on the conditions for organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children using Natural Materials in preschools in Xuan Truong commune

Conditions	Level of Fulfilment					Mean	Rank
	Not Met at All	Not Met	Partially Met	Met	Fully Met		
1. Conditions regarding Natural Materials							
1.1. Natural Materials are easily accessible and appropriately selected to match the content and forms of Art Creation Activities	0	13	35	35	15	3.53	2
1.2. Diverse and aesthetically appropriate	0	13	38	35	12	3.46	3

1.3. Ensuring safety for children	0	10	36	32	20	3.63	1
1.4. Easy to use and scientifically stored	0	18	36	34	10	3.36	4
Overall Mean						3.49	
2. Conditions regarding Teachers							
2.1. Teachers have a good understanding of Natural Materials	0	0	34	35	29	3.94	2
2.2. Teachers have plans for using Natural Materials in Art Creation Activities	0	0	30	35	33	4.03	1
2.3. Teachers have competency in organizing Art Creation Activities based on Natural Materials	0	0	47	30	21	3.73	4
2.4. Teachers possess artistic skills and the ability to guide children in art creation	0	0	51	30	17	3.65	5
2.5. Teachers create an environment that supports the development of children's art competencies	0	0	45	30	23	3.77	3
2.6. Teachers have competency in evaluating children's art products	0	15	38	34	11	3.42	6
Overall Mean						3.75	
3. Conditions regarding Children							

3.1. Children have cognitive abilities	0	0	49	28	21	3.71	3
3.2. Children show interest in the activities	0	0	44	28	26	3.81	1
3.3. Children actively participate in the activities	0	0	45	30	23	3.78	2
Overall Mean						3.76	

Regarding Natural Materials, the survey results indicate that this condition received the lowest overall evaluation in organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children, with a mean score of 3.49, indicating a “Met” level but at the lower end, approaching “Partially Met.” Within this category, variations were observed across specific aspects. The highest-rated condition was ensuring safety for children ($M = 3.63$), followed by the accessibility and appropriateness of Natural Materials for the content and forms of Art Creation Activities ($M = 3.52$), both at a low “Met” level. The diversity and aesthetic quality of materials ($M = 3.46$) were also rated at a low “Met” level, close to “Partially Met.” The lowest-rated aspect was the ease of use and scientific storage of Natural Materials ($M = 3.36$), which was assessed at the “Partially Met” level. Interviews with teachers revealed that the greatest challenges lie in collecting and preserving Natural Materials, due to limitations in regional conditions, school facilities, and climate. While sourcing materials that meet aesthetic, safety, and functional requirements is already difficult, proper storage is even more challenging because schools lack adequate preservation facilities.

Regarding teachers, this condition generally met the required level, with a mean score of 3.75 (“Met”). However, one aspect—teachers’ competency in evaluating children’s art products—was rated lower ($M = 3.42$), approaching the “Partially Met” level, indicating a need for further improvement.

Regarding children, the survey results show that most children were positively evaluated in terms of their engagement in Art Creation Activities based on Natural Materials, with an overall mean score of 3.76, meeting the required level. Indicators related to interest and cognitive abilities ranged from 3.71 to 3.81, all at the “Met” level, and no aspects were rated as “Partially Met” or “Not Met.” These findings suggest that children’s readiness and participation are not major barriers to the effective organization of such activities.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In implementing the content and process of organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children based on Natural Materials in preschools in Xuan Truong commune, teachers have generally carried out all required contents and procedural steps. Several aspects within these steps have been implemented relatively well, achieving fairly good results at a higher level. However, certain

limitations remain, particularly in the preparation stage, including the collection, selection, and storage of Natural Materials. During the implementation stage, teachers also face difficulties in fostering children's creativity, while in the evaluation stage, limitations are evident in the use of self-assessment and peer assessment among children.

Overall, the conditions for organizing Art Creation Activities for five- to six-year-old children in these preschools largely meet the requirements of the activities. Nevertheless, some conditions—especially those related to Natural Materials and their storage, as well as teachers' artistic competency in organizing activities and evaluating outcomes—remain limited, only reaching a “Partially Met” or low “Met” level and therefore require improvement. To enhance the effectiveness of organizing Art Creation Activities based on Natural Materials, teachers need to address limitations in their competencies and instructional methods, while schools should provide better conditions for storing materials and supporting teachers in effectively and safely exploiting and using Natural Materials.

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